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# CANADIAN LITERATURE No. 40

*Spring, 1969*

## COLONIALISM AND POST-COLONIALISM

### Articles

BY ROY DANIELLS, ROBERT J. GIBBS, WILLIAM H. NEW,  
DOROTHY LIVESAY, NAIM KATTAN, ESTHER JAMES

### Chronicle

BY DONALD CAMERON

### Review Articles and Reviews

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PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF  
BRITISH COLUMBIA, VANCOUVER 8

## CANADIAN LITERATURE

LITTÉRATURE CANADIENNE

NUMBER 40, SPRING 1969

*A Quarterly of Criticism and  
Review edited by George Woodcock*

ASSOCIATE EDITOR: Donald Stephens  
ASSISTANT EDITOR: W. H. New  
CIRCULATION MANAGER: Joan Bays  
ADVERTISEMENT MGR.: Dorothy Shields

PRINTED IN CANADA BY MORRIS  
PRINTING COMPANY LTD., VICTORIA

Indexed in the  
*Canadian Periodical Index.*

Second class mail registration  
number 1375.

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

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

SUBSCRIPTION \$3.50 A YEAR  
OUTSIDE CANADA \$4.00 A YEAR

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## SPARROWS AND EAGLES

A GREATER CONTRAST could hardly exist than between the two periodicals that lie at this moment beside the editorial typewriter. One is a complete reprint, with an admirable introduction by W. H. New, of *The Victoria Magazine*, which Mrs. Susanna Moodie and her husband edited from Belleville, Ontario, in the years 1847 to 1848. (The reprint is published by the University of British Columbia.) The other is an enormously fat issue of the *Malahat Review* of Victoria (266 pages and possibly the largest single issue of a journal ever published in Canada) which is dedicated to the memory of the British poet, critic and anarchist, Herbert Read.

It is impossible to make a direct comparison between the two journals. The Moodies set out with the "hope of inducing a taste for polite literature among the working classes", while I am sure Robin Skelton of the *Malahat Review* had no didactic intent at all in his mind, but merely the wish to create the best possible tribute to a writer he admired, through a group of serious essays by his peers.

Is this placing the eagle beside the sparrow? I suppose it is, for what the Moodies present to "the working classes" is, except for a few execrable jokes, the dregs of early Victorian genteel writing, the *low* colonialism, if one may adapt an expression of Roy Daniells. Its interest, as Mr. New suggests, is in what it tells us of Canadian taste in its day, and what it tells is not inspiring.

The real point is that in the 1840's periodicals like *The Victoria Magazine* and the slightly superior *Literary Garland* were all that could be expected in Canada. That a journal of the calibre of the great English quarterlies, the *Quarterly* itself or the *Edinburgh*, should appear in Canada was unthinkable.

That a review which can compete with any other in the English language should appear in Canada is now not merely thinkable. It happens — and *in*

*Victoria*. This issue of the *Malahat Review* is proof of it, and more than anything else I have seen recently in literature (the situation is somewhat different in painting) it shows that at last we have created an atmosphere in which writing and publishing on an international level can be attempted and can succeed in more than the rare and exceptional instances of the past. We have passed from colonial imitativeness into national assertiveness, and now, it seems, we may be ready for the next step when Canada becomes the place where one works, with all that means and nothing more.

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## ***HASTEN AND SAVE!***

# HIGH COLONIALISM IN CANADA

*Roy Daniells*

**T**HERE ARE CANADIANS who regard our colonial beginnings with distaste and who consider filial gratitude from a young culture to an older one as sentimental at best and at worst degrading. I should like to advocate an entirely opposite view.

An examination of literary and critical writings in Canada between, say, 1870 and 1920 reveals a widespread belief in the value of continuing tradition to a nation beginning its independent course. The limits of this paper allow me to refer only to work in English. How deep Quebec's colonial roots reached down has recently been shown in W. J. Eccles' penetrating study, *Canada under Louis XIV*.

High colonial aspirations looked forward to political freedom but did not seek instantaneous total independence. Even the act of founding a new nation was in fact compatible with concern for tradition and loyalty to the Crown. Graeme Mercer Adam, editor of the *Canadian Monthly* and ardent nationalist, writes in 1872: "It is possible that the hour of Canadian nationality may be drawing near. If so, let us prepare to found the nation, not in ingratitude but in truth and honour." Truth and honour are words not much in current use but in this remote context they stir the heart, as Sidney said of the ballad of Chevy Chase.

In contending for the reality of a high colonial culture in Canada, let us quickly look for the image of it in the works of two poets, a novelist, an anthologist, a periodical editor and the compiler of a school reader. My examples are necessarily brief but not, I hope, inconclusive. A single stanza of Blake or Burns, a single paragraph of Addison or Arnold, may give us an insight into the man and his outlook on the world. Is not this also true of Canadian writers? The old notion of touchstones still has its uses.

Among high colonial poets, Roberts and Lampman are, I think, the most impressive: the first for his historical, representative and seminal qualities, the second for the intrinsic æsthetic quality of his verse. Let us confine ourselves for the moment to landscape; Roberts and Lampman are in the forefront of those who have tried to compose the Canadian scene. There is, of course, no landscape until we look at it. We choose what to regard and from what point of view, at what time and in what context. We import our own emphases, emotions and criteria. Roberts and Lampman proffer their help in this operation.

Could we reopen Roberts' *Orion*? You recall how Lampman was enchanted by the poem, like Keats looking into Chapman's Homer. I never walk up between Trinity College and the Royal Ontario Museum without seeing Lampman's shadowy form a little ahead, the small square volume of *Orion* in his hand and his heart full of rapture, that Canada at last had its own poetry. *Orion*, he said, "written by a Canadian, by a young man, one of ourselves . . . was like a voice from some new paradise of art, calling us to be up and doing." He was about nineteen at the time and Roberts a year or so older.

The actual texture of descriptive passages in the poem is of great interest.

Where the slow swirls were swallowed in the tide,  
Some stone-throws from the stream's mouth, there the sward  
Stretched thick and starry from the ridge's foot  
Down to the waves' wet limits, scattering off  
Across the red sand level stunted tufts  
Of yellow beach-grass, whose brown panicles  
Wore garlands of blown foam. Amidst the slope  
Three sacred laurels drooped their dark-green boughs  
About a high-piled altar. There the king,  
Ænopion, to whose sceptre bowed with awe  
The people dwellers in the steep-shored Chios,  
Stood praying westward.

Now it is clear that King Ænopion, for all his vineyards and olive-groves (elsewhere described in the poem), his sacred laurels and his altar, is furnished with a New Brunswick beach. The thick sward down to the tidal limit, the red earth: I need not labour the point. You recall how the old photographers put their clients before a backdrop of distant castellation framed in flowery meadows, the hither edge of which neatly accommodated itself to the fur rug underfoot.

Let us see how, in a more subtle way, Lampman himself works, how in a poem like "April" Canada and Keats combine. If we listen to such lines as these:





But under all to one quiet tune,  
    A spirit in cool depths withdrawn,  
With logs, and dust, and wrack bestrewn,  
    The stately river journeys on.

Faint films of smoke that curl and wreathe;  
    And upward with the like desire  
The vast grey church that seems to breathe  
    In heaven with its dreaming spire.

And still my thought goes on, and yields  
    New vision and new joy to me,  
Far peopled hills, and ancient fields,  
    And cities by the crested sea.

Beyond the tumult of the mills,  
    And all the city's sound and strife,  
Beyond the waste, beyond the hills,  
    I look far out and dream of life.

Arnold is with us, joining in, line after line :

But the majestic river floated on. . . .  
And that sweet City, with her dreaming spires.  
Roam on! the light we sought is shining still.  
Then through the great town's harsh heart-wearying roar,  
Let in thy voice a whisper often come,  
To chase fatigue and fear. . . .

But, again, the authentic Canadian scene appears, this time as an old sawmill, and we hear the saw, engaging a log, change its tone :

At moments from the distant glare  
    The murmur of a railway steals,  
Round yonder jutting points the air  
    Is beaten with the puff of wheels;  
And here at hand an open mill,  
    Strong clamour at perpetual drive,  
With changing chant, now hoarse, now shrill  
    Keeps dinning like a mighty hive.

Lampman, then, in a subtle and quiet masterly way, is using the viewpoint and technique of Keats (with whom he had a secret natural affinity), and Arnold,

and others in the English poetic tradition in order to interpret the Canadian scene. What helps us to identify it as high colonialism is that it is done consciously and with great delight.

Our concern is at the moment with the literary image of high colonialism but a passing reference to painting may be allowed. In our National Gallery hangs a painting by Lucius O'Brien, called "Sunrise on the Saguenay". O'Brien was born in Canada, the son of an army officer. He attended Upper Canada College, found a patron in the Marquis of Lorne and became President of the Royal Canadian Academy. The amateur who enjoys his picture, knowing nothing of the immediate influences on his style, can nevertheless enter pretty fully into O'Brien's sensibility. Across those calm waters and through those rising mists can be seen the smiling wraiths of many traditions. The fallen pine in the foreground barely conceals Salvator Rosa. It is a romantic view, giving a chance to every device of aerial perspective. The immense cliffs flanking the bay loom out of cloud with towering grandeur. Here is the real substance of the Canadian scene, harmonized by a carefully chosen atmosphere. The Saguenay "doth like a garment wear/The beauty of the morning. . . ." Not only harmonized, the scene is humanized, by the addition of a vessel in the offing, ready to sail, and in the middle distance a small craft near which a boat is being rowed. The human scale is preserved, against the stupendous background; this width of water and height of wooded cliff are neither strange nor inimical; they invite the viewer, like the landscape openings in "L'Allegro". I personally enjoy this picture, as a record of high colonial sensibility, because it brings traditional techniques to the service of an undistorted record of a locus classicus of Canadian scenery and because it breathes a cheerful confidence in man's ability to live in this our landscape. It is not in any sense a dull or superficial performance; it achieves assurance and serenity without forcing or falsifying the *donné* of the locale; it is a picture which the Marquis of Lorne, whose own portrait was painted by Millais, must have enjoyed, and the Canadian who cannot enjoy it today must be either totally insensitive or else in total rebellion against the past or else possessed by horrid antagonisms which vent themselves on whatever they encounter.

THE UNIQUE FLAVOUR of a wine derives not only from its datable vintage but also from the location of the vineyard, sometimes within very narrow limits. Charles Gordon (hereinafter referred to as Ralph Connor) was

born within a few months of Lampman and knew the Ottawa River with the same loving familiarity. "A perfume and a wintry chill," wrote Lampman, "Breathe from the yellow lumber piles". It is a world familiar to the man from Glengarry.

Lampman, as we have seen, employs a mechanism of apprehension and expression derived from English poetry to encompass and record the Canadian scene. Connor, greatly aided by memories of childhood, projects with triumphant ease the perfect image of a Scottish colony. Glengarry, the most easterly of the Ontario counties, is peopled by Scots, not only from the patronymic Glengarry district just north of Pitlochry but from the Highlands and Islands generally. *The Man from Glengarry* embodies a whole ethos which takes in region, race and religion. The Ontario forest is made to serve this ethos by transformation into a magic, enclosed world as filled with absorption and emanation as Grimm's Schwarzwald. It opens to disclose a scene of woodcutters and children, of giants and gentle princesses, of perils and deliverances. "The solid forests of Glengarry have vanished", begins Connor's preface, but in another sense they are as enduring as Sherwood or Arden.

The perfection of the colonial spirit in this Scottish Presbyterian community is shown by its refusal to adulterate the heritage. French, English, Irish, Americans and at least one Mexican appear, together with some account of Methodists, Baptists, Roman Catholics and atheists. These are not despised or rejected; they simply cannot meet the Scottish standards. If an Englishman has his leg crushed in the fury of a communal barn-raising, it gives an opportunity for the skill of a Scottish medical student. If Methodists unwisely agree to a public debate on theology, they retire after the Presbyterian minister's first denunciation. This question of an element of comedy in the high colonial record, of a mild absurdity so endearing that it must be the product of a retrospect upon what has been well loved, — this we must return to before leaving the subject.

The Canadian West is a good touchstone for true high colonialism. Connor shows us his hero making a speech in New Westminster at a moment when there is a wave of resentment against Confederation. "It was Ranald's speech, everyone said, that turned the tide. His calm logic made clear the folly of even considering separation; his knowledge of, and his unbounded faith in, the resources of the province, and more than all, his impassioned picturing of the future of the great Dominion reaching from ocean to ocean, knit together by ties of common interest, and a common loyalty that would become more vividly real when the provinces had been brought more closely together by the promised railway. 'Send him

East', cried a voice. 'Yes, yes, that's it. Send him to Ottawa to John A. It's the same clan!'

The neatness with which the novelist links moral and political issues, expands the ethos of Glengarry to cover and preserve the entire community, and leaves us indebted to Scottish virtue for our very existence is beyond all praise. Added posthumously to Connor's autobiography is the line from Bunyan, "The trumpets sounded for him on the other side!" It is my belief that these were, in fact, bagpipes.

THE MOST EXPLICIT SPOKESMAN for high colonialism I have yet encountered is W. D. Lighthall, chiefly memorable as the editor of an anthology, *Songs of the Great Dominion*, which first appeared in 1889. Lighthall was then about thirty-two years of age, a lawyer living in Montreal. His introduction affects this reader, at least, as some Renaissance cartographical view, in perspective, of an Italian ducal city beside its rolling river, Apennines in the background, the four winds blowing vitality upon it from the cardinal points and a band of angels with their trumpets spreading wide its fame.

Lighthall's sentences have the true heroic quality of rhetoric; what sounds like hyperbole has a direct relation to fact. He speaks of Canada as having in her hands the solution of those problems of Empire which concern every true Briton, "proud and careful of the acquisitions of British discovery and conquest".

She is Imperial in herself, we sons of her think, as the number, the extent and the lavish natural wealth of her Provinces, each not less than some empire of Europe, rise in our minds; as we picture her coasts and gulfs and kingdoms and islands, on the Atlantic on one side, and the Pacific on the other; her four-thousand-mile panorama of noble rivers, wild forests, ocean-like priaries; her towering snow-capped Rockies waking to the tints of sunrise in the West; in the East her hoary Laurentians, oldest of hills. She has by far the richest extent of fisheries, forests, wheat lands, and fur regions in the world; some of the greatest public works; some of the loftiest mountain-ranges, the vastest rivers, the healthiest and most beautifully varied seasons. . . . In losing the United States, Britain lost the *smaller* half of her American possessions: — the Colony of the Maple Leaf is about as large as Europe.

"But what," Lighthall continues, "would material resources be without a corresponding greatness in man?" He finds it in a concept of loyalty. The French in

Quebec are loyal to their own imperial tradition. The Loyalists withdrawing from the rebel Colonies have accomplished "the noblest epic migration the world has ever seen: — more loftily epic than the retirement of Pius Æneas from Ilium. . . . 'Why did you come here?' was asked of one of the first settlers of St. John, New Brunswick, a man whose life was without a stain; — 'Why did you come here, when you and your associates were almost certain to endure the sufferings and absolute want of shelter and food which you have narrated?' '*Why did we come here?*' replied he, with emotion which brought tears: — '*For our loyalty.*'"

If greatness is equated to loyalty, we must ask, Loyalty to what or to whom? The primary answer is, of course, to the Crown, but for Lighthall this has immense and all encompassing implications, like Tennyson's concept of loyalty to Arthur. Lighthall's expansion of British loyalty does not stop at the level of Canadian patriotism but broadens out to take in the world. The Empire will last only if it upholds an ideal that men will suffer and die for and "such an Ideal — worthy of long and patient endeavour — may be found in broad-minded advance toward the voluntary Federation of Mankind." It is difficult to match Lighthall for a buoyant, fresh, engaging confidence in our future; for the candour of his idealism; for the breadth of his historic and geographic grasp; for the clarity of his crystallization of high colonial faith and hope.

His limitations are also apparent, especially the one he shares with Ralph Connor, an inability to see the actual ideals of French Canadians in full perspective. It is, in the circumstances, venial. Connor can get as far as a cordial symbolic reconciliation between leaders of opposed gangs of Scottish and French or Irish loggers. Lighthall can produce a finely turned exemplary tale, *The Young Seigneur*, extolling the virtues of the habitant and of those of his countrymen who combine the old heroic qualities of authority with progressive ideas, and begging the French in Quebec to provide front-rank leadership for the whole country. But that is as far as they can go, in the closing years of the nineteenth century. We cannot ask more of them; their sin is one of omission rather than commission. For the latter we must await the report on Bilingualism and Biculturalism.

WE MUST INCLUDE IN OUR SURVEY a quick glance at some pages of *Rose-Belford's Canadian Monthly*, Volume I, published in 1878. It succeeded the *Canadian Monthly and National Review* which had just ceased publication and it retained the same remarkable editor, Graeme Mercer Adam.

Rose Belford rescued the operation and it went on into the 1880's. I have always seen her as a striking and for some reason dark-haired girl, with financial resources of her own, a taste in literature ranging from Homer and Horace to Wilkie Collins, a charmingly forthright manner, and — somewhat literally I admit — with a red rose in her raven tresses. Although further research revealed that these virtues, on the cultural side at least, appertained rather to Mr. Rose and Mr. Belford, two publishers who jointly supported the journal, the image of my own Rose Belford is still with me, more living than, say, Kathleen ni Houlihan or Laura Secord.

From this volume I choose one article, entitled "Canadian Nationality", by William Norris, of Toronto. Norris believed that Canada might shortly sever the "slight link" binding her to Britain and the prospect did not trouble him.

It, therefore, behoves all true Canadians to be prepared for whatever may occur. There is but little to be done. A Governor elected every seven years by both our houses of Parliament, the appointment of a small diplomatic body, and the adoption of a flag are all that is needful. Surely, a people who have an independent and final Supreme Court is equal to this. The flag may cause some difficulty, but not necessarily. We have the colours already — it is only necessary to place them. The red first, representing Englishmen and Scotchmen; the white, representing the French who first colonized Quebec and the French-Canadian people who now inhabit it; and the green, though questioned by some, is acknowledged by all to represent the Irish. These colours, placed vertically, with the Union in the upper corner as now, would make a good Canadian flag and attract the regard of a majority of the people who inhabit the Dominion. The green, especially, would be worth 100,000 men to the Dominion in case of any difficulty with our neighbours, and would effectually Canadianize the Irish.

Norris foresaw, also, the disintegration of the United States and the thought afforded him considerable satisfaction.

Already she shows signs of dissolution. . . . A hot-bed progress among alien and half-assimilated people will surely accelerate the end. They are in a dilemma either horn of which is fatal. They must either submit to the mob and the commune, and see their cities blaze as they did three years ago, or to a standing army and a general who will destroy their institutions and make himself dictator. In either event, disintegration is sure to follow. As power steps from the disorganized grasp of the United States, it will fall to Canada as her natural right, making her the first nation on this continent, as she is now the second. United closely, as we shall be from the Atlantic to the Pacific by a common nationality, our country will go on, increasing from age to age in wealth, in power and in glory; and it may not be too much of a stretch of the imagination to think, that as it is the latest

developed portion of a new world . . . it may be the country where a last great, and fully developed humanity may find its fitting habitation and abode.

Norris was not an altogether accurate prophet but he did put his finger on two problems that today trouble every thoughtful American; he did foresee in Canada independence, national growth and, as a condition for these, the need for unity; and he knew that we should have vertical red and white segments in our new flag. Like Lighthall he can rise into rhetoric without losing contact with the firm ground of fact and, again like Lighthall, he envisages wealth, power and glory in the context of a humane ideal. That he is genuinely high colonial in his suppositions one further sentence will demonstrate. "And, lastly, we shall have the good will of England and possibly her guarantee for our independence, as she guarantees that of Belgium, in starting our national career."

Our final reference, which I will make as succinct as possible, is to a school reader published in Toronto in 1901 and in use, at least as late as 1916, in high school classes in Victoria. It was a magnificent assemblage of great names, going back to Plato and coming down to Macdonald and Laurier. It had a range of material from Thomas à Kempis to Oliver Wendell Holmes. It dealt with the death of Socrates and with the Union Jack. It introduced one to the Ancient Mariner and to the Canadian Song Sparrow. In an appendix, the unnamed editor explained what he was attempting. The five and a half pages of small type cannot be summarized, they are so thronged with implications. But may I quote a few of the closing sentences, concerning his choice of patriotic pieces?

Tennyson's "Hands all Round" belongs to the period of the revolution which left Napoleon III Emperor of France. The line "We likewise have our evil things" suggests comparison with Kipling's "Recessional", which was written on the occasion of Queen Victoria's Jubilee in 1897. The first two stanzas will be found in fac-simile on p.8 of this anthology; the remaining three are as follows . . .

He then quotes them, to their conclusion, "For frantic boast and foolish word,  
Thy mercy on Thy people, Lord!" and he continues,

If "that man's the best cosmopolite who loves his native country best", this group of selections should, in the hands of intelligent and patriotic teachers, prove an effective means of inculcating incidentally a spirit of rational patriotism. Its most striking characteristic is the absence of the glorification so common in this kind of literature.

The last group is intended to bring pointedly into view the magnanimous spirit in which, during the past two and a half centuries, Great Britain has dealt with her colonies, especially in the way of conceding to them — "frankly" as Mr. Gladstone says — the right to manage their own domestic affairs. The latest outcome



of this policy is the formation of the "Commonwealth of Australia" in imitation of the "Dominion of Canada"; neither Canadians nor Australians would have taken part in the war in South Africa but for their belief that it would speedily lead to the establishment of a similar nationality there.

So we pass from Plato to à Kempis, to Tennyson and Mr. Gladstone, to Canadian volunteers in South Africa and to loving one's native country best, without frantic boast or foolish word. It is literature and appreciated as such, but it is also life and as such to be lived. It has the unmistakable accent of greatness, for all its simplicity, like Arthur among his knights though many of them in richer arms than he. It is Canadian colonialism in its high and palmy days.

What creates the æsthetic effect of organic unity in this ideology of high colonialism? It is the power of imagination to project a vision of Canada having its own logic and consistency. As in a time of miserable civil strife Milton could see England as a giant roused from sleep, or as Blake, among the dark mines and mills could view the rising walls of Jerusalem in England's green and pleasant land, so *mutatis mutandis* these Canadians attained a vision of their own country. In historical fact there were grave doubts and dangerous dissensions. In the pageant presented by Lighthall or Connor, these are performers of the anti-masque, soon driven into the wings by personifications of faith, hope and loyalty.

Appreciation and some laughter often mingle in a retrospect of colonial Canada. "Truth and honour", "the trumpets sounded for him", "a life without a stain": is it that we can no longer believe in such possibilities? Or do we smile as we would at a photograph of grandparents? Such outmoded clothes and conscious character; yet essential to our own existence and remembered with affection. This laughter can be salutary, self-revealing, free from denigration.

The end of high colonialism may conveniently be placed at the beginning of this century's third decade. Canadian veterans of the First World War had just returned; the *Canadian Forum* commenced publication in 1920; the old *University Magazine* ended the next year. Yet it goes without saying that high colonial emotions were not instantly extinguished in 1921. A few years ago there arose in my own home a slight problem of identification as the name of one Louis St. Laurent came up in conversation with my mother. St. Laurent is the prime minister, my wife explained. But my mother, who had not set foot in England for thirty years, replied very simply, "Winston Churchill will always be my prime minister."

In conclusion, here are eight lines of Lampman. They are sapphics; we know from one of his letters they pleased him. They show the chain of connection from

Sappho, to the metrical practice of English schoolboys, to Trinity College in Toronto and to the flowers of the Ottawa countryside which Lampman loved. And they tell us that, in spite of change and decay, the fragrance of what has once been loved remains.

Brief the span is, counting the years of mortals,  
Strange and sad; it passes, and then the bright earth,  
Careless mother, gleaming with gold and azure,  
    Lovely with blossoms —  
Shining white anemones, mixed with roses,  
Daisies mild-eyed, grasses and honeyed clover,  
You and me, and all of us, met and equal  
    Softly shall cover.

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# THE LIVING CONTOUR

## *The Whale Symbol in Melville and Pratt*

Robert J. Gibbs

IT TAKES A LIVELY EYE to catch leviathan in the act of swallowing his tail. Yet such agility seems necessary to the reader of Pratt or Melville who wishes to cope with the great whale as a symbol. The question is largely one of limits. Where does significance begin and end? Or does it begin and end at all?

James Baird in his intricate study of Melville appears at one point to set limits. "Great art . . . endures because it lends itself to the hues on any passing sensibility. It goes on meaning all things to all men. The responsibility of criticism remains fixed: to establish the facts of what it meant to its maker."<sup>1</sup> The value of the statement lies in its defining not only the critic's role as compared to that of any "passing sensibility," but also the limits between which meaning in art can exist: "all things to all men" and "what it meant to its maker." The trouble lies, of course, in the word "meaning" itself. How much, one is bound to ask, of the "all things to all men" may lie within "what it meant to its maker."?

Critical comment on Melville's *Moby Dick* justifiably outweighs in bulk and elaboration what is available on Pratt's *The Cachalot*. Yet the criticism of each seems to me to lie between the same extremities: that which sees no justification for a symbolistic approach to what it regards as self-contained narrative, and that which finds the work open-ended, allowing for, if not inviting, countless varieties of interpretation. In Melville's case the balance tips towards the latter, while for Pratt it appears to favour the former. The reasons for this difference lie obviously in differences of size, design and complexity in the two works. What the two narratives offer, taken together, is a common image, the great whale; a

common action, a clash of titanic forces; and a common conclusion, mutual destruction. The opposition between these common elements in the narratives and the vast disparity of scope and design may prove useful to my purpose of examining the limits of significance.

The white whale in *Moby Dick* is given size by the size of the book. All of the whale and whaling matter in the book goes into the making of the central image. In the "Etymology" and "Extracts", a further extension occurs. The story proper and the individual whale are set in a larger context, which aims to encompass all the literature and lore of whales. Pratt's five-hundred and twenty-five lines are a minnow by comparison, and yet the sense of size in the central image is not wanting, and the effect is no less a cumulative one. The opening lines in establishing the whale's lineage have somewhat the effect of Melville's preliminaries, but Pratt does not reach as far out or backward, and his "cetacean lore" must bear a tremendous charge to equal in effect the amount of such lore actually present in *Moby Dick*. In this matter, there may be just no comparison, but there is, I think, for Pratt a compensating factor, which is the medium of verse itself.

Keats' sonnet, "On Looking into Chapman's Homer", is remarkable for the degree to which a sense of Homer's expanse is contained within fourteen lines. Imagery, vowel sounds and control of the iambic line are all factors in Keats' success, but equally important is the confinement of the sonnet form itself. The pressure of matter against form has a great deal to do with the poem's effectiveness. Similarly, in Pratt's octosyllabics, the pressure of matter against form, the play of multisyllabic roll on monosyllabic strength, and the cumulative effect of a sustained rhythm are built-in amplifiers. For all that, no one would claim for Keats' sonnet equality of magnitude with Homer, and no one would pretend for *The Cachalot* the measurements of *Moby Dick*. Within the limits of the poem itself, however, the sense of magnitude in the whale is similar. In either case, it is not just a matter of creating a life-sized impression of physical immensity, but of making a mythic or epic image, larger even than life.

Melville's prose medium is as fluid as the sea in which his whale swims. It is firmly responsive to the action depicted. Rhythmic expressiveness becomes particularly impressive in the final chapters of the book when the white whale enters the story physically: "...far out on the soft Turkish-rugged waters, went the glistening white shadow from his broad, milky forehead, a musical rippling playfully accompanying the shade, and behind, the blue waters interchangeably flowed over into the moving valley of his steady wake; and on either hand bright bubbles arose and danced by his side. But these were broken again by the light

toes of hundreds of gay fowl softly featuring the sea.” The responsiveness of this prose involves sound and texture as well as rhythm. Pratt’s medium would appear to be more confining:

Over his back, the running seas  
 Cascaded, while the morning sun  
 Rising in gold and beryl, spun  
 Over the cachalot’s streaming gloss,  
 And from the foam, a fiery floss  
 Of multitudinous fashionings,  
 And dipping downward from the blue,  
 The sea-gulls from Comore flew,  
 And brushed him with their silver wings.

This passage illustrates the maximum departure from the normal pulsations of the tetrameter. It is not my purpose to compare the effectiveness of the two passages, both of which I consider remarkably good, but to illustrate Pratt’s success in the more confining medium. The very regularity of the rhythm throughout the poem serves the poet here, since variations within a rigid medium have stronger effects than those within a more fluid medium.

Elsewhere in *The Cachalot*, Pratt is able to use the regular pulse of his rhythm to make the whale’s movement physically palpable in the verse:

No febrile stirring as might spring  
 From a puny barracuda lunging  
 At a tuna’s leap, some minor thing,  
 A tarpon or a dolphin plunging —  
 But a deep consonant that rides  
 Below the measured beat of tides  
 With that vast, undulating rhythm  
 A sounding sperm whale carries with him.

The faltering and steadying of the beat are locally expressive, but more significant is the discovery that the “vast, undulating rhythm” is the rhythm of the poem. The “deep consonant” is felt everywhere underlaying the surface fluctuations. Melville has other means of making his whale’s presence felt throughout the book, but the sense of it as a thing always there, a thing swimming continuously under the surface phenomena is similar. “. . . the great floodgates of the underworld swung open and in the wild conceits that swayed me to my purpose, two and two there floated into my inmost soul, endless processions of the whale, and mid most of them all, one grand hooded phantom like a snow hill in the air.”

The white whale is at first a phantom in the book but gathers body in the course of the pursuit. All of the physical details associated with the killing and processing of whales serve to solidify the image. The final chapters, in a sense, recapitulate the total development. On his first physical entrance, the whale is still a shadowy thing, merging with the fluid sea. In the course of the three days of chase, he assumes stronger and stronger bodily presence. In his "breaching" on the second day, Moby Dick, himself, breaks the surface of the novel with tremendous force. The larger movement is an aspect of the total design. The white whale, as an image, cannot be localized. He is the phantom pull seaward at the beginning, the motive of the voyage, and the end. The process of his realization is the process of the book.

There is nothing in Pratt's poem to match this larger rhythm, in which every pause is felt as a gathering of force for the final assault. There is not the same sense of growth and gradual emergence in the whale itself, which appears in full strength at the outset of the poem. Of the three sections of *The Cachalot*, the first two make up less than half of the poem. The chief narrative interest lies in the third part, for which the other parts may be regarded as preparatory. Section one is occupied by the cachalot himself, his lineage, his legendary feats, and his anatomy. Section two opens with a description of the kraken's lair and of the kraken himself. The encounter between the monsters follows with no suspense, and titanic as the struggle is, the issue is quickly decided. In the final section of the poem, the alternation of head-on attack with temporary pause is not unlike the action depicted in the final chapters of *Moby Dick*. The dramatic powers of both novelist and poet are summoned for the last lunge: ". . . in spite of all that mortal man could do, the solid white buttress of his forehead smote the ship's starboard bow, till men and timbers reeled."

Ten feet above and ten below  
The water-line his forehead caught her.  
The capstan and the anchor fled,  
When bolts and stanchions swept asunder,  
For what was iron to that head,  
And oak — in that hydraulic thunder?

Although, as I have said, there is not in Pratt's whale the quality of growth found in Melville's, there is development of a kind. The second section of the poem has to be accounted for. How does the cachalot's battle with the kraken affect our notion of him? There are, of course, certain purely dramatic effects. The right of the cachalot to the title of monarch is proved in that second section,

and the lower extent of his kingdom is measured there. The whale's triumph in the deep lends irony to the outcome of the surface battle.

The symbolistic approach to Pratt's poetry dates from John Sutherland's long article in *Northern Review*<sup>2</sup> and the book he developed from it.<sup>3</sup> Much subsequent criticism of Pratt has been endorsement or modification of Sutherland's views, or violent reaction against them.<sup>4</sup> While I am not prepared to follow Sutherland all the way, I do think that en route he proves a perceptive guide. Particularly helpful are some of his comments on the second section of *The Cachalot* and the image of the kraken: "... when we turn to the poem, we discover the curious fact that most of the key words employed to describe him — 'antennae,' 'coil,' 'vibrate,' 'cable,' 'socket,' 'tensile,' and 'suction cup' — have an electrical or a mechanical reference as well as an anatomical one. . . . The kraken is half monster and half a superb machine."<sup>5</sup> Sutherland goes on to assert that the cachalot in devouring the kraken assumes something of his character.<sup>6</sup> He concludes with a significant statement: "... there is never a firm distinction in Pratt's narratives between the 'here' and the 'demon.' . . . There may be an ambivalence of this kind in part two of *The Cachalot*: if the whale and kraken are not actually 'kin,' they are related in a way that militates against a rigid interpretation of their significance."<sup>7</sup>

Pratt gives the impression that both his monsters are fearfully and wonderfully made. The kraken, of a more primitive, cold-blooded order, less conscious and less mobile than that of whales, is more alien and repellent. The struggle itself does not appear to be one of hero against villain, or good against evil, but of cetacean with cephalopod, a confrontation of two blindly amoral forces. When the cachalot, who has "gorged" upon the kraken's "fibrous jelly — Until finding that six tons lay — Like Vulcan's anvil in his belly," appears again in Part III, the sinister associations remain with him:

In a white cloud of mist emerged —  
Terror of head and hump and brawn,  
Silent and sinister and grey

Swimming blandly on the surface, he carries the depths and that grim encounter in the depths with him.

A giant squid appears briefly in *Moby Dick*. It brings with it a sense of unutterable and alien mystery similar to that conjured with the kraken in Pratt's poem; "A vast pulpy mass, furlongs in length and breadth, lay floating on the water, innumerable long arms radiating from its centre, and curling and twisting like a

nest of anacondas, . . . No perceptible face or front did it have; no conceivable token of either sensation or instinct; but undulated there on the billows, an un-earthly, formless, chance-like apparition." Starbuck establishes the association between this kraken and the white whale: "'Almost rather had I seen Moby Dick and fought him than to have seen thee, thou white ghost!'" Like all the sea phenomena in the book, the squid serves to emphasize certain qualities in the central symbol.

The cachalot's colour is grey, grey seen through white mist. Grey is to Pratt as white is to Melville. Grey is appropriate in its neutrality to the ambivalence of attitudes established. One recalls the steely greyness of Pratt's shark,<sup>8</sup> and his iceberg of *The Titanic*, "the grey shape with the paleolithic face."<sup>9</sup> Whiteness is Melville implies a starker, antinomian ambivalence: "Is it that by its indefiniteness it shadows forth the heartless voids and immensities of the universe, and thus stabs us from behind with the thought of annihilation, when beholding the white depths of the milky way? Or is it, that in essence whiteness is not so much a colour as the visible absence of colour, and at the same time the concrete of all colours; is it for these reasons that there is such a dumb blankness, full of meaning . . . ?"

Even the least symbolistic of *Moby Dick's* critics, one who denies the novel's power to bear the weight of interpretative criticism loaded upon it, admits the presence in the novel of qualities that seem to invite such treatment: "Of ambiguity, to be sure, there is plenty — contradiction and paradox, dualism and antinomy. Ahab is, according to Captain Peleg, 'a grandly ungodly, god-like man' (ch. 16); the whiteness of the whale is dubious — fair or foul (ch. 42). And to the ambiguous or paradoxical the symbolist critics particularly take, for latitude much eases the path of interpretation."<sup>10</sup> The latitude that appears to Mr. Stoll to ease the path, in fact, erases it altogether and makes almost any individual reading, apart from the book itself, a misreading, in the sense of containing something less than the truth. John Sutherland, as we have seen, discovered that the ambivalence established in Pratt's poem "militates against a rigid interpretation."<sup>11</sup> This discovery did not prevent the critic from proceeding toward a highly individualistic interpretation, that of seeing Pratt's whale as a Christ-symbol.<sup>12</sup> Similar discoveries followed by similar courses are not hard to come by among Melville's critics.

The limits of meaning in both Melville and Pratt are set in part by the points of view. Melville, through the eye of his beholder, Ishmael, can peer into metaphysical depths denied to Pratt. On the other hand, Pratt is able to look into physical depths, within the living whale and in the ocean, denied to Melville.



Through Ishmael's eye, the vision of other characters in the novel is filtered, and Ishmael himself is the one who learns that the final meaning of things is past our finding out: "Dissect him how I may, then, I but go skin deep; I know him not, and never will. But if I know not even the tail of this whale, how understand his head? much more, how comprehend his face, when face he has none?" Ishmael's place in the novel as a character and as author-narrator is not constant. At times, he disappears into his vision; at times, he assumes omniscience. In one respect, he shares Ahab's burden and his guilt; in another, he remains essentially detached from the moral issues. He is saved in the end not only for the act of creation; that is, come back and tell; but by the act of creation, which includes his beholding, his recording and his ordering of the vision.

In *The Cachalot*, the point of view shifts more freely. We begin with the author omniscient beholding the great whale inside and out. In the second section, the whale is perceived as a vibration in the squid's antennae:

The kraken felt that as the flow  
Beat on his lair with plangent power,  
It was the challenge of his foe,  
The prelude to a fatal hour.

The fatality of the encounter is sensed through the kraken. In the third section, the whale is spotted first from the cross-trees of the royal mast of *The Albatross*. His sinister and immovable greyness appears in the eyes of the crew. In the struggle itself, the view shifts significantly to the whale:

He swung his bulk round to pursue  
This arrogant and impious crew. . . .  
An acrid torture in his soul  
Growing with the tragic hurry  
Of the bloodstream through the widening  
hole  
Presaged a sperm-whale's dying flurry.

In the final lines of the poem, the view returns to that of the outside beholder.

Pratt has freely shifted points of view, not to establish moral grounds, nor to cause the reader to identify finally with one protagonist. His moving eye has allowed for the fullest dramatic participation. Northrop Frye points out how the movements of the all-seeing eye effect a complexity in the image: "When we look from the outside . . . we see only the endless struggle to survive which has been practically all pain and cruelty. But when we shift the view to the inside,

we see the exuberant, unquenchable force of life, which fights to maintain itself, but can find its fulfilment also in defeat and death."<sup>13</sup> The blend of awe, terror and exuberance, found in Pratt, is found in Melville as well. It is a matter of tone as much as of point of view.

Melville's white whale, then, would seem to have multiple significance, and a single interpretation is more likely to be partial, less than true to Melville's intention, than outside it altogether. Most critics I have read are aware of this limit and set their individual interpretations on this side of it. Such characterizations of the whale as "a comprehensive, dynamic symbol for the whole immense, riddling, uncaring cosmos,"<sup>14</sup> are not uncommon nor far-fetched, for they simply state in other words what the book itself finds out. Pratt's cachalot offers probably less latitude, and a single interpretation is in greater danger of trespassing outside the limits of conscious or unconscious intentions. Nevertheless, the nature of the whale and the conflicts he is caught in seem, as in *Moby Dick*'s case, to encompass Pratt's notion of the way things are, and any arbitrary meaning is likely to be *a* meaning without being *the* meaning.

Pratt had not read Melville before publishing *The Cachalot* in 1925, but in 1929 he edited a condensed version of *Moby Dick* for Macmillan's St. Martin's series. (How much of a hand Pratt had in this cutting up of Melville's whale I have not been able to find out.) Commenting on the novel's significance in his brief introduction, Pratt remains well within the limits set by the book: "The appraisal of *Moby Dick* as an immensity in our English literature springs from the underlying feeling of mystery, the sense of clash between vague, titanic forces — the feud which, as Melville says, 'Time has with the sons of men.'"<sup>15</sup> More interesting is his remark that "the great achievement is the final impression left on the reader's mind that chaos itself is subject to architectural treatment."<sup>16</sup> Here is the novel's meaning for an artificer who, like Melville himself, is engaged in finding means for bodying out and giving significant shape to what is essentially shadowy and shapeless. The significance lies in the architectural process itself.

At this point, it is interesting to note that E. E. Stoll's attack on the symbolistic approach to *Moby Dick* is really an attack on the book itself. It is not the failure of the critics to understand the book that concerns him, but the failure of the book, in his view, to stand up to such understanding.<sup>17</sup> Other critics, like Charles Feidelson Jr. have emphasized the solidity of the book as the ground for symbolistic interpretation: "The whale is simultaneously the most solid of physical things and the most meaningful of symbols. The voyaging intellect of Ishmael interacts with the material world to generate symbolic meaning."<sup>18</sup>

Substance and process, it seems to me, suggest the limits of symbolic meaning in the work of both Melville and Pratt. The whale symbols created by both are not static or arbitrary but organic, each having its growth not only in the individual work but in the writer's *œuvre* as a whole. Symbolistic interpretation may justifiably proceed in two directions: outward from the individual work and inward from the total development. Symbolistic meaning is inherent in the artistic process itself, the "architectural treatment" of materials that without it hold no meaningful shape in the mind. A critic who flies easily into speculation runs the risk of leaving the book which is his ground far below. He will end by creating his own book, if he is good, and we shall not quarrel with his right to do so, as long as he doesn't try to make us forget the book he started from. Individual interpretations may enrich the book for us, but what counts is the architecture of the book itself, the great arches of bone and muscle that compose the image. We end as we began somewhat equivocally in saying that the book itself is what the book is about. "And the only mode in which you can divine even a tolerable idea of his living contour, is by going a-whaling yourself." (*Moby Dick*)

## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> James Baird, *Ishmael: A Study of the Symbolic Mode in Primitivism*.
- <sup>2</sup> "E. J. Pratt: A Major Contemporary Poet," *Northern Review*, V (April-May 1952), 36-64.
- <sup>3</sup> *The Poetry of E. J. Pratt: A New Interpretation*, (Toronto, 1956).
- <sup>4</sup> See Earle Birney, "E. J. Pratt and His Critics," *Masks of Poetry*, ed. A. J. M. Smith, (Toronto, 1962), pp. 72-95.
- <sup>5</sup> *The Poetry of E. J. Pratt*, p. 60.
- <sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 61.
- <sup>8</sup> *Collected Poems*, p. 5.
- <sup>9</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 242.
- <sup>10</sup> E. E. Stoll, "Symbolism in Moby Dick," *Journal of the History of Ideas*, XII (June 1951) 450.
- <sup>11</sup> *The Poetry of E. J. Pratt*, p. 61.
- <sup>12</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 79.
- <sup>13</sup> "Introduction," E. J. Pratt, *Collected Poems*, p. xxi.
- <sup>14</sup> John Parke, "Seven Moby Dicks," *Interpretations of American Literature*, edd. Feidelson and Brodtkarb, (New York, 1959), p. 87.
- <sup>15</sup> "Introduction," Herman Melville, *Moby Dick*, (Toronto, 1929), p. xiv.
- <sup>16</sup> *Ibid.*, p. xvi.
- <sup>17</sup> Stoll, p. 452.
- <sup>18</sup> *Symbolism and American Literature*, (Chicago, 1953), p. 184.

# SINCLAIR ROSS'S AMBIVALENT WORLD

*William H. New*

ONE OF THE MOST HAUNTING phrases in all of Canadian fiction has to me always been the last line of Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House*. The ambivalence of it puzzles, irritates, confuses. When Philip Bentley at that time protests that to name his illegitimate son Philip would be to raise the possibility of not knowing which of them is which, his wife — the central character-narrator — writes in her diary: "That's right, Philip. I want it so." And so the novel closes. At first that "I want it" seems to reveal a great deal; it speaks the voice of the manipulating woman who has already almost destroyed her husband by confining his artistic talents, and who even now does not let up. For Philip in such a climate to leave Horizon and the ministry and run a book shop somewhere appears still to be his wife's decision, and the future seems bleak indeed.

The picture's other side — for it has one — is, though not exactly rosy, certainly less bleak. If we can accept that Mrs. Bentley's final remark is a sign of a new-found humility — 'I want it so' — and this is certainly the received interpretation' — then she and Philip have some hope of escaping their hypocrisy towards themselves, towards each other, and towards the towns to which they have been inadequately ministering. Both views are reasonable. This one is supported by the climactic scene in which the storm in Horizon blows down the building's false fronts and Mrs. Bentley angrily reveals to Philip that she knows that their adopted baby is really illegitimately his own. The other view acquires its credibility from the book as a whole, from the character we see self-revealed in the

pages of her admirably constructed diary. For Ross has consciously constructed it after all; the calendar system itself is enough to tell us that. But what does he really want us to think at the end then? Which view of his character does he want us to accept? There is a third possibility: that it is neither the one nor the other view, but the ambivalence itself which is desired aim — not based on an indecisiveness about who his character really is, but emerging out of a carefully constructed web of viewpoints, Mrs. Bentley's and ours, pitted ironically against each other so that we come to appreciate not only the depth and complexity of the narrator and her situation, but also the control in which Ross artistically holds his words.

The scene which gives us some indication of this lies between the storm scene and the final words of the novel. It is their last Sunday in *Horizon*, and Mrs. Bentley writes:

After three or four years it's easy to leave a little town. After just one it's hard.

It turns out now that all along they've liked us. . . . Last Friday they had a farewell supper for us in the basement of the Church, made speeches, sang *God Be With You Till We Meet Again*, presented us with a handsome silver flower basket. It's the way of a little Main Street town — sometimes a rather nice way.

It's blowing tonight, and there's dust again, and the room sways slowly in a yellow smoky haze. The bare, rain-stained walls remind me of our first Sunday here, just a little over a year ago, and in a sentimental mood I keep thinking what an eventful year it's been, what a wide wheel it's run.

It is the first time she has ever complimented the townspeople or found anything attractive about the small town way of life. But is she sincere now or has she, since the storm, learned another hypocrisy? That ambivalence again.

The importance of this episode for the novel as a whole is not just the revelation of the new attitude, but the image which follows it, that of dust and rain, for if the imagery is structured as well as the events of the novel, it should serve to support the themes and to confirm our interpretation. The simple "polar opposites" view of Mrs. Bentley, that is, as being *either* success *or* failure at the end of the novel, would be supported if a strand of "polar opposites" imagery ran through the book, distinguishing truth from falsehood, good from bad. The false-fronted stores come at once to mind — yet after they have fallen we are still left with ambivalent scenes. The dust and rain, then, would seem to fulfill the function of delineating opposites, but they are even more deceptive than the falsefronted stores, and to force them into this technical role would be to distort what Ross intends. To illuminate this question, however, forces us back into the novel.

THE OVERALL IMPRESSION left by the book is certainly one of aridity: of dust and heat, the Depression on the prairies and the drought which went with it.<sup>2</sup> And accompanying the unproductivity of the land is the dryness of the people: Mrs. Bentley, who cannot bear a child; Philip, who does not believe in his church and cannot comfort the people; the people themselves, who in Mrs. Bentley's eyes cannot appreciate anything or anyone beyond their own restricted world. Yet this directly conflicts with the view of them she gives us at the end of the book, so obviously "in Mrs. Bentley's eyes" is the operative phrase here. By extension, we suspect all of her affirmations, finding in them partial truths that ring ironically against the complex realities Ross ultimately allows us to glimpse.

So it is with the dust and rain, which reveal the complexity that several separate points of view create. The image becomes one not of affirming polarities of good and bad, but of exploring what is real in the world. Mrs. Bentley's view is thus not the only one we are conscious of, for the technique of the book, Ross's words in Mrs. Bentley's diary, establishes a linguistic tension that allows us to view the narrator with distance, objectivity, dispassion: and so perceive the irony and ambivalence — the "jests of God", in a sense, if we can anticipate Margaret Laurence — which characterize reality in Ross's world.

Although from the very beginning, that is, we come up against Mrs. Bentley's explanation of things, the false fronts and social attitudes of *Horizon*, the first detail of weather we see is not one of dryness but one of a "soft steady swish of rain on the roof, and a gurgle of eave troughs running over". April rains are usually a symbol of hope, of nurture for new growth, of Christian sacrifice and forgiveness, but here in this "disordered house", they (ostensibly for the first time) leak through the roof and stain the walls. Obviously the rain in reality does not serve to refresh, just as the "Christianity" hypocritically uttered by Philip or by Mrs. Bentley's townspeople is powerless to affect the environments through which they move.

We see this most clearly in the Partridge Hill episodes. In this little country town, beyond *Horizon*, the people are experiencing their fifth straight year without a harvest, yet they continue to place faith in the ministrings of the Church. Sardonicly, in June, Mrs. Bentley writes, "This was the day out at Partridge Hill we prayed for rain." The Church ceremony is thus reduced to pagan ritual, and she and Paul Kirby, the equally sardonic schoolteacher, "tie" in their reaction: "Surely it must be a very great faith that such indifference on the part of

its deity cannot weaken — a very great faith, or a very foolish one.” It is just this ambivalence, explicitly enunciated here, expressing at once the impossibility of taking sides and the human inclination to do so, which the book communicates throughout.

Paul’s continuing habit of uttering etymological facts, which seems almost gratuitous in the novel at times, is not thematically unrelated. He has already told us, for example, “*pagan*, you know, originally that’s what it meant, *country dweller*”, and in June in Partridge Hill this echoes through the scenes we see. Paul’s problem is that he cannot live outside his world of arid facts. Whereas he thinks he knows what’s around him and withholds himself from it, others are encountering, experiencing whatever is there. The problems that others (like the farmers) do have, however, emerge not just physically from that encounter (the drought, the land), but from a state of mind in relation to the experience that is not unlike Mrs. Bentley’s or Paul’s own. Mrs. Bentley later wonders if she is “the one who’s never grown up, who can’t see life for illusions”; the farmers for their part live in one sense in a dream world that does not recognize the present, for it acknowledges only two times, the good harvest and the possibility for one, “the year it rained all June, and next year”.

April rains, for the Bentleys, then, had been destructive; June rains do not exist. The persistent faith in rain seems ironic, therefore, and with this in mind we move back to Mrs. Bentley herself. She likes water, wants it, apparently needs to go walking in the rain, for example, and so heads out in it whenever possible. Even snow will do, though then reality gives way “to the white lineless blend of sky and earth”. “Horizon” seems itself to be reality, therefore, just as the present is reality, and like the farmers with their belief in June rains, she comes headlong into conflict with it. Once in a recital she played Debussy’s *Garden in the Rain*; now she tries to build one, but water is scarce and all that blooms is a single poppy — while she is away.

Similarly, her view of her husband is founded in this dream of fruition. That he is an artist is what *she* says, but whether or not he indeed has talent, he lacks the milieu that might foster greatness. She sees his artistry, moreover, in terms of her own image, just as he (with his “sons”, Steve and young Philip, as well as with his God) creates in his:

It’s always been my way to comfort myself thinking that water finds its own level, that if there’s anything great or good in a man it will eventually find its way out. But I’ve never taken hold of the thought and analyzed it before, never seen how false it really is. Water gets dammed sometimes; and sometimes, seeking its level,

it seeps away in dry, barren earth. Just as he's seeping away among the false fronts of these little towns.

When Philip is ill, too, it is she who says he has nausea — causing Paul to flinch, because his etymological sensibility is outraged. *Nausea* “is from a Greek word meaning *ship* and is, therefore, etymologically speaking, an impossibility on dry land”.

That Philip needs a change of environment is true, but again it is Mrs. Bentley who voices the desire, even acts it out when she walks recurrently down the railway track as far as the ravine. When Philip goes with her, she locates her wish in his eyes, and finds the possibility of escape — the possibility of a fruitful, ordered future — in the train to an outside world.

At last we heard a distant whistle-blade, then a single point of sound, like one drop of water in a whole sky. It dilated, spread. The sky and silence began imperceptibly to fill with it. We steeled ourselves a little, feeling the pounding onrush in the trestle of the bridge. It quickened, gathered, shook the earth, then swept in an iron roar above us, thundering and dark.

Paradoxically the train comes from, passes through, and heads for “Horizons”, which are realities, not dreams, and must be faced. The “water sickness” is in a sense Mrs. Bentley’s, not Philip’s; therefore, a function of her perhaps unconscious dream and a further indication of her imposition of her own point of view onto the world around her.

WHAT ROSS DOES to communicate these ironies and ambiguities is to blur the edges of his images. Absolutes do not exist. For all that the recurrent water images seem to accompany an inability to come to terms with reality, that is, the water is not itself “bad” — it only becomes so when in a person’s viewpoint the dream it represents stands in the way of altering the present. When the dream and the reality come into conflict, the water takes on the characteristics of the desert, the arid land. At the ravine, thinking of Judith, Mrs. Bentley writes:

Philip and I sat in the snowstorm watching the water rush through the stones — so swift that sometimes as we watched, it seemed still, solid like glass.



Later, knowing of the affair between Judith and Philip, she notes:

The rain's so sharp and strong it crackles on the windows just like sand.

The similes work in the opposite direction as well. At Partridge Hill, "There was a bright fall of sunshine that made the dingy landscape radiant. Right to the horizon it winked with little lakes of spring-thaw water." But we also hear of "dust clouds lapping at the sky", of "dense, rigid heat" and "planks of sunlight". We're told that the August heat "was heavy and suffocating. We seemed imbedded in it, like insects in a fluid that has congealed." This last image recurs again when Philip seduces Judith, and Mrs. Bentley wakes, listens, and knows: "like a live fly struggling in a block of ice". For her, during the winter that follows, "The sun seems cold". These are not all working to say exactly the same thing. There are times, apparently, when the dream serves a useful function in the mind of a people, but again, when the reality — "Horizon" — is obscured, the dream is frozen, becomes as hard and apparently sterile as the dust and sand.

The ambivalence we are left with at the end of the book is not absolutely resolved by these observations, but they bring us closer to understanding it. In presenting and exploring a single point of view, *As For Me and My House* runs the danger of seeming shallow, of allowing no aesthetic distance from which we can respond to the narrator as well as participate in her verbal reactions to the world. Fortunately Ross's technique, his control over the words he allows Mrs. Bentley to use, creates the ironic tension which raises the book from a piece of "regional realism" to a complex study of human responses. Mrs. Bentley herself is all too prone to approve or condemn, but Ross would have his readers avoid this. By his images and through the other characters, he shows us, in fact, how Mrs. Bentley's polarization of Horizon (this world, arid, sterile, bad) and the Bookstore (dream, water, fruitful, good) is invalid and gradually breaks down. That she and Philip ultimately do leave to try to set up the bookstore is perhaps cause, therefore, for us to see her as a failure, continuing as the manipulator she has been before.

But then we still have her compliment about Horizon's townspeople to contend with, and her acknowledgment in the same breath of both the dust and the rain stains. Here she seems to be aware of reality at last; if so, her future might hold at least some success. But reality to Ross is still not clearcut, and that the book should end so ambivalently seems ultimately part of his plan. The ambivalence is founded in his imagery, founded in the lives of the characters and the nature of their world, germane to the whole novel, magnificently distilling what it has

tried to say. When we become conscious of this, we become not only involved in the book, but like the people of *Horizon*, no matter how apparently sure of themselves, still sensitive to doubt and so to reality as well.

FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> See Roy Daniells, "Introduction" to *As For Me and My House*, 1957, v-x. Cf. Warren Tallman, "Wolf in the Snow", in George Woodcock, ed., *A Choice of Critics* (Toronto: Oxford, 1966), 53-76.
- <sup>2</sup> See Donald Stephens, "Wind, Sun and Dust", *Canadian Literature*, no. 23 (Winter 1965), 17-24.

# SEARCH FOR A STYLE

## *The Poetry of Milton Acorn*

*Dorothy Livesay*

“**P**OETRY FETTER’D FETTERS THE HUMAN RACE.” These lines of Blake still retain their freshness, their significance, as a source from which twentieth-century poetry may draw its vigour. For a time it seemed that lyricism such as that of Blake or Shelley had gone out of fashion: passionate song seemed out of key with the tone of *The Wasteland*. Yet Pound valued “music” above all else; Williams established the importance of rhythm as opposed to metre, with his “Down with the iambic pentameter!” On the ideological side there were many echoes of Shelley’s revolutionary utopian vision in the poetry of the nineteen thirties. Now in the sixties we seem to be becoming somewhat fatigued by cerebral and mythopoetic poetry. There is a return to Imagism; and with that return lyricism inevitably canters alongside. “The consciousness of necessity” is not far behind.

Of all contemporary Canadian poets, Milton Acorn is most at home as a part of this development. A small town boy on Prince Edward Island, a building trades worker in the industrial east, a recruit for the Second World War, he is now, in his forties, devoting all his time to poetry and politics. His interest in writing began early, but he had no access to modern poetic directions. As he describes it, he grew into poetry the hard, unschooled way:

I started to write in iambic patterns, taught by my brother who went to college. Iambic was theoretically based on the ‘natural’ rhythms of the English language, and I guess in the district where I lived this was more or less true. But among the great majority of people living on the North American continent the speech patterns (stress and rhythm) have changed. Iambic no longer fits.<sup>1</sup>

Acorn first began to break with the iambic pattern from listening to seamen talk:

The way they used words, the way they condensed sentences, the way they dropped conjunctions, the way they used 'will' and 'should' in their elliptic form. . . . When I started writing I used the iambic metre because I thought it was popular, it would reach people; but I became uninterested in reaching people if I had to present my work in terms such as they didn't use themselves, in their own speech.<sup>2</sup>

His aim was "a line that flowed more in terms of their own natural idiom". In the light of that aim, it would seem worthwhile to examine in detail poems by Milton Acorn that reveal how he began to grow away from the iambic pattern, while yet maintaining a unity of structure based essentially on strong-stress (ballad) rhythms.

Linguists like Trager and Smith have described the English accentual system of speech as being based on four degrees of stress; but the average person's ear probably detects only three levels of syllable stress. In analyzing the poetic line, it is the position of the strong stress that counts; secondary or "weak" stresses do not give the line its beat. This is because there is always (in speech as well as in poetry) one strong stress between pauses (or junctures, as they are now called). Bearing this in mind, it will be convenient to look at one of Milton Acorn's poems on the basis of a three-level stress pattern. Here is a sample, "Charlottetown Harbour", from an early collection:

An old docker with gutted cheeks,  
 Time arrested in the used-up knuckled hands  
 Crossed in his lap, sits  
 In a spell of the glinting water.  
 He dreams of times in the cider sunlight  
 When masts stood up like stubble;  
 But now a gull cries, lights,  
 Flounces its wings ornately, folds them,  
 And the waves slop among the weed-grown piles.

In this poem of nine lines we can reckon that each contains two strong stresses per line. These stresses occur isochronically; that is, the intervening syllables, whether secondary or weak, occur within the same time-beat, emphasized by juncture. Sometimes there is an "outrider", as Hopkins called it: an extra syllable or group of syllables, as in line two. Further variation is achieved in this line by the use of internal juncture (*Time arrested/*). In stanza one, the most effective juncture occurs in the line:

Crossed in his lap, /sits//

and in the second stanza we have a somewhat parallel third line:

But now a gull cries, /lights

A long rounded effect is achieved in the last two lines with a juncture on each side of "folds them"; followed by onomatopoeic rhythm as, "the waves slop among the weed-grown piles".

What other elements besides rhythmic stress and juncture are characteristic of this early poem? It is not a poem of action, loaded with verbs, but a "picture" poem; therefore the nominals (modifiers and nouns) are dominant. Notice how almost every noun has a qualifier: *old* docker; *guttled* cheeks; *glinting* water; *cider* sunlight; *weed-grown* piles; and that rhythmically these follow a trochaic "falling" pattern which emphasizes the depressed, ironic mood. The few finite verbs, on the contrary, are single-syllabled, forceful, progressing from transitive to intransitive; from "sits", "dreams" and "stood" to the more active verbs "cries", "lights", "flounces"; with a sudden transitive descent, "folds them". As that action is completed the continuity of nature is insisted on: the waves "slop".

Notable in this poem is the lack of overt emotion and the absence of metaphor or symbol. We are presented with a still-life painting in the Imagist tradition. Generally Acorn's early work seems to follow this Imagist pattern of minute detail, enclosing an internal movement which is created by the use of phrasal rather than clausal utterances. Yet Acorn is a poet unable to sit still for long: man interacting on scene is what really interests him. In a recent unpublished poem, for instance, he states:

Description isn't for poets:  
Poetry demands an exactitude that defies description,  
liken the soul to an electron.  
When you say 'like' that implies 'not quite'.  
Or drop that word! But then  
you're speaking of something else entirely  
going on in the nucleus.

Even in his first book it is apparent that Acorn's poetry is beginning to eschew description, or even simile and metaphor, in favour of a more dramatic presentation. The landscape is now acted upon, as in the poem, "Old Property":

past that frost-cracked rock step  
twist yourself thru  
skewjee trunks and old coat-hook branches;

ground once dug and thought of and  
never intended for those toadstools.

in the shade past the cracked robin's nest,  
past that spilt sunlight, see  
his grainy grip on  
a hatchet keened to a leaf,  
a man in murky denims  
whispering curses at the weeds.

The sentence structure here is still phrasal but the arrangement of the two finite verbs — “twist” and “see” — emphasizes their imperative nature, stresses action. There is no internal juncture and even end-juncture is disguised by run-on lines:

twist yourself thru  
skew-jee trunks

or

his grainy grip on  
a hatchet

The effect is to emphasize word or phrase at the *beginning* of the line. From now on, this will be one of Acorn's chief technical devices. With “whispering curses” he extends himself farther than imagism, into symbolism. And from there on he questions, questions. An example in the early volume of this leap from the declarative statement (“Charlottetown Harbour”) to the imperative (“Old Property”) and on into the interrogative, is found in the poem “Islanders.”

Would you guess from their broad greeting  
witty tuck of eyelids,  
how they putt-putt out with lunch cans  
on seas liable to tangle  
and dim out the land between two glances?  
Tho their dads toed the decks of schooners,  
dodging the blustery rush of capes,  
and rum-runner uncles used wit-grease  
against the shoot-first Yankee cutters,  
they couldn't be the kind to sail their lobster  
boats around the world  
for anything less than a dollar-ninety an hour.

This poem shows a significant development from the two previous ones (and whether it antedated them or postdated them is not the point) because of its

dialectic. The utterance pattern is no longer dominantly phrasal. There is a balance now between nominals and verbals, with strong, vivid verbs taking over: *putt-putt, dim out, toed, used, sail*. After the first five lines, in a rhythmic pattern of three strong stresses to the line (all ending in a trochee), the rhythm suddenly gets stronger and tighter with four beats to the line, for four lines. The last two lines, however, open out into an expanded iambic speech rhythm, long and sinuous and hard-hitting. The exciting element in this poem is the way that the developing rhythmic pattern corresponds to the developing content pattern. The first five lines carry straight description (though couched in a laconic question); the next four lines are dramatic narrative, a reference to the past behind the present; and the final breakthrough is more than ironic comment, it is the dialectic “jump” to a new synthesis. Acorn’s mind works in lightning flashes.

Several deductions can be made from the above analysis. The first one is that there are three aspects to Acorn’s style, evident in both his early and his late poems. These are: vivid imagery, rhythmic progression, and the ability to create a synthesis of what has gone before.

But similarly I liken a soul to an electron:  
 give it a charge and it jumps to a new orbit.  
 Therefore I praise the jump before it happens —  
 which makes the kids say I tell lies  
 and so I do  
 but *my* lies make things happen.

Said another way, the poet works on his material, activates it and re-creates it into a new synthesis. He successfully integrates form and content. What he himself has to say about this process is worth noting. I quote here from a conversation:

My work since 1960 has been greatly influenced by Olson — not his ‘formal’ theories, but theories on voice. I do not agree with him that form must always be nothing but an extension of content. I think there is a continuous dialectic interplay between form and content; that anything is conceived as a form in the first place.<sup>3</sup>

Again, he says

My favorite painter is Picasso. I love him because he is conscious of form, of the approach. Like him I am very deeply interested in various methods of presenting the content of my poetry — I find myself almost incapable of writing two poems with the same formal idea. I’m always looking for new forms. Each new poem is an experiment in form to me.

It is as an experimentation with form that Milton Acorn's poems are particularly satisfying. In his great variety of presentation (well over one hundred poems already published) there is no repetition; neither is there an amateur dilettantism. Rather, soaring through a variety of approaches a human search is evident: the search for enduring life. "The Fights" is a good example: <sup>4</sup>

What an elusive target  
the brain is! Set up  
like a coconut on a flexible stem  
it has 101 evasions.  
A twisted nod slues a punch  
a thin gillette's width  
past a brain, or  
a rude brush-cut to the chin  
tucks one brain safe under another.  
Two of these targets are  
set up to be knocked down  
for 25 dollars or a million.

In that TV picture in the parlor  
the men who linked to move  
in a chancy dance  
are abstractions only.  
Come to ringside, with two  
experts in there! See  
each step or blow pivoted  
balanced and sudden as gunfire.  
See muscles wriggle, shine  
in sweat like windshield rain.

In stinking dancehalls, in  
the forums of small towns,  
punches are cheaper but  
still pieces of death.  
For the brain's the target  
with its hungers  
and code of honor. See  
in those stinking little towns,  
with long counts, swindling judges,  
  
how fury ends with the last gong.  
No matter who's the cheated one  
they hug like girl and man.



It's craft and  
 the body rhythmic and terrible,  
 the game of struggle.  
 We need something of its nature  
 but not this:  
 for the brain's the target  
 and round by round it's whittled  
 till nothing's left of a man  
 but a jerky bum, humming  
 with a gentleness less than human.

This poem depends more than most in its rhythm, to create unity and strength. The natural speech units, the breath groups, have been "distorted" so as to lay strong stress beats on each line. This creates the over-all rhythmic pattern. To illustrate how it works, we have only to arrange the same poem in its normal phrasal pattern on the page. Here, as in all straightforward prose, the phonological elements (breath groups) coincide with the syntactical arrangement. Let us look at the first paragraph:

What an elusive target the brain is! Set up like a coconut on a flexible stem, it has 101 evasions. A twisted nod slues a punch a thin gillette's width past a brain, or a rude brush-cut to the chin tucks the brain safe under another. Two of these targets are set up to be knocked down for twenty-five dollars or a million.

In this version it will be felt at once that the impression is prosaic, communicative rather than expressive. It lacks the excitement created when the poet distorts the natural utterance to obtain rhythmic effects. In the original version, strong stresses occur in every line of the first and second stanzas. The rhythmic pattern is compulsively (almost convulsively) established. In the third stanza there is some variation. The first five lines have two strong stresses each, but in line six we have a shortened line with one strong beat, "with its hungers", thereby heightening the tension. Similarly there is dramatic effect in the delayed juncture between "honor" and "see", followed by a contrived juncture at the end of the line (it is contrived because it goes against the syntax). The last two lines have an odd effect because they revert to iambic:

No matter who's the cheated one  
 they hug like girl and man.

The last stanza of "The Fights" reverts to strong-stress isochronic beat. The imposed junctures effected by end-stopping must, together with the intonation

pattern, set up a counterpoint to the normal stress pattern. This again heightens the effect, intensifies the meaning of the poem, which is more metaphorical and symbolical than the other poems we have been considering.

There are further elements in "The Fights" which create tension. True, the paucity of verbals as opposed to nominals (nineteen verbs to forty adjectives) would be a weakness, but the nature of these noun modifiers is worth attention. Eleven of these modifiers are past participles. Thus, although the poem lacks clausal balance, its phrasal proportions are heavily weighted and they are rooted in action. The tone of the poem is not "sublime" (as so often in Shelley), but classical, balanced, vigorously ironic. It could be a commentary upon our whole way of life in the twentieth century. About man's aggressiveness it says little explicitly; yet it says all.

More Blakeian in style is the poem "For a Singer".<sup>5</sup> Here is a poem that carries to completion the process begun in "The Fights" and developed in "I Shout Love". Although far from being the end of Acorn's development, "For a Singer" seems to mark a phase complete in itself: the phase of the conscious, social revolutionary poet defying the sickness of capitalist society. Of its shape — that of four-line stanzas in a four-beat, strong-stress measure, Acorn has remarked:

Tonally it is a unique experience for me in that it is a chant, an invocation. It depends not upon the natural flow of the voice, but upon the distortion of the stresses and intonation. And you'll notice the distortion in my voice as I read it.

The poem sets a strong rhythm going at the outset:

Let me be the mane that swings  
 (clouds tossing, lightning shot)  
 about the singer's muscled face,  
 caressing and letting it go wild

Or let me be the oar's pulse  
 throbbing through that figurehead  
 to the heroic Argo, that woman alive  
 who sang against the crash of spray

over her nipples, her chin,  
 and every love-wrought pore of her,  
 against the flattening calm, visions  
 washing up and down her spine.

From these images, startling in their unexpectedness, yet objectively viewed, the poet turns the camera inward to reveal his own feelings: the effect the singer is

having on him. Then he moves, more strongly, to show the effect she has on the audience:

She sings in a crowded coffee shop  
 smoke curling amongst tenuous ghosts  
 of the living. "Love!" she cries.  
 They scratch at love with palsied hands.

But at each emotional cry (almost a beseeching prayer) for "Sorrow!" "Courage!", the audience fails to respond; for they are the people who

feeling nothing but death for themselves  
 desire the death of the entire world, because  
 even the imagination of life  
 is forbidden by all their teachers.

The vision of what she is saying passes back then from audience to poet. "Let me be the song!" he cries. "Take me. . . like/ a firebird above the last cloud/ of the last/ dark planet." Finally the vision ends with his complete identification of himself with the singer "with her guitar/ crossed like a shield over her heart/, perched on this bomb of a world, every instant/ ticking . . . ticking . . ." His final identification is with "the men and women of her song" who stood up against oppression. The last stanza, a synthesis, is one of passionate personal conviction:

. . . . This heart  
 is necessary; even in the shadow  
 of Mount Death, it's necessary  
 :for the standing up brave and hopeful way, the  
 way of asserting the truth of our lives,  
 we ought to die  
 is the only way we might live.

Although the syntax here might be criticized as being too elliptical, the lines pound their way home. Indeed, the most interesting aspect of this poem is the fact that its dialectical development, moving from a sense of post-Hiroshima despair towards a Utopian revolutionary optimism, is bound together structurally by unrhymed tetrameters, a free-flowing ballad rhythm. It is a poem built up, not on finite verbs and clausal structures, but on phrases; therefore we expect neither metaphysical intricacy nor classical balance, but fervour, incantation, excitement. What verbs there are are not verbs of action but of *being, feeling, seeming, exist-*

*ing*. Yet movement is created by the rock-a-bye effect of participles used as descriptive modifiers. Even to itemize them is interesting: *clouds tossing; lightning shot; caressing; throbbing through*. These and many other "ing" verbals rock out the rhythm of the poem. They are ongoing and lend themselves to chant, declamation, prophecy. Whilst they give an impression of motion, they do not move except as the ocean's floor may be said to move. The singer does not act, she seems to be caught up in the poet's vision, singing eternally on the brink of destruction. She is not a metaphor, but a symbol, proclaiming life.

This poem, "The Singer", a poem of affirmation and belief in humanity's struggle, is in the tradition of Blake and Whitman. Its metaphors of the Moloch worshippers "teetering on the last rung" in juxtaposition with the "firebird on the last cloud" emphasize the prophetic tone. That tone, though Marxist by implication, avoids didacticism and sentimentality. As the poet himself warns, in a recorded conversation:

Don't congratulate yourself on detecting the naïveté of this poem, because the naïveté is deliberate.

Acorn's aim is to bring objects, life itself, back into perspective so that we may look on them freshly, not cynically. Obscurity and mystification are not a part of this method.

From the foregoing examination of Milton Acorn's work, however arbitrary having been the selections, it should be clear that he is a poet who never stands still. Perilously near as he seems to come, sometimes, to a precipice of emotion too dizzying to be borne, miraculously he swings around. He marches on, laughing and crying, turning his back on clouds of glory to consider the internal, mental life of the dreaming man.

## FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> From a tape recording made by the author, Vancouver, 1964.

<sup>2</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*

<sup>4</sup> Milton Acorn, *The Brain's The Target*. Toronto: The Ryerson Press, 1960.

<sup>5</sup> *The Literary Review*, Canada Number, Summer 1965, Vol. VIII, 4. Fairleigh Dickinson University, Teaneck, N.J., U.S.A.

# LE THEATRE ET LES DRAMATURGES A MONTREAL

*Naim Kattan*

**C**OMMENT SE PORTE le théâtre à Montréal? L'on peut dresser un bilan très optimiste comme on a tout le loisir de faire un diagnostic qui traduirait un très mauvais état de santé. Ainsi, depuis que le Théâtre du Nouveau Monde s'est installé dans la nouvelle salle du Port-Royal à la Place des Arts il a pu accroître le nombre de ses spectateurs. Le Théâtre du Rideau Vert fête son vingtième anniversaire et il fait souvent salle comble. Les jeunes auteurs disposent d'un centre d'essai où des comédiens professionnels font des lectures publiques de leurs œuvres. Une revue, *Théâtre Vivant*, est publiée par ce centre et fait connaître à un plus grand public les écrits des jeunes dramaturges. De leur côté plusieurs groupes d'amateurs qui faisaient montre d'une grande audace dans le choix de leur répertoire, mais qui n'attiraient pas un public suffisant, se sont groupés sous une seule enseigne et ces efforts conjugués semblent devoir donner des résultats. Alors, tout va bien, pourrait-on dire.

Il y a malheureusement un revers à la médaille. Le Théâtre de l'Egrégore, qui, au cours de ces dernières années, a présenté au public montréalais des pièces canadiennes et étrangères parmi les plus intéressantes ferme ses portes pour une année. Espérons qu'il reprendra ses activités l'an prochain. Le Théâtre de Quatrous éprouve quelques difficultés. Le Théâtre de l'Escale disparaît. Bien sûr, l'on pourrait dire qu'il en a toujours été ainsi. Des troupes se forment, renouvellent la vie théâtrale, d'autres prennent de l'âge et disparaissent. Mais voilà! Tant que l'on ne peut fonder des troupes régulières, stables et les comédiens et les dramaturges vivront dans l'éphémère; on sera amené à recommencer toujours et à attendre les enthousiasmes vierges.

Et puis, la vie théâtrale ne peut avoir de continuité et de conséquence si les troupes ne s'appuient pas sur les dramaturges du cru. Le public souhaite que les horizons qui lui sont ouverts soient vastes mais aussi ne pas se sentir toujours dépourvu de porte-parole. Il veut, ne fut-ce par moments, se sentir présent non pas seulement dans la salle mais, par personne interposée, sur la scène.

Il est évident que la télévision a absorbé un nombre incalculable de textes. Les téléromans fournissent tous les jours la matière d'une ou de plusieurs pièces, mais ces feuilletons sont écrits rapidement, au fil de l'imagination et des besoins techniques, sans que l'auteur ait le temps de s'arrêter sur les personnages, l'intrigue et sans qu'il puisse dépeindre d'une manière adéquate la situation sociale. Il y eut des exceptions bien sûr: Germaine Guèvremont, Roger Lemelin, Marcel Dubé et dans une certaine mesure, Robert Choquette, François Loranger et Jean Filiatrault. Mais les textes de tous ces auteurs se sont éparpillés et l'on ne peut pas dire qu'ils aient constitué une œuvre durable.

Cas rare, c'est la télévision qui donne au théâtre un auteur dramatique. Il s'agit de Guy Dufresne. Pendant plusieurs années Dufresne a dépeint dans des téléromans certaines réalités canadiennes-françaises. Ses personnages appartenaient d'abord au milieu des marins. Ensuite il a planté sa scène dans un hôpital et ce sont des médecins, des infirmières et des malades qu'il faisait évoluer devant les téléspectateurs. Et voilà qu'il a éprouvé le besoin de quitter le petit écran pour la grande scène. C'est Gratien Gélinas qui a accueilli sa première pièce, *Docile*, à son théâtre: la Comédie Canadienne. Il est difficile de dire si la collaboration entre Dufresne et Gélinas ait été fructueuse. En effet, Gélinas, homme de théâtre lui-même, auteur dramatique, comédien, metteur en scène, a joué le premier rôle dans la pièce de Dufresne qu'il a mise en scène aussi. "Docile" est une farce paysanne. Le personnage principal sait lire l'avenir, non pas dans les lignes de la main, mais dans le bout des orteils. L'on peut imaginer les ressources d'une telle trouvaille. Hommes et femmes se mettent devant lui, se déchaussent. Les jeunes filles lui offrent le spectacle de leurs belles jambes et de leurs cuisses alléchantes et les hommes ne lui offrent que la mauvaise odeur de leurs pieds. Il y avait sans doute dans l'esprit de Dufresne un drame humain qui se jouait à travers cette farce. Ces hommes et ces femmes qui révélaient leurs désirs secrets, leurs craintes, leurs soucis, se mettaient à nu non seulement devant cet homme quelque peu roublard, mais aussi devant le public. Cet aspect de la pièce a été perdu dans la mise en scène de Gélinas. Celui-ci a mis l'accent sur la farce et a fait graviter tous les autres personnages autour de celui qu'il interprétait lui-même. Mais, d'ores et déjà, l'on peut dire que le théâtre a gagné

un auteur. Même si Dufresne continuera à écrire pour la télévision il sait que ce qu'il fera de plus durable sera joué sur la scène; d'ailleurs, on attend avec un grand intérêt sa deuxième pièce *Les Traitants* que le Théâtre du Nouveau Monde montera cet hiver.

Avec Michel Tremblay on ne quitte pas le milieu populaire, ni la farce. Et pourtant le monde qu'il nous révèle est aux antipodes de celui de Dufresne. Tremblay est un jeune auteur et *Les Belles-Soeurs* est sa première pièce. Il a imaginé une intrigue plausible, mais qu'il a étirée. Une femme pauvre gagne un prix: un million de timbres-primés. Certaines épiceries ont entre-temps cessé d'accorder à leurs clients ces faux cadeaux. C'est dire que la pièce date déjà un peu. Mais là n'est pas la question. La situation a existé et l'auteur avait tous les droits de l'exploiter. Pour coller le million de timbres qu'elle a gagnés le personnage principal de la pièce réunit ses belles-soeurs et ses voisines chez elle.

Et chacune des femmes révèle dans un monologue, son drame secret. Elles sont toutes malheureuses, frustrées, sans espoir. Rien ne rachète leur vulgarité et leur goût pour le clinquant. Tremblay dépeint une humanité dégradée. Ces femmes choisissent de hurler, de parler mal, de s'injurier les unes les autres, de blasphémer. On ne croit pas toujours à leurs malheurs. On n'éprouve aucune sympathie pour leurs souffrances. Tremblay a sans doute voulu traduire avec férocité l'aliénation d'une certaine couche de la population canadienne-française. La publicité fait miroiter devant des femmes qui vivent dans des conditions sordides des rêves de bonheur, mais ce bonheur est artificiel, faussé au départ. Leur malheur c'est de ne pas en vouloir d'autre. Et pourtant parmi toutes ces femmes il devrait en exister une qui voudrait autre chose, rêverait d'un autre bonheur, serait satisfaite de certains moments de sa vie. Et parce que cette humanité est toute d'une pièce, parce qu'il n'y a pas de rachat à sa condition, elle nous semble caricaturale et manquant d'une certaine vérité.

Deux autres dramaturges, déjà chevronnés, Marcel Dubé et Françoise Loranger, ont présenté de nouvelles œuvres. Pendant plusieurs années Dubé a travaillé pour la télévision. Il a rehaussé par sa présence la qualité des téléromans. Et, malgré tout, son œuvre souffrait de ce que l'on peut maintenant appeler un exil. Car pour Dubé la télévision aura été, dans une certaine mesure, un exil. Je fais exception, bien sûr, des pièces qu'il a écrites pour la télévision, dont l'une, *Bilan*, fut offerte aux spectateurs de théâtre cette année. Les dimensions en étaient restées limitées malgré tout. Surtout que Dubé reprend l'un des thèmes qu'il n'a cessé d'exploiter comme s'il en était obsédé: la juxtaposition entre deux générations, celle des adultes déjà décadents, défaits, résignés, corrompus et des

adolescents, purs, innocents qui ne parviennent pas à se révolter parce qu'ils n'en ont pas la force, ni non plus, sans doute, le goût. Ils sont corrompus d'avance et on les voit déjà se joindre au rang de ces adultes démolis. Mais je voudrais parler de sa nouvelle pièce montée au Théâtre de la Comédie Canadienne, car là Dubé se renouvelle. Certes, il nous présente encore les deux générations, mais il a quelque peu renversé les rôles. Ce sont les jeunes qui sont corrompus. Une jeune fille s'associe à un garçon. Leur but: obtenir de la vie tous les plaisirs, mais au prix du plus vil, en exploitant les autres. Ils se présenteront dans les endroits de vilégiature et les grands hôtels européens comme frère et soeur, s'infiltreront dans la vie de couples plus âgés, profiteront de leurs rêves, de ce qu'il leur reste d'innocence pour se faire entretenir. Ils font la connaissance de deux Canadiens; leur mariage n'a pas été heureux. Ils n'ont pas eu d'enfants. Leur amour s'est épuisé. Ils s'ennuient l'un avec l'autre. Ils n'ont plus rien à se dire. Existe-t-il pour eux une possibilité de recommencement? L'homme, un journaliste, utilise ses économies pour aller faire un voyage en Europe afin de se retrouver et peut-être de retrouver sa femme. Et ils font la connaissance des deux jeunes gens. On peut imaginer l'intrigue. La jeune fille fait croire à l'homme, qui a plus ou moins l'âge de son père, qu'elle est amoureuse de lui, et le garçon joue au gigolo avec la femme. Les deux couples se reforment avec des partenaires différents. Pour les jeunes gens ce n'était qu'un passe-temps, un jeu. Ils ont vendu de l'espoir, du rêve à leurs aînés moyennant des vacances luxueuses en contre-partie. A un certain moment les jeunes gens se prennent à leur propre jeu. La jeune fille a des velléités sentimentales. Le garçon est jaloux. Mais enfin tout se termine comme il se doit: les aventuriers reprennent le fil de leur existence dans l'attente d'autres aventures et les adultes se résignent au vide de leur vie.

Souvent on a l'impression que cette pièce constitue une version atténuée de *Qui a peur de Virginia Woolf?* d'Edward Albee. Mais, on ne peut pas pousser trop loin la comparaison sans commettre une injustice envers Dubé, car son esprit est très éloigné de celui d'Albee. Son attitude envers la famille n'est point négative. Il a du mariage une idée quelque peu triste, mais c'est surtout la déception et la pitié pour un bonheur détruit que ses personnages nous font entrevoir. Dubé ne croit plus en la vertu de la jeunesse. La corruption n'est pas une question d'âge et l'on peut toute sa vie garder une part d'innocence et d'espérance. Ainsi l'on peut dire que Dubé a quitté ses propres sentiers. Si ses personnages se compliquent, si ses situations sont moins prévisibles l'esprit qui animait ses autres œuvres, une certaine enthousiasme et une révolte juvénile, s'est atténué et l'on a l'impression que son ressort dramatique a faibli mais il a gagné en technique ce qu'il a



peut-être perdu en force dramatique brute. Dubé sait maintenant aménager les coups de théâtre, les surprises. Il sait varier l'action, rendre la complexité des personnages.

Je voudrais parler de la pièce de Françoise Loranger: *Le chemin du roy*. S'agit-il vraiment d'une pièce? Françoise Loranger a voulu faire un spectacle sur la visite mémorable du Général de Gaulle. Heureusement que le metteur en scène, Paul Buissonneau, a su donner un cadre à son texte.

Il a imaginé que les Canadiens anglais et les Canadiens français qui assistaient au spectacle de cette grande visite qui a bouleversé des esprits et provoqué les passions se trouvaient face à face, mais ils n'étaient que des joueurs de hockey. Ils gagnaient ou perdaient des points. Spectacle de metteur en scène — intéressant, avec des trouvailles, mais l'on sortait de là quelque peu déçu. Y avait-il vraiment un texte? Pourtant, le thème pouvait donner suite à de grands développements. Mettons que ce fut une pochade qui se rapprochait plus d'un esprit de collégien qu'une véritable pièce. L'on attend l'œuvre suivante de Françoise Loranger.

La grande découverte dramatique cette année fut sans nul doute Réjean Ducharme. On a donné de lui coup sur coup deux pièces: *Le Cid magané* et *Ines Peree et Inat tendue*. On a donné ces pièces dans un théâtre d'été à Sainte-Agathe. *Le Cid magané* est une œuvre pleine d'inventions. Ducharme reprend la célèbre œuvre classique de Corneille, il la situe dans un Canada actuel et contemporain. Cette situation inusitée donne lieu à des trouvailles poétiques et linguistiques de grande portée. Ducharme alterne le bon parler français avec le langage populaire, le "joual". Et dans une dialectique serrée, dans cette alternance entre l'expression et la parole, entre ce que l'on a à dire et la manière dont on le dit, entre l'âme et le défroque, permet à Ducharme de révéler l'ambiguïté existentielle du Canadien français. Il y a chez lui une source de vie, une volonté d'expression mais la défaite le guette et il éprouve l'échec quand il tente d'extérioriser sa vitalité. Curieusement ce n'est pas quand il parle bien qu'il s'exprime vraiment. "Le bon parler" semble dire Ducharme, peut être le mensonge le plus colossal parce qu'il est ridiule et dérisoire. Une scène dans *Le Cid magané* demeure inoubliable. C'est celle où la comédienne oublie son texte. Elle vient devant le public et elle dit qu'elle va improviser, qu'elle va parler son langage propre. Sa diction est tellement exagérée, son langage est tellement travaillé que l'on ressent le malaise de voir un personnage abîmer ses ressources vitales en essayant de fabriquer, non pas une médiation par le langage, mais un écran entre ce qu'il a à communiquer et ce qu'il communique vraiment. Comme dans toutes les œuvres de Ducharme le langage, les jeux de mots, les trouvailles de style ne sont qu'une

manière d'atteindre un réel qui échappe. Il échappe d'autant plus à un Canadien français que celui-ci dispose d'outils fragiles pour le saisir. Il est malheureux que le metteur en scène de la pièce, Yvan Canuel, n'ait pas saisi toutes les ressources de cette œuvre. Il l'a souvent réduite à une revue de collège, ce qu'elle n'est point.

J'ai lu une version de la deuxième pièce *Ines Peree et Inat tendue* et elle m'a semblée encore un brouillon. Il serait injuste par conséquent que j'en parle, d'autant plus que je n'ai pas eu l'occasion de voir la présentation qu'on en a faite cet été à Sainte-Agathe.

# LUDWIG'S "CONFUSIONS"

*Esther James*

**A**N AUTHOR'S THEME is both defined and limited by the viewpoint through which it is expressed. Jack Ludwig in *Confusions* presents us with a view of twentieth-century North American society as seen through the eyes of Joseph Gillis/Joe Galsky, his protagonist-narrator. Underneath the thin veneer of a morality based on our Judaic-Christian heritage to which we pay only lip-service, we find sham, hypocrisy, weakness, viciousness and stupidity. Naked and exposed, twentieth-century North American society is thus examined and found wanting. But Ludwig, like other satirists before him, cannot ridicule and expose the evils of an age without revealing the didactic purpose of his message. Let us reform, he says; change is possible. How? We are not told and, in any case, that could be another novel. In the meantime, what we are left with is *Confusions*, a novel in which the protagonist-narrator delivers a satirical exposé of society as seen by him but which, he concludes at the end of the novel, is open to the possibility of change.

As a positive sentiment this conclusion is admirable. As an ending to a novel which has poked a satirical and destructive finger into every corner of our twentieth century value system such a conclusion is a positive necessity. Over and above these positive, admirable and necessary qualities, however, such an ending is not valid, I would suggest, in terms of Ludwig's novel as a whole. For the major part of the book we have been shown the world through the jaundiced eye of Gillis/Galsky. A change of persona, however, invalidates the viewpoint through which he has originally presented the world to us. Gillis/Galsky has looked about him one fine day and, lo and behold, things are not really as black as he thought they were. But where has the change occurred? Obviously in him. Now he gives us a glimpse of a different world, a world that contains a

society for whom salvation is possible. The reader, therefore, is left with two pictures of twentieth-century North American society, one black and one hopeful. Gillis/Galsky presented to us first a jungle view of life that was nasty and brutish; then he changes and life becomes full of golden possibilities. But the confusions which, for Gillis/Galsky all through the novel, were so portentous are now left with the reader. What is more, the reader has the feeling that some sleight of hand has been practised. The protagonist-narrator has shifted his position but has steered us towards the belief that, basically, he is still where he was except that now his eyes are more widely opened. It is at this point, however, that we become conscious of the author's presence. *He* has known all along that human weakness and hypocrisy were not here to stay. *He* has known all along that a narrow, limited, self-centred view of society does not tell the whole story. Suddenly Ludwig's persona becomes more than the vehicle for his story; he becomes Ludwig himself, and it is this inconsistency in the novel that I would suggest mars what is, undoubtedly, a necessary conclusion in other respects.

The limitations imposed on an author using persona are great. The protagonist-narrator presents only his own thoughts, feelings and perceptions of the world around him. Thus, he becomes the fixed centre around which everything else revolves, and through which everything else is sieved. The reader receives no picture of the world other than that which touches the protagonist-narrator. Restrictions of this sort are often worth the sacrifice of a more omniscient viewpoint if the author wishes to gain a particular kind of authenticity both for his theme and his point of view. Each, in reinforcing the other, is constant to the same principle. Thus Gillis/Galsky, confused and narrow and limited in his viewpoint as each of us necessarily is, gives us his self-centred view of the society into which he has been born. Because of this subjective approach his involvement in that society is established whilst through allusion, pun, irony and satire he convinces us of his objectivity. Society out there is the thing he examines, and he views it this way:

My course was Nineteenth-Century Literature, on stage, Cardinal Newman: I, Roxbury Jewish boy, scrupulously differentiated consubstantiation and transubstantiation for these nominal Christians who wouldn't have set foot in church except that chapel at Royce was compulsory, a policy of Royce's logical positivistic dean, who wanted the kids back early from San Francisco on Sundays.

For two hours my ebullience battled the students' wariness. *Caritas, caritas*, I calmed my aspiring heart: nine-tenths of these kids don't want to be in college in the first place. They're only fulfilling social necessity which says "College(s) at-

tended" is an essential category in newspaper Engagement and Wedding Announcements. If there had been a shorter path to the Alumni Club, these students would, of course, have eliminated college altogether. Their parents' conversation needed the "my son (or daughter) in college" gambit, but other topics for bragging and bitching might conceivably be found.

One of the interesting aspects about the passage just quoted is that it points up a clever device by means of which Ludwig has expanded the limitations of persona. He has made the "I" of his story a "Roxbury Jewish boy", from which viewpoint he may comment on those Judaic elements which go to make up a part of North American society. But this is only a part — there is another side. The persona is a split persona, and almost in the same breath as Joseph Gillis announces his Jewish origins he tells us that he changed his family name "to prevent the sacrilege of 'Galsky' appearing on a Harvard degree *in Latin*." As a physical type, he is unlike his Semitic mother or swarthy, squat father who burns with "Hasidic joy and fervour". He, Gillis, is "tall, slim, gray-eyed, a typical washed-out paleface. . . ." So much, therefore, for a persona who serves the double function of presenting an outlook and a yardstick for our Judaic-Christian culture in either its combined or separate state. For good measure, and as a counterbalance to his Galsky side, Gillis gains a Puritan wife. Nevertheless, as a persona figure Gillis/Galsky remains fixed at centre and, as a consequence, the narrow and personal angle of vision through which the work is presented remains unaltered.

WITH THIS IN MIND let us examine the plot in *Confusions*.

Writing from a specific point in time, there are two aspects of time which the protagonist-narrator can deal with: the present . . . and the past. When he deals with the past, however, he is restricted, again on two counts. To begin with, what he reveals of the past will, obviously, be limited by its relevancy to the present situation in the novel. Furthermore, no story which uses persona can begin before the character reaches what we would consider a reasonable age for conscious awareness with respect to experience to be retained and recorded. Events which happened before such an age is reached can only be reported as having happened by virtue of another party's verification. Birth is an obvious example. Childhood, however, may be experienced and the experience retained by the narrator — ready to be written down later as part of his past. Any experience, therefore, of persona's past must be handled by the author in terms of flashback when he has

chosen as his theme the confusion of the present and he wishes to present this confusion as seen through the viewpoint of a man who lives and works in its midst.

Gillis/Galsky, then, begins his story *in medias res*, since the device of persona demands it. Dramatically speaking, flashback creates a tension in the novel between past and present which can be turned to good account. As I have pointed out, in terms of technique — that is, using the particular protagonist-narrator he did use in *Confusions* — Ludwig had no other choice than to offer the past in flashback. What he wanted to say, therefore, in terms of his theme was limited by the point of view in his novel. He wished to show a breakdown in our culture of those positive values which were once embodied in our Western heritage — values to which we give only a passing thought in the present since more of our lives are spent in jungle tactics and, thus, we expend our energies wastefully. Ludwig, then, has turned a technical necessity to good dramatic effect. By means of flashback he is able to advance the background of his hero to show his boyhood, his adolescence, his young manhood, so that it is interspersed with narrative of the present. In this way, the past becomes a valid comparison with the present. Two scenes illustrate this. Writing as an adult, Gillis/Galsky relates an anecdote concerning a sexual adventure at the age of thirteen with his aunt's maid. His mother, unswerving in her loyalty and totally supportive of her son, denies his guilt in this incident to her sister, Gillis' aunt Bess. Recalling the event in flashback, Gillis/Galsky writes:

Vindicated by a mother's faith, I ran outside to join the other children play kick-the-can.

The story then continues in the present again and, as the plot unfolds, the high value placed on family faith and loyalty, established and recalled from the past, is contrasted with the values of contemporary society. A second scene illustrates this. The immensely wealthy father of a mentally ill student has left the campus without desiring to see his son, whose enforced withdrawal from university has necessitated the father's visit in the first place. Not believing that any father could be so callous, Gillis/Galsky, the boy's tutor, tells us that he watches the Petersons' limousine pull away and slowly realizes that the father is indeed leaving without seeing his son. We then get an image of "a toppling of walls, a staving-in of abutments", and a comparison is made between the present and the past — a past in which values of love and loyalty have been carefully established — and Gillis/Galsky writes: "Maybe the root of my simple-mindedness

lay here: my father Simon was incapable of abandoning me, no matter what — crime, crack-up, illness.” Past and present, therefore, juxtaposed for comparison and interspersed in narrative for reasons of technical necessity, are used effectively as polarities to maintain dramatic tension.

Having left the question of consistency in Ludwig's novel hanging, as it were, I should like to pick it up again at this point. As I have said, persona presents us with his view of the world and, as a product of the Judaic-Christian world, he both embodies the culture of his society and is the yardstick of it. What he is, so is his society — cynical of its values, wasteful of its energies, and myopic in terms of its future. In terms of the future what function can persona perform other than to present this condition of myopia? Obviously none. A Victorian novel, guided by the hand of an omniscient author, used to end with a chapter summing up the subsequent careers, marriages, deaths, of its main characters. By its very nature persona is prevented from taking even a peep at the future and Ludwig's persona commits no fault in this respect. Gillis/Galsky, however, as I have suggested above, does surrender to his author as he attempts to reveal to us that change is possible; that, in fact, there is no end to the possibilities that are open to all of us in this world, even to those despairing graduate students in English literature who imagine that the last word has already been written about everything that has ever been published. Gillis/Galsky tells us that the world is not as black as he had pictured it for us. However, previous to this in the novel what has happened is that the author had relied on Gillis/Galsky's view of the world to carry his theme.

Standing confused in the midst of twentieth-century moral confusion, Gillis/Galsky became the vehicle which carried Ludwig's novel. Diagrammatically, we can picture him as the fixed centre of a circle. Suddenly, however, Ludwig requires two focal points. He wants another persona who is no longer confused — he wants a persona whose view is clarified, who may still see the world as confused but he, persona, *is no longer confused*. What Ludwig wants, at this point, is not a circle with one fixed point but an ellipse with two foci. The problem here, of course, is how to arrange for an ellipse with two foci. Ludwig's way out, in view of the way his novel has been structured, was difficult. He solved his problem by dropping the second focal point into the circle whose one fixed point was already occupied by his protagonist-narrator, Gillis/Galsky. Technically speaking, Gillis/Galsky had no right to change. His change is a miracle, a *deus ex machina*, brought about by a hand external to the situation.

## THE UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA MEDAL FOR POPULAR BIOGRAPHY 1968

*By and large, 1968 was a poor year for popular biography in Canada. A good number of biographies were written, but too many showed signs of inadequate editing and too much haste in getting the books into the hands of the public. Many books—such as the one on Pearson—should have been drastically cut to make them readable; and others—such as that about Trudeau—should have been thought out more thoroughly.*

*Some books were better than others, but for various reasons were not of medal quality. Malcolm Foster's book, Joyce Cary is well conceived, but hampered by too turgid a style. Some opportunity should have been taken to examine Cary's works with care, and instead only a very regular critical opinion is presented. Mr. Foster calls Cary "Joyce" too often, and the chummy tone often leads to confusion with James Joyce. Richard Gwyn's book, Smallwood: the Unlikely Revolutionary is the best of the contemporary political works; it begins well, and presents a nice sense of the man. The lucid prose captures the elusive spirit of Newfoundland exceptionally well, but the latter half which concerns Newfoundland more than Smallwood, weakens the book's total effect measurably. T. P. Slattery's The Assassination of d'Arcy McGee makes a good story about McGee's personality, much more than history books usually afford, but the book is over long and would have stood some judicious editing.*

*The best book to come to the award committee this year was G. P. V. Akrigg's Shakespeare and the Earl of Southampton, but it cannot be considered in the "popular" biography category. The book is readable to the general, but literate, reader, and is not popularized to a point of being over-general at the expense of being accurate. A new biography of Southampton was needed, and this is very useful. The final third of the book is guesswork, but it is intelligent guesswork, and has great bearing on the first two-thirds. It offers an intelligent surmise about a personality conflict, which the major portion of the book, the analysis of the verifiable facts, suggests. It fills out, in an interesting though not indisputable way, the character of a man the way a good biography should. Akrigg's book is a fine example of how facts can be made interesting, and how details add enormously to a work. The committee commend it highly.*

D.S.



## LETTER FROM HALIFAX

*Donald Cameron*

**T**HE STATUE OF JOSEPH HOWE stands in the grounds of the Legislature, staring determinedly at the head office of the Bank of Nova Scotia. A few blocks away, in an old stone building near the docks, are the offices of the *Acadian Recorder*. An hour's drive brings one to Windsor, where Haliburton House is open to the public as one of Canada's few authentic literary shrines.

Canadian writing in English began here, nearly a century and a half ago. This tough old city of trade and warfare saw good writers come and go when the site of Vancouver was hardly known; Lord Selkirk's little cluster of farms on the Red River was twenty years old when Halifax was the centre of an astonishingly fertile intellectual circle. What about our own day, when clusters of writers lurk in every Canadian university town, when little presses in twenty cities pour out chapbooks and quarterlies of experimental writing at a bewildering rate?

No little magazines. No basement publishers. No poet of any consequence, unless one cheats by claiming a slice of John Newlove, who spent last winter in Nova Scotia. A flourishing branch of the Canadian Authors' Association, but no special interest in writing at any of the city's five degree-granting institutions. A depressing scene.

Yet everything seems to stand ready, waiting to crystallize. The CBC has an important operation in Halifax, with an endless appetite especially for radio scripts. Radio drama is currently having a special boom. The Neptune Theatre, Canada's first professional repertory company, is now an established part of the city's life, and it is crying for new plays. According to Heinar Piller, the theatre's artistic director, the lack of new plays is a "burning problem", one which can't

be resolved easily because the prerequisites for good playwrights have been absent:

Most Canadian playwrights are not familiar enough with the theatrical medium. They haven't been subjected to theatre ever since their childhood, they've seen maybe five to ten productions in their lives, perhaps the usual clichés of touring Broadway productions. They haven't had the opportunity to observe and explore and experiment in their own work, to find out what is effective on a stage.

Nevertheless, Neptune has produced a number of original plays. Dr. Arthur Murphy, a Halifax surgeon who served his apprenticeship in radio drama, has written two of them; Gavin Douglas, formerly a Neptune actor, wrote the script for *The Wooden World*, an anthology of Nova Scotian history, and is now in London on a Canada Council grant, turning himself into a playwright. More recently Henry Whittier, a Dalhousie English professor, has written two dramatic anthologies which the Neptune has presented in high schools all over the province, and he hopes to write original plays in the future.

Dr. Whittier aside, the universities are curiously uninvolved in contemporary Canadian writing. Will R. Bird, a novelist absorbed by Maritime history, lives in Halifax, but he has been honoured in Alberta rather than Nova Scotia. The *Dalhousie Review* sandwiches some poetry between its learned articles, but prints practically no fiction. The general atmosphere suggests a belief that a man who is going to write will write whatever the obstacles, but the man who really needs encouragement and stimulation probably should do something else in which his interest is self-generating.

Writers have emerged from this austere academic tradition, of course, the best known being Hugh MacLennan. More recently Simon Gray followed a pattern similar to MacLennan's: after graduation he left for Cambridge and Vancouver before coming to rest as a lecturer in English at the University of London. Asked if he received any encouragement as an undergraduate when he was beginning to write, he gave the answer that perhaps typifies the kind of writer one would expect to bud in Halifax: "I never thought that I particularly needed encouragement, of an official sort anyway."

The city itself is fascinating, and MacLennan has written often and affectionately about it:

All the proportions of Halifax are strange. She sits there on her ironstone, generally in the wet, with all her faults exposed. . . . The smell of tar, fish-meal, bilge, ozone, salt water, spruce forests and her own slums are rich in her nostrils. She

is like an old trollop, lying in wait for weary seamen, if that is how you choose to regard her. She is like an old lady living in genteel poverty amid the disorder of her own past, if you think of her more gently. . . . She possesses the same kind of beauty Rembrandt discovered in the battered faces of the old men and women he loved best to paint.<sup>1</sup>

Interestingly, Simon Gray also remembers the rich character and atmosphere of the city with pleasure, even down to the pungent smells which are an integral part of the Halifax experience:

I loved Halifax in many ways; I still do feel immensely nostalgic about it. I think it's one of the most beautiful places I've been. I'm one of the few people who liked Barrington Street as it was then, a very dilapidated, very seedy street indeed, but the odour of stale fish and fog was one of the most romantic I've ever smelt, and I still hunger for it.

The attitude that writing is a solitary art which is generated only from within is by no means limited to Halifax, however, and it accounts for the most curious phenomenon of Nova Scotian writing: in the chief city of Atlantic Canada, there is no literary community at all, and the most successful and prominent authors live in small towns far away.

WHEN A NOVA SCOTIAN tries to explain something about his native province, he will probably refer you to one of Thomas Raddall's books. Probably the topic will be historical, for in part Raddall both feeds and is fed by the passionate interest of the ordinary Nova Scotian in his own colourful history. (Will Bird, who has an analogous though much less intense relationship with his readers, gave me a revealing fact: his historical novels of Yorkshiresmen in the Amherst area have about two-thirds of their considerable sale within the Maritimes.) I doubt if there can be another writer in Canada who has so intimate a relationship with his public as Thomas Raddall, or one who is so nearly a spokesman for the inarticulate attitudes of a community the extent and nature of which he knows exactly. Sailors and teachers, businessmen and students, they all read Raddall; the mayor of Halifax gives copies of Raddall's fine history of the city, *Halifax, Warden of the North*, to his distinguished visitors.

Raddall makes his home in Liverpool, down the South Shore from Halifax, a town that has figured prominently in more than one of his novels. Originally

a Yankee trading settlement, Liverpool now lives on its mills, and Raddall moved there after he left the sea originally to take a job as a mill accountant. In his mid-sixties, he is a muscular sun-browned man with a dramatically white ruff of hair around the crown of his head. One might mistake him for a senior naval officer off duty. He has known few writers. "Once or twice a wandering American writer drifted along the coast," he recalls, speaking of his early years, "and stopped in to see me because he'd read one of my stories. But other than that I had no contact with writers at all." He has no regrets about living in a country town. "The way to learn to write is to write — work it out yourself. And you *can't* do that in a crowd. A writer's business is to stay away from any organized group."

Writing in isolation has its disadvantages — for Raddall, "the main regret has been the lack of live theatre. I've always loved that when I could get it. But other than that I've missed nothing." Books, movies and TV are readily available in Liverpool; informal contacts with other writers are enjoyable when they come along, but too much of that kind of thing would be a bore. "Authors are not meant to be gregarious," Raddall argues, "I'm more interested in people generally than people who write about them." The life and history of his fellow Nova Scotians provide his real stimulation. Remembering his first days as a writer, Raddall remarks that "I found that right where I was, in this part of the Maritime Provinces, I had all the material that any writer could wish for."

One might enumerate endless contrasts between Raddall and Ernest Buckler. Raddall, who is curiously ignored by academic criticism, is beloved in Nova Scotia, while Buckler, far less celebrated in his native province, is widely agreed to be among the most important of Canadian novelists. Raddall specializes in history and action, Buckler in philosophy and contemporary psychology. Buckler is dedicated to fiction as art; Raddall is the romancer and story-teller. On the afternoon I visited him, Raddall was going golfing with his wife, and he gives an impression of settled contentment; Buckler, a bachelor, in uncertain health, half-shy, half-rebel, accepts that the wound is implied in the bow. "It is the *sick* whale that produces the ambergris," he insists, "it is the *irritated* oyster that produces the pearl."

Yet in discussing their styles of life, the two Nova Scotians offer remarkably parallel ideas. For Buckler too, isolation is a positive value: the writer must be alone, cannot be distracted, even though the cost of solitude is the most appalling loneliness. And country life "lets you know who you are. You have to be plugged into the arteries of life as well as the veins." Buckler has travelled: he worked

in New York when he was a Dalhousie undergraduate, and for some years he lived in Toronto. But he finds the arteries of Bridgetown, Nova Scotia, richer than most.

In the Nova Scotia country, almost specifically in the country where I live, you get the universals more than you do almost anywhere else. You don't have to wander all over the bloody world and explore every nook and cranny in it to find out how people behave. This is the whole tenor of my present book, *Oxbells and Fireflies*, that in a small community like this even, you have a representation of every kind of action, of every kind of psychological mode. The whole macrocosm is here in microcosm.

As for contact with other writers,

Writers by and large are the dreariest people you can possibly know. Because they're just stuffed with words like dry bread dressing up a Christmas goose's ass. You subsist on people who really live, who are not looking at what they're doing all the time. You have to observe people who act simply, and who are not introspective in the least; and draw your conclusions from them.

Books come to Buckler through the mobile library; painting is "a blind spot of mine". Music and plays are available on records: "You can get almost everybody in better form than when they're performing on the stage. You *miss* the magic of the curtain, though."

As one might expect, Buckler shares with many another Maritime writer a real gratitude to the CBC, especially the radio network, for providing both stimulation and outlet. He has written many talks, stories and plays for radio, and listens regularly. "I love the CBC," he says, "I think it's the thing that Canada has most to be proud of. It gets kind of precious sometimes, and they get this — thing, about this, well, just discovered twelfth-century music, for the unaccompanied lute. But never mind that; when they're good they're *goddam* good, aren't they? and they're almost induplicable." (Arthur Murphy, as a dramatist, is even more forceful: "Without the CBC, I don't think there'd be any significant Canadian theatre today.")

Acadia University, up the Annapolis Valley at Wolfville, has been interested in Buckler. He has friends on the faculty there, and Professor Gregory Cook, himself a poet, recently completed the first thesis on Buckler's work. Some time ago Buckler was persuaded to sit in on Acadia's creative writing workshop, and to his surprise he enjoyed it. "If you've been through the mill yourself, you can show them all kinds of short cuts," he admits. "You can show them where they're going wrong, where they have to tighten this up. Actually I had a fine time."

He's been invited to give the course himself, but he worries that it might be pretentious. On the other hand, "Real hard cash just for this. Everybody thinks I'm crazy to turn it down." Buckler is no more affluent than other writers, and it is hard to see how anyone could lose if he took up the invitation. Next year, perhaps.

To spend a summer afternoon talking with Ernest Buckler is to focus many of the experiences both of Nova Scotia and of his own novels. He lives in a serene white farmhouse outside Bridgetown, a century-old house filled with well-worn family furniture. The talk is leisurely and careful, words are weighed before they are spoken — and weighed, as often as not, for comic effect. Buckler's criticism of another novelist — that he doesn't take enough time with his writing — is revealing; for on the lush floor of the Annapolis Valley, shut in by its two mountains, traditional rhythms and tested values quietly control the pace. There is no hustle, and conversation turns easily towards love, destiny, comedy. Buckler has no doubt paid for his choice of venue, but he has gained from it a rare perspective, much the way other Nova Scotian writers have gained perspective in history. Visions of this quality are not easy to find in swinging urban Canada, and driving home through the warm evening one is grateful that Nova Scotians and their writers are saltily individual. Fads wither; empires have clashed and fallen; the rocks and the sea endure. Nova Scotians know in their bones the indifference of history, and they live intimately with the naked conditions of life. Ironstone and brine: history: the farms and the woods. In Nova Scotia, one feels himself to have a better than even chance of laying hands on something permanent.

## FOOTNOTE

- <sup>1</sup> "Portrait of a City", from *Cross Country* (Toronto, 1949), reprinted in Will R. Bird, ed., *Atlantic Anthology* (Toronto, 1959). All other quotations are from tape-recorded interviews, and I want to express my gratitude to the many people I spoke with for their courtesy and their universal generosity with their time.

## NOURISHING THE ADDICT

Clara Thomas

DOUGAL MCLEISH, *The Traitor Game*. Macmillan. \$5.95.  
MARGARET BRIGGS, *Lost Identity*. McClelland & Stewart. \$5.95.  
NIGEL FOXELL, *Carnival*. Oberon Press. \$2.50  
JOHN CORNISH, *Sherbourne Street*, Clarke Irwin. \$4.75.

"THERE IS NOTHING," said Toad, "absolutely nothing, like messing about in boats". The mystery-story bibber feels exactly the same about the books which satisfy and nourish his addiction. For addiction it is, and beside and beyond both reach and grasp of the articles which explicate the genre's characteristics and analyse its attractions, there remain, as every addict knows, two awful necessities: there must be more; there will never be enough.

Certain and constant components of the appeal are carry-overs from childish simplicities — mixtures of the novel and the familiar, danger and security, the blackly wicked and the snowy good. The path of adventure and pleasurable, because vicarious, concern and fear is the same path, whether guided by Winnie the Pooh or by Lord Peter Wimsey. The goal and the satisfactions are the same — through darkness and disorder to light and the righting of the rocking balance of things.

The habitual "found-in" of the mystery story expects virtuoso variations on the theme, however, and quite often he be-

comes a demanding connoisseur of the runs and trills of the production. The best writers in the genre have created characters who are dazzling performers; they have also created believable worlds, memorable talk, tones and moods of dizzying variety — and always, good yarns. Dougal McLeish may well join their hierarchy.

*The Traitor Game* is Buchan in its derivation and Canadian in its plot and setting. Its suspense accumulates to a wonderfully unlikely but satisfying climax featuring a fragile and heroic Governor-General as a Super-hero, a Canadian St. George, and a villainous Premier of Ontario as the Super-villain Dragon. The characters are predictable in their types: shaggy Max, the everlasting boy adventurer, sniffing out evil to test his strength against it; his adversary, Captain Mittelhorn, who is, in fact, another projection of the Max character, his strengths given to darkness, not to light; John Lane, the doomed loser who turns winner after all. So far, *The Traitor Game* is all old-formula, though competently handled.

Its distinction lies in Mr. McLeish's command of the settings. He knows exactly what Thunder Bay looks like from the cockpit of a small aircraft and he communicates his knowing. He knows, and he shows, how strange it would be to see the Armouries at Port Arthur in a sudden crisis, handing out live ammunition, or to crawl on hands and knees across a beaver dam and almost prefer, like one of the fugitives, to be captured by the villains than "to be bitten by a beaver."

I hope that Dougal McLeish will write more Canadian set mysteries. I wish that this one were published in paper-back; it's a "good read" at any age and it would be a fine choice for the indoctrination of High School students to the delights of the genre at about the Grade X level.

*Lost Identity*, by Margaret Briggs, belongs to the psychological division of the mystery genre, the shelf where some of the works of J. I. M. Stewart and Nigel Balchin are prominent prizes. Set in contemporary England, it tells the story of John Finneker who has lost his memory, ostensibly through accident, but in fact because he cannot bear to remember and so to face his war and post-war guilt.

It is a thoroughly well-constructed tale and believable within its chosen frame, but that frame contains much that seems curiously dated. Finneker, whether lost or found, walks among the stereotypes of "old school tie" literature: humane psychiatrist, understanding headmaster, scowling villain, sadistic bully and, above all, the fiancée who is clever, brave — and far more a "good chap" than a woman. When the book ends and Finneker has navigated the path back to true self and a new beginning he has be-

come convincing enough, but the people around him and the England he moves in are less credible than we have reason to expect in this kind of "adventure of the mind."

*Carnival*, by Nigel Foxell, has much of the mysterious in it, though it does not move in any of the traditional mystery-story paths. In it, we follow the consciousness of its narrator, Walter Phalts, a young academic of German ancestry from an English Department in Plain City, Western Canada. Walter is trying to establish himself and some dependable sense of mature identity in an English Department in Glommenheim, Germany — I think. On the other hand, he could be suffering an identity-crisis simply through a switch from the University of Saskatchewan to York — or vice versa. Awash on beakers of academic sherry, one needs only to be slightly sensitized to find a departmental gathering anywhere in the world taking on the grotesquerie that the Glommenheim Carnival Ball assumes.

Walter narrates events as he sees and shares them, brooding, anxious or elated about their significance to him, from the early evening of the Carnival Ball when the Head's son challenges him to a duel, to the next morning. Throughout the night his mind and emotions are battered by a number of encounters, chief among them his recurrent conversations with Hermann, a Mephistophelean, self-appointed mentor. Walter's problems seem superficially and artificially imposed; his dilemma does not convince and his self-exploration is often tedious, sometimes banal. But Mr. Foxell writes well of the strange, surrealist, dream-distorted atmosphere of the Carnival Ball. It is well worth reading on to



Walter's decision in the dawn when, finally, "the mist had thinned and the sky was trying to be blue" and Lulu, the beautiful temptress-daughter of the Head was forlornly dancing solo "amid the miniature devastation of the ballroom."

For *Sherbourne Street*, John Cornish dreamed large dreams, of a novel big with life and energy and teeming with characters who are as beguiling a gallery of eccentrics as have ever flourished in our fiction. God's plenty indeed: Ronald Napier, an old, forgotten Canadian composer, living with memories of minor musical successes in a crazy broken-down mansion on Sherbourne Street in Toronto; his aged, dirty, taciturn, frail and stubborn Scottish housekeeper, Emmy; Isobel, Napier's England-bred daughter who lives down the street in a trailer-camp, wife of a hard-up musician, warmly material, both to her speedily increasing family and to several strangely-assorted male admirers. These people are at the centre of the plot—the dreaming and scheming of Napier's ramshackle house back to glory as a conservatory by Isobel and her group, and the resistance offered them by Napier.

But this is skeletal, for these characters and their lives are involved with many others. Mr. Cornish spins a wide web—strange, sometimes fantastic, often funny, finally sad, and sometimes his novel has not the spaciousness to contain it all easily. The real writer *does* live here, however. Of the four books reviewed *Sherbourne Street* best demonstrates the creativity that is the most precious "mystery" of all: its characters, major and minor, walk off its pages, persuading us for a little while that, "once upon a time" they did indeed live the lives that Mr. Cornish imagined for them.

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# WORDS THAT DON'T MAKE PICTURES

*Julian Symons*

ROBIN SKELTON, *Selected Poems, 1947-67*. McClelland & Stewart, \$3.95.

ROBIN SKELTON is a pretty good anthologist and editor, a very indifferent poet. The qualities that make him a good editor (of selections from the Thirties and Forties poets in Britain, as well as of a magazine) are a nonsense attitude and an ability to select and organize material. The introduction to his *Poetry of the Thirties*, in particular, shows a remarkable sympathy for the tone and temperament of young poets in a time when, younger still, he did not share their concerns. He writes approvingly of the "radical distrust of anything worn out, evasive, shoddy, or meretricious" that marked English criticism in the period. He might have added a distrust of breast-beating poetic egotism and of rhetoric that did not proceed from actual observation of objects or events. Unfortunately, these characteristics show up with disastrous clarity in his own poems.

Here are a few examples for the Bad Verse of Our Time scrapbook:

I, this ventriloquial pillar  
in the wordy desert

I have made poems — good, bad,  
indifferent, mystical obscene . . .

And what's ahead?  
Poems till I drop, and words, words,  
Words. It's my trade.

Ghosts, stand by  
this poet of your family.

Such huffing and puffing about the idea of being a poet is joined to a striking lack of care for what the poems actually say, a readiness to use any old meaningless bit of rhetoric:

He knocked upon the door of all  
the old eternities

what will survive? The stars  
may tell in time, at least  
will sieve away the worst  
and probe with practised hand  
the desolate remainder.

Confronted with such writing I think it is fair to be uncomfortably literal. Why should the stars, rather than the moon or Old Moore, tell what survives (the subject is Skelton's verse of course), and why are they equipped with hands for the purpose? What are those old eternities upon whose door Johnny Question knocks, and if eternities have doors why don't they open them instead of answering his knocking with phrases like "To give to all that asked would ruin all"? It is no surprise that a poet so careless with phrases takes for his images the first clichés that come to hand so that lips are red as blood, eyes green as grass, the yellow sun turns dull as gold and a cave is black as your hat. William Morris said of Swinburne that his poems used words which didn't make pictures, and the phrase is devastatingly true of Robin Skelton. Swinburne survives for us, rather

precariously, because of his interest in metrics and immense skill in using technical devices, and because particularly in *Poems and Ballads* the emphasis on blood and cruelty genuinely expresses his deepest feelings. The things that he could not say openly in Victorian society force their way through the permanent waves of his verse and give a strange sort of reality to those implacable beautiful tyrants holding death in their hands. Skelton's work, however, is not rhythmically or metrically exciting, although at times he shows skill in organizing the structure of poems, and he seems less to be expressing deep personal feelings than saying the sort of things which he believes poets really ought to feel. Three-quarters of this selection offers us Skelton the Poet, a star-crossed ventriloquist desperately invoking the Muse, and eventually assaulting her in "A First Ballad of the Muse":

I put your word into my mouth  
 And spell your sentence bare.  
 A bright bone button winks at you  
 up from the bedroom floor.  
 The creased cloth grins.      The hot sheets  
    shifts.  
 We meet in one wide bed.  
 The blowfly crawls the knocking wall  
 and the great word is said.

But he is mistaken. Great words are not being said, only loud ones.

The poems in the last section of the book, most of them written in Canada, are more interesting chiefly because the ventriloquial pillar is less in evidence and the rhetoric is used to some purpose. "At Walden Pond", the best poem in the book, compares skilfully and with restraint the contrast between generations as the poet takes his children out on to the frozen pond:

They seem so young  
 to risk the ice, though it's more like to  
                                  hold  
 their weight than my bear's tread. They  
                                  can afford  
 the gestures I can't make, run far, and  
                                  slide:  
 slowly we near the shore and the farther  
                                  wood.

The scene is blended with recollections of the past, childhood and school, other boys and girls running on the ice long ago, "a herd/stampeding through the failing light, some dead,/some twisted, from a war they didn't start/and couldn't end." The poem itself closes with successful sobriety as father and children carefully cross the darkening pond. There are other poems in this part of the book, "The Come-Back" which describes the search for a basement room lived in during youth, a revived memory of seeing Tod Slaughter play The Demon Barber, and a straightforward account of a soldier rehabilitated at Esquimault on Vancouver Island after spending years as a prisoner of the Japanese in a camp near Nagasaki, which have a good deal of dramatic impact on their own level.

A feeling for drama is, indeed, the quality that comes through most clearly and genuinely from this collection. "Remembering Esquimault" shows the bones of what might be a good short radio play, and this is true of some other pieces like "The Reliquary" which describes the approach to mutual understanding of the sons of English and German artillerymen both of whom fought at Ypres. I don't see any sign here that Robin Skelton will ever be more than an energetic versifier, but a man with so strong a dramatic sense might well become a very successful writer for radio or television.

# NEW INTEREST IN REALITY

*W. F. Hall*

HUGH GARNER, *Cabbagetown*. Ryerson Press, \$7.95. *Storm Below*. Ryerson Press, \$2.50. *Silence on the Shore*. Ryerson Press, \$2.95.

THE SURFACE LAYER of Garner's fiction has been defined more than once. It is, as Robert Fulford puts it, "how modern Canadian society has looked to the people who live on the bottom and the edge of it." This is a world of oppressed workers and oppressive bosses, of lonely frustrated drifting misfits; a drab world, by and large, in which sometimes the sociological interest of both writer and reader seems to outweigh that of any other kind. In these terms Mr. Garner is a part of a recognizable literary tradition: that of the naturalistic novel. And as one reads one is frequently reminded of other novelists; of Zola or of Frank Norris in *Silence on the Shore*; of Kipling and of London in *Storm Below*; of Dreiser and James T. Farrell and, in certain episodes in *Cabbagetown*, of the James Joyce of *Dubliners*. This is not to suggest that Mr. Garner is derivative. It suggests something more interesting than that.

The major focus of his novels is the society of the urban lower-middle and working classes, as it is the focus in the work of the other novelists I have mentioned. Thus what one notes is not so much a repetition from novelist to novelist of material and treatment of material, but a re-examination by a series of novelists of an experience of a section of society in which various stages have become ritualized, predictable. The conclusion

one draws then is not that Mr. Garner is indebted necessarily to Zola for the basic idea of *Silence on the Shore* and for much of its development, but rather that such a situation, a common one in a large city, will produce certain inevitable and predictable patterns and problems, no matter what the city or where it may be: Garner's Toronto, Dreiser's Chicago or New York, Zola's Paris. The further conclusion one would draw then would be that to consider Mr. Garner too exclusively in terms of his "Canadian-ness" is to do him as much of an injustice as to consider him only in terms of his "naturalism". The reader who knows *Cabbagetown* (then and now) will enjoy the added pleasure of recognition, possibly at times the peculiar satisfaction, in *Silence on the Shore*, of checking Mr. Garner's urban geography. Mr. Garner's success does not, however, reside in his nationality any more than it does in his experiences recorded, misleadingly, on the dust jacket of *Cabbagetown*. It lies in his talent and an unexpected quality of his imagination.

One does not expect of Mr. Garner's style in his novels, any more than in his short stories, that it should be rich with imagery, that it should dazzle with its brilliance of either phrase or insight, that it should tease us out of thought with its complexity. At its worst the style is flat and dull and much given to cliché:

tears of self pity "roll down the sides" of noses; a woman feels "doomed to her aloneness"; the captain of the *Riverford* thinks: "It was remarkable how the news got around the ship". At its best it produces an impression of effort, a recognizable effort to produce, as a character in *Cabbagetown* remarks, an art that is "the delineation of things", by an artist who is attempting to "transcribe his senses . . . with the greatest degree of accuracy". And this effort results, as in Dreiser, in a fictional world in which the slow accumulation of minute accurate physical detail is a necessary part of total understanding. This kind of effort (which calls for a corresponding effort from the reader) I find most clear and most rewarding in *Silence on the Shore*, in which Mr. Garner shows, with considerable unobtrusive skill in the handling of a complex plot, the interrelationships among a number of people (some immigrant, some native Canadian) in a shabby boarding house (soon to be sold for property development) in Northern Toronto. The effort is wasted, it seems to me, in *Storm Below*. Here one clambers over one detailed description of the ship to another and finds, in the little space remaining, crew members explaining to each other the meanings of certain nautical terms (as in a bad play not so much for their benefit as for ours) or else acting in predictable and grossly melodramatic terms. Mr. Garner here attempts symbolic "significance"; the body of a young sailor, who has died in an accidental fall, is preserved on the last leg of the return to port in the ship's frozen food locker. Projected in the imagination of a Katherine Anne Porter or a Budin such "significance" might convince. Projected in Mr. Garner's, which

does not appear to move at all in this way, it does not; it does not even produce the grotesque comedy that such a situation might well create. Disorder and confusion most certainly spread through the ship but they have little to do with disturbing emanations from the food locker. As one of Monsarrat's officer types might remark: "just a damn bad ship".

This novel does illustrate a curious fact about Mr. Garner's talent that, given some of his qualities, is at first surprising. To examine the fact is to discover what is to me the most fascinating layer of his talent. It is very clear in *Storm Below* that in the description of a man's world, in the approach to a subject from what one might call a sociological stance, Mr. Garner is frequently as wooden, dull and fictionally uninvolved as he is when attempting symbolic projection. He is rarely so, the effort he demands is more worthwhile, when he is exploring the relationships between adult men and women and the inner world of a woman. It is in fact in the projection of a world as seen by women (in most of *Silence on the Shore* and parts of *Cabbagetown*) that Mr. Garner is, in my opinion, at his very best. It is in the scenes that involve them — such women as Mabel Tilling and Myrla Patson in *Cabbagetown* or Aileen, Sophia or Grace Hill in *Silence on the Shore* that Mr. Garner's talent, which seems otherwise so predictable, is transformed. The effort — of the style, of movement — dissolves into a clear unsentimental lucidity. The life Mr. Garner is concerned with at such times is rarely pretty, is often downright ugly. These women are all in one way or another outcast and yet what is shown about them is central to the understand-

ing of the novels in which they appear. The treatment of Myrla's career, from employer's mistress to bellhop's callgirl, is not only more successfully realized but it makes, without any explicit comment, a more valuable statement about Mr. Garner's society than does the rather predictable and, on the whole, self-righteous career of Ken Tilling. Here, as in his short stories, Mr. Garner is much more concerned with the victims than with the victors, but his anger (that makes the tone of "One-Two-Three Little Indians" so bitter) no longer distorts his concern. The projection of his world from the woman's point of view, of a world principally conceived in their terms, results, when he has a complete imaginative grasp of his situations, in a point of view which is not, as Ken Tilling remarks, that of "socialism, . . . communism . . . Christian radicalism . . . Social Credit . . . Technocracy" but that "of an interested sceptic."

At his best — a best I find sustained most successfully in *Silence on the*

*Shore* — Mr. Garner is on nobody's "side". He is not disgusted by Grace Hill's prurience; he does not sentimentalize Sophia's unhappy existence in the hospital, any more than he does her efforts to cope with her frustrated sexual life. It is true, as Michael Hornyansky has put it, that Mr. Garner is "a sensible blunt man who knows what real life is and he gives it to us straight." But he is much more than merely sensible and blunt, and his reality extends beyond the detailed physical surface that everyone can touch. It extends into an area in which motive, desire, lust, personal integrity, sense of purpose and even of identity are all tangled and obscured because of the need to engage with that "real life" that is the surface. What surprises and intrigues me in two, at least, of Mr. Garner's novels is the delicacy and sureness, the unsentimental directness with which he demonstrates his ability to project a reality clearly not that of his own self, a reality that is new and interesting.

## THE CONQUEST OF MEDUSA

*D. G. Jones*

ALVIN H. LEE, *James Reaney*. Burns and MacEachern Limited. \$5.25.

IS REANEY A SMART PRESTIDIGITATOR or a real magician? Alvin Lee's book on James Reaney would appear to suggest that he is both, even perhaps that they are the same thing.

The book gives a running explication of *The Red Heart*, *A Suit of Nettles*, *A Message to Winnipeg*, *The Dance of Death in London, Ontario*, *Twelve Let-*

*ters to a Small Town* and the various dramatic works. It has the immediate value of placing before us the whole of Reaney's achievement and of calling attention to the need for some kind of collected edition of his work, which is scattered, out of print or simply not available except from the author.

Lee's method has the further advan-

tage of sticking close to the text, providing immediately practical information, and revealing the organic development of what the author calls "Reaneyland." It has the inherent disadvantage of making a somewhat pedestrian progress. Only at the end of the detailed discussion can the reader lift his eye from the trail to take in the larger view. Then, the world that spins out from the dark farmhouse in rural Ontario is revealed as a particular province in the Frydgean kingdom of Western culture, "This culture based on Classical and Christian mythologies . . . intermittently breaking through in the achievements of its visionary artists, to the timeless, ideal pattern of itself."

Does it break through, or is it merely applied? More important, does Mr. Lee's exposition of the timeless patterns in Reaney's work reveal the roots of its vitality or its final significance?

In the case of *A Suit of Nettles*, I would answer *no* to both questions. I am still bothered by the strangely hobbled or goosegaited rhythms. More seriously, the grab-bag of Canadian history continues to strike me as arbitrary, obscure and superficial. I'm supposed to see "Défense de Fumer" as emblematic of Laurier's combined *politesse and hauteur*. I don't. A blonde corpse lying, against all history, at Port Moody, B.C., is supposed to evoke the Vikings' failure to penetrate a fell continent. It doesn't. I'm grateful to Mr. Lee for his explanation of the allusions to Spenser's eclogue, Frazer's *Golden Bough*, Frye's seasonal quaternity, and the Christian vision of a New Jerusalem. Yet I am impressed only by an increasing sense of absurdity as all this is piled on the back of a few geese. And it's not just the geese, gabbling their clichés, who sound absurd, but the critic

as well as he explains the presumably profound spiritual drama that controls the overall development of the poem. "The poem ends," says Mr. Lee, "with a vision of the imagination breaking through the world of nature until, through the agency of divine love, the chaos of water begins to fuse with fire." Yet this awesome epiphany depends upon two italicized lines apparently relating to Peter and Anne as they retire for the night following their Christmas dinner:

*Drowning in the waterflames of Love  
They lay in the straw with it snowing in  
the loft window.*

Frankly, I haven't felt the agency of divine love and I find it absurd to rest the whole Christian vision of Grace on a few italics. The timeless, ideal pattern that is supposed to break through at this point, strikes me as just as much a cliché as any other idea in the anserine repertoire. It is not reborn in the work, but applied.

The controlling structural element in Reaney's work is the antithetical vision of a dark world of nature and death and a bright world that is nature redeemed by the imagination and the word. Mr. Lee's exposition of this vision clarifies the poems and, more especially perhaps, the plays, where the vision becomes dynamic and where it affects the whole conception of the play. It is not, as Mr. Lee warns, to be read as a comedy of manners. Yet, in reaction to the critics who emphasized the local colour in Reaney's writing, and in the interests of "universality," Mr. Lee exaggerates the importance of the academically more prestigious archetypal patterns. He implies, mistakenly I believe, that the vitality and significance of Reaney's work is

revealed when such timeless, ideal patterns are revealed. In fact, it may only reveal the prestidigitator's manipulation of the Complete Magician's Set of Western Archetypes. The real magic occurs when such archetypal patterns or literary conventions reveal, not themselves, but Reaney's world.

Reaney's orthodox Christian symbolism doesn't interest me one little bit. His fascination with the unorthodox children of *Wuthering Heights* does. Why this fascination on the part of writers going through the University of Toronto for the nineteenth-century world of the Brontes, Lewis Carroll, H. Rider Haggard? What does it reveal about the imaginative world of the Upper Canadian? Where exactly is Heathcliff and the mature Catherine in Reaney's work? These are questions Mr. Lee provokes but does not answer.

Generally, the conventions of literature and myth serve Reaney as Athena's shield served Perseus in his encounter with Medusa. It is Medusa, the local element, and Reaney's conquest of it, that is, his articulation of it, that interests me and deserves more emphasis. It is not the shield, but the two farmwomen tight on elderberry wine and scandal, dancing with their cutout paper men; it is the two black brothers who seduce the lady-evangelists crusading on behalf of pure copulation and who turn the ladies into machines; these remain alive, ambiguous and uproariously funny. I want to know more about the fascination and horror of the old Ontario farmhouse, with its combination of boredom and violence, puritanism and sex, perversion and vitality.

It is not the *theme* of making a dumb nature articulate but the actual doing

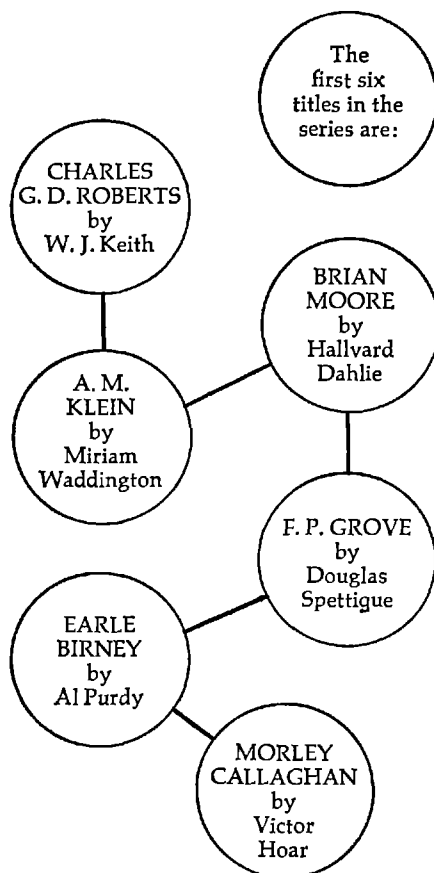
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## STUDIES IN CANADIAN LITERATURE

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General Editors:  
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THE COPP CLARK PUBLISHING CO.  
512 Wellington Street West  
Toronto 2B, Ontario

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so that is significant. It is Reaney's decision to accept his native experience, his willingness, up to a point, to be possessed by it and allow it to transform the conventions he inherits. It is the voice of the Thames river, of Pierre Falcon come back from the graveyard of forgotten verse, of Isabella Valancy Crawford, Raymond Knister and Duncan Campbell Scott articulating a native tradition. It is the corduroy road beyond Stratford playing scales through the layers of asphalt and mud. It is not the revelation of the timeless, ideal pattern that is sig-

nificant, but the revelation of a buried, inarticulate world that, ideal or awful, provides the pattern of so many of our lives in time. Like the magician Schmendrick in Peter Beagle's *The Last Unicorn*, Reaney is often absurd, but when the power comes to him now and again, he performs the real, the essential miracle.

Mr. Lee exposes one side of Reaney's work very thoroughly. More remains to be done to explore that side Mr. Lee only touches in passing.

## ONE TOUCH OF NATURE

*Fred Cogswell*

JOE ROSENBLATT, *Winter of the Luna Moth*. House of Anansi. \$2.50.  
AL PURDY, *Poems for all the Annettes*. House of Anansi. \$2.50.

THE FIRST FOUR PARTS OF *Winter of the Luna Moth* demonstrate the truth of the adage, "one touch of nature makes the whole world kin." The similarity between fish, birds, bats, pigs, insects, etc., and human beings with respect to alimentation, reproduction, growth, and death is used to transfer human values and attributes to the world of our finned, furred, feathered, and scaled partners in life on this planet. Such a transfer possesses two poetical advantages. It enables the poet to support his belief in the one-ness of all life, however ugly or beautiful; and it provides him with a fresh vocabulary and an original set of images with which to adorn his work.

The poet's world is the familiar one of the disillusioned idealist — a world in

which beauty and nobility are threatened or ruined by the greed of predators, but the expression is anything but familiar; at its most extreme form it is Browningesque grotesque:

Molecules miracle midas to glands;  
hands antelope. verb errogemusics.  
Eros is termite cones lamp eeled —  
coulomb senses: lovers weightless.  
Death is weepers in vulvachurches.

At its best, it is fine-textured verse that moves with effortless ease:

On a Christmas tree, they hang,  
hang like bat men with TV antennaed  
hands.  
Rooster feet rotate the Mayan bat gods  
of sleepers with seeing eye ears.  
Then, slowly, the mausoleum skin flaps  
back  
to apron the small bashful faces  
with membranes of darkness.

Part Five, "A Hall of Mirrors" is a longish poem which begins with a protagonist dancing in a hall of mirrors (the silicate kings) and which goes on to speculate on the nature of both dancer and dance as the hall becomes the universe, the dancer a puppet, and the mirrors puppet-masters. This is Joe Rosenblatt's most ambitious poem, and a creditable one at that. But, to me, it does not succeed so well as "The Bee Hive (An elegy to Che Guevera)". As one reads this minor masterpiece, one realizes that all the cleverness and the amalgam of fish, moth, bat, pig, etc., with human in the work which had gone before had been apprentice work, leading up to this apparently effortless fusion in which an event in contemporary history takes its place in the perspective of the twin hives of religious symbol and human society.

*Winter of the Lunar Moth*, while sometimes jarring with too heavy rhythms, too obvious alliteration, and too Joycean attempts at punning, is all the same an original, ambitious, and impressive book of poems, and a reviewer is quite safe in saying that Joe Rosenblatt has in this work found himself as a poet. Whether he keeps and improves upon what he has found here, time only will tell.

Al Purdy's reissue of *Poems for all the Annettes* is not really a reissue. It is a selection and revision made from those volumes published up to and including the original *Poems for all the Annettes*. It contains all the earlier poems which Purdy thinks will support his current image as a poet; in other words, it is a *Selected Earlier Poems*.

Purdy's ability as a poet has depended upon two principal factors. These are,

firstly, his ability to stamp upon every thing he has written the impact of an oral personality that is alive, engaging, apparently frank, and fresh and initially exciting in its moral and linguistic approach to experience. Less immediately observable but perhaps more important for his poetic reputation in the long run is Purdy's second poetic talent. This is the genuine and original "intellectuality" that his poems display. By "intellectuality" I mean his "soul-hydroptic" curiosity and his imaginative power to fuse seemingly unfusible elements. This quality is rarely found in other than the greatest poets.

It seems to me, however, that Purdy's poetic development has been uneven. That is to say, there was a time when the two qualities I have mentioned came and went in flashes but were never satisfactorily present throughout a single poem. Now the Purdean monologue persists brilliantly throughout nearly every poem Purdy writes or revises, but the corresponding development of "intellectuality" has not kept pace with the development of style and voice.

I can easily mention poems from this book: "After the Rats" with its exquisite irony; "The Death of Animals", which carries the irony forward to metaphysical speculation; or at least ten other poems, which as I re-read them now almost persuade me that my previous characterization of Purdy's development is too harsh. But it is enough to say that the Purdy of this book is as good as the Purdy of *The Cariboo Horses* and better than the Purdy of *North of Summer* and better still than the Purdy of *Wild Grape Wine*.

## IN THE OLD FOLKS' HOME

DARYL HINE, *Minutes*. Atheneum. \$1.95.

I CANNOT READ Daryl Hine's poetry without saying Yes and No simultaneously.

In his fifth book of verse, his voice is more his own, heard more directly here than it was in his previous collection, *The Wooden Horse*, where he wore the masks of Sir Walter Raleigh and Don Juan, where he wrote about Patroclus putting on Achilles' armour and about one of Bluebeard's wives. But in *Minutes*, when not writing in his own first person, he still takes on an already-created persona, such as the mythical Daphnis or Tolstoy's Natasha. There is even a poem containing the memorable line, "I negotiate the steps of paradise". But the line would be even more memorable — if it weren't uttered by a trout.

I don't question Hine's craftsmanship, particularly his mastery of iambic pentameter, both blank and rhymed verse. His poem "Tristan" in *The Wooden Horse* is, I believe, one of the most beautiful poems ever written in the English language.

There is no poem of the stature of "Tristan" in *Minutes*. There are a few poems, however, worth quoting, such as this sonnet:

Movement alone gives meaning to the view  
According to which obnoxious planets turn  
Round an incandescent axis. Is it you  
Or me for whom the other must rotate and  
burn?

Earth and sun, we used to be the centre  
Each of his own universe, a pivot  
Nothing could make wobble. Disorder  
could not enter  
Our too formal gardens, moribund and  
private.

But experience flat theory disproved.  
Now we live in a reciprocal emotion,  
Our harmony an interrupted silence,  
Our pattern not a treadmill but a dance,  
Our being that eternal revolution  
By which the sun and other stars are  
moved.

But even this example, "A Conceit", illustrates something that bothers me about Hine's poetic idiom — and it's the same thing that bothered me in his previous collection.

It's as if every stanza was composed with quill on parchment, perhaps to be displayed behind museum glass. Hine is definitely not a coffee house poet — and I am not saying he should be. But he has considerably and purposely limited his audience, excluding from it especially the young, by writing compositions I can best imagine being recited to the tinkle of tea cups in someone's Victorian drawing room.

Actually *made* to be antique, most of Hine's poems cannot be read without blowing the dust off them first. Take "Lady Sara Bunbury Sacrificing to the Graces, by Reynolds". Even though the poem itself is a barbed commentary on an artificial scene, *why* does Hine develop such a subject, without making even an implicit reference to himself or his audience or to the twentieth century? The poem is as much a work of artifice as the painting it describes.

Hine has probably been reminded so many times of his preference for non-contemporariety and of his love of artifice that he even sat down to write an "Apology". At least (thank the Graces?)

he is able to mock himself, but not happily:

Many mouth obscenities in hope  
 That thereby the parts of speech will  
 mate.  
 The muse washed out this poet's mouth  
 with soap;  
 Now when I speak out of my frothy lips  
 Portentous bubbles float, and in my  
 wake,  
 Like *obiter dicta* in the comic strips.  
 The air is burdened with them; as they  
 break  
 They glitter, worlds within words and  
 without weight,  
 The nightingale's mechanical refrain.

In "Dans le Marais" these revealing  
 lines appear:

I have sat in a darkened room,  
 My interest else-and-every-where.  
 An adolescent in an Old Folks' Home  
 Is not more ill at ease than I am here

Hine, in making this choice of comparison, may see himself as "an adolescent in an Old Folks' Home", surrounded by countless reproductions of "Lady Bunbury Sacrificing to the Graces" by Reynolds. I find such a situation not funny, however, but sad.

Yet there are some hopeful signs that Hine, who is only 34 years old, is secretly planning to break loose — that he really *wants* to break loose — from his self-confinement in the Old Folks' Home. I would like to see more poems like his boldly confessional "A Visit", his excellent "Untitled" which is the only thing close to a raw, spontaneous prose poem in all of *Minutes*, his mixture of the sardonic, sacred, and sensual in "Le Rendezvous de Gourmets", and his short poem "The Survivors" which I quote here in its entirety because it is the only poem in *Minutes* that is without question wholly contemporary in subject, idiom, and tone:

Nowadays the mess is everywhere  
 And getting worse. Earth after all  
 Is a battlefield. Through the static  
 We used to call the music of the  
 spheres

Someone, a survivor, sends this  
 message:  
 "When it happened I was reading Homer.  
 Sing — will nobody sing? — the wrath,  
 Rats and tanks and radioactive rain."

That was before rationing was enforced  
 On words, of course. Particles went  
 first,  
 Then substantives. Now only verbs  
 abide  
 The law, and the odd anarchistic scrawl  
 How above the crumbling horizon  
 Brightly shine our neighbours, Venus,  
 Mars.

Perhaps some day Daryl Hine will escape the Old Folks' Home; perhaps he'll let "Disorder" enter the "too formal gardens" of his poetry. I hope his work will not continue to belong primarily to yesterday.

MICK BURRS

## NO LONGER CANADIAN

*Canadian Short Stories*, (Second Series), selected by Robert Weaver, Oxford University Press, 1968. \$6.50 cloth, \$2.95 paper.

THIS SECOND SERIES of short stories is devoted to Canadian writers of the 1950's and 1960's. Robert Weaver feels that the first series handled the historical growth of the short story in English Canada, and obviously selects what he feels are main trends within the past two decades. His concept is a good one, and the book can be recommended highly to anyone who recognizes that the book in no way pretends to give a study of the development of the short story in Canada.

In fact, what the book rather emphatically proves is that Canadian writers cannot be labelled "Canadian". Instead, what is most noticeable about this collection is the contemporaneity of recent writers in Canada. No longer do the stories concern themselves with concepts within the Canadian myth, stories which stress the dramatic changes in climate, the ice and snow, the prairies during the depression, or other obvious underlinings of the landscape and influence of the environment. The recent Canadian writer is writing in a world wide contemporary vein, and the stories are psychological in orientation and development.

There is, too, an obvious concern with the Canadian short story writer to be sophisticated and urbane, to show to the reading public that the writer in Canada is as not grey and colourless as the image that the word "Canadian" frequently presents to the outside world. This kind of sophistication comes off very well with someone like Mavis Gallant, whose "Bernadette" is marked by Miss Gallant's association with publication in *The New Yorker*, and her cleverness which may arise partly from her residence in France. Mordecai Richler, too, has lived outside Canada for some time, and this has made his work less Canadian in context, though he still reverts frequently to his childhood and is stamped by its Jewishness, and influenced by his early years spent in Montreal.

While the sophistication of Gallant and Richler can be partly explained by their own natural sensibilities, and the time they have spent abroad, other writers have moved beyond the Canadian framework mainly because they are writing in opposition to authors writing in the English language elsewhere. Hugh

Hood and Jack Ludwig have not been laced by the Canadian environment; neither has David Helwig. But Dave Godfrey and Hugh Garner seem to pack unfortunate Canadian flavours into their short pieces of fiction; it is as though they do not want to move beyond the limitations of their own horizons, and deliberately seek out experiences and language that speak directly of Canada. I do not think it is wrong for a writer to be Canadian, but these two writers seem too deliberate at it, too obvious is almost crying out to the world: "Look, this is Canadian writing". This is an axe that is perhaps too old-fashioned to grind, but at a time when the majority of Canadian writers—especially the poets—are beyond any serious Canadian identity search, and are moving into world-wide problems as themes and are using widely contemporary techniques, it is a pity that some writers still hope to capture that indefinable concept of what a Canadian writer is. I like to think that we are beyond all that.

Two Canadian writers moved beyond their Canadian identity many years ago, and it is refreshing to see that their work has not been marred by a pursuit of meaning of roots that so often comes to older writers. Ethel Wilson and Morley Callaghan still are beyond the search for Canadianness in their writing. Though both stories that represent them here are not of the 1950's and 1960's, they do have a modern ring; they do show the facet on which their strength lies: that rarely achieved quality of a Canadian writer—repose. Their strength lies in the very careful way in which they express themselves. There is no dilly-dallying at all; instead, the strength is that of assured and mature hands. Fortunately

for us all, the stories of Morley Callaghan and Ethel Wilson will always be with us; they do not age. And I thought to myself as I reread the stories in this new selection that both of them handle the short story form much better than they handle the concept of the novel.

Weaver's book is not a collection of "Canadian" short stories; instead, it is a selection of stories by Canadian writers. No one would discover anything about Canada, in any particular way, by reading this volume. What he would discover, however, would be an awareness that the writer of contemporary short fiction in Canada need not, in any way, hide his light under a bushel, a bushel that is the term "Canadian". The short story has come a long way in Canada, and Weaver's book proves it.

DONALD STEPHENS

## IDEAS AND ICONS

DOROTHY LIVESAY, *The Documentaries*. Ryerson. \$4.50.

STANLEY COOPERMAN, *The Owl Behind The Door*. McClelland & Stewart. \$3.95.

IN RECENT YEARS it has been fashionable for poets to disclaim responsibility for the political poetry they wrote earlier in their careers. But now we seem to be moving into an age when political and social poetry is once more acceptable, so it is appropriate that a collection of Dorothy Livesay's longer social and political poems, *The Documentaries*, has just been published.

It is a remarkably honest book. The poet has not attempted to mask the at times hortatory and perhaps naive statements of political action and solution

from the Thirties. The attitudes expressed through these poems were honourable then and are nothing to be ashamed of now. The most avowedly political poems in the volume, "Day and Night" and "The Outrider", perhaps over-simplify political positions — indeed, the black-and-white positions of worker and boss expressed in the poem make it for me an inferior poem to "The Outrider", which I consider the best of Dorothy Livesay's longer political poems — but within the context of persuasion, exhortation and cajolery these poems obviously succeed at that polemical level. Further, I would suggest that "The Outrider" convinces at a poetic as well as at a political level.

The poet introduces the poems with honest statements about the sources and the purposes of her poetry at the time they were written and she tempers these remarks by admitting her "social innocence" without once denying or retracting the validity of her political position.

"West Coast (1943)" is the weakest poem in the book, as it hovers on the brink of an uneasy and simplified acceptance of the rightness of the war, although the poet tries to write her uneasiness into the poem in the figure of "The Outsider". I sense that the poet is even more dissatisfied with the poem now, as she has shortened it from its original version. Nevertheless, the fact that she has retained it is further evidence of the honesty of mind which has gone into the gathering of her committed poems and the documentation of the attitudes behind them. And, in fact, the tendency towards a kind of self-righteous optimism in this poem is immediately undercut by her deeply-felt poem-for-voices, "Call My People Home", an indictment of

Canadian treatment of the Japanese in this country during World War II, a poem which gains dramatic strength from its low-keyed language and its emphasis on spoken language, a dominant interest of the poet during the last few years.

This collection is framed by two more recent poems, "Ontario Story", a nostalgic look at early days that never drops into sentimentality, and "Roots", the best poem in the book, in which the poet describes her return to places she has known to search for the basis of her life and personality that gave rise to the poems in the central portion of this volume.

In all, this book seems to me to be essential reading firstly, for those who, like me, feel that Dorothy Livesay has never quite been given her due as a significant writer in the development of modern Canadian poetry in English, and secondly, for those who perhaps decry the poetry of the Thirties as jejune and uninteresting. *The Documentaries* with its inclusion of two recent poems is a kind of summation of Dorothy Livesay's honesty of mind and feeling and helps to gather together principal facets of her poetic character which has made a real contribution to Canadian poetry.

The surface of Stanley Cooperman's poetry is simple but it is not the simplicity of the rational mind. To enter his imaginative world is to step outside reality into a world with little or no causality. Brightly-lit, isolated, clear-cut fragments appear in succession, and the reader has to catch their resonances. Often a Cooperman poem proceeds by images which apparently define: in "The Three Mouths of God", for instance, each mouth is defined in three separate

stanzas before a final stanza defines them compositely — and that is all. The metaphors in the poems extend into worlds of magic and make-believe and at times Cooperman's poetry is like a melange of child-like conundrums, for the poems also contain a good many questions which are not always answered and which do not always open up possibilities.

The simplicity of tone, the unexpected juxtapositions within the visual content of the images and the use of paradox remind me of Cummings without the broken typography and as in Cummings, at times the garish imagery gives way to what might be termed almost traditional language in some personal poems about the nature of human love.

His poetry reminds me of nothing so much as the paintings of Chagall, the figures in themselves accurately observed but placed in contexts that take them beyond rationality. Perhaps this is why Cooperman creates by questions and by definitions which seem to beg questions. For him, a poem is "an act/like my hands touching/your lips." (In context, this is framed as a question.) We must extend the poems for ourselves, for a poem opens the mind to "convolutions/ of peculiar tastes." Like Cummings, Cooperman celebrates love and an act of creation like poetry reveals the dimensions of love in the world:

To have poemed  
is a kind of loving  
when there is nothing to love  
but the fog  
that you breathe,  
the echo  
when you look at a window  
and whisper  
against the glass.

But in search for revelation the poet, encountering sources of his love, "waving

a magic condom", may be buffeted and wrecked, becoming "Odysseus with a broken face".

Cooperman has chosen an individualistic path to follow in trying to create his own iconography and often his poems collapse with the weight of the effort. Yet this volume contains some isolated images full of life and on some occasions whole poems of revelation and light.

PETER STEVENS

## MINORITY HISTORY

GEORGE WOODCOCK and IVAN AVAKUMOVIC,  
*The Doukhobors*. Oxford University Press.  
\$7.50.

WHATEVER BECAME of the Doukhobors? Just a few years ago the newspapers were full of reports of bombings, arson and nude parades, and the Sons of Freedom terrorist sect waged its seemingly senseless war against society. Yet now, just five years later, they seem to have vanished. Certainly, they are no longer in the news.

The plain fact is that they have taken their place as ordinary citizens, differing from the rest of us only in the private affairs of their pacifist religion and their daily lives. This seems almost miraculous, in view of the reign of terror that swept the Kootenays and the disturbances that stretched westward even to Vancouver just five years ago.

Very few in British Columbia understood what it was all about then, or in the many decades leading up to the major and — we hope — final outbreak in the early 1960's. We did not know what these strange, Russian-speaking people were after; we did not fully understand the divisions within their

group — between the so-called Orthodox Doukhobors and the Sons of Freedom. Perhaps the whole ugly period could have been avoided, or the social pain of it eased considerably, if we had understood.

We would have a much better chance to cope with the Doukhobor problem if there had been any solid literature available to tell us something of them: a book, for instance, like the one just published — *The Doukhobors*, by George Woodcock and Ivan Avakumovic.

Both the authors are associated with the University of British Columbia. Mr. Avakumovic is a professor of political science. Mr. Woodcock is a member of the English department and editor of the university's quarterly, *Canadian Literature*. He is also well known as a poet, critic and writer who has in the past twenty years produced a number of outstanding biographies and travel books.

It is perhaps inevitable that Mr. Woodcock should have turned his attention to the Doukhobors. Among his previous books was *Ravens and Prophets*, often described as a travel book dealing with British Columbia, but which is at least as much a study of various individuals and groups around the province seeking their own utopias — among them the Doukhobors.

Mr. Woodcock has given fuller rein to his abiding interest in the role of the idealist within society in his biography of Peter Kropotkin called *The Anarchist Prince*, and more recently in a volume entitled *Anarchism: A History of Libertarian Ideas and Movements*. This background is important because it foreshadows the sympathy with which the present volume approaches the Doukhobor movement.



It is a history of the Doukhobors from the beginnings in the shadows of 18th century Russia to their troubled days in Canada. Through it all the writers display an obvious urge to find the real reasons, to seek out the causes for the Doukhobors' actions and the frictions that have always in the past risen around them.

There is also a welcome willingness, even an eagerness, to understand. And understanding has always been in short supply where the Doukhobors have been concerned, whether in Russia, in Cyprus (where they tried to establish their Utopia before coming to Canada) and in Saskatchewan and British Columbia.

The writers avoid the sensationalism that has seriously marred previous books on the subject. But they do not avoid Doukhoborism's warts — the extremism, the curious leadership, the internal frictions that have always marked the group. Neither do they omit the steadfastness that enabled the Doukhobors to withstand the enforced migrations across the face of Holy Russia and eventually on to the new world. There is something compelling — even epic — about the account of the sect's emergence, of its trials and scandals and considerable accomplishments within Russia.

The epic quality unfortunately disappears when the Doukhobors in 1898 come at last to the supposedly free and democratic new land of Canada. It is true that in Saskatchewan and, a decade later, in British Columbia as well, the Doukhobor society continued to be bedevilled by its own indecisions and divisions. But Canadian governments have not been very helpful or, at times even honest — waffling on their word, applying different interpretations of the ori-

ginal agreement by which the Doukhobors entered Canada, and even devising special laws aimed at them.

And if the rise of the militant Sons of Freedom could not be condoned by our society, it was not condoned by the Orthodox Doukhobors, either. Nor must we forget that some of the actions of our governments directed towards the Doukhobors have not been defensible, particularly the enforced separation of their children in a special school. Effective that separation may have been, but ideologically it remains unpalatable.

If at last the so-called Doukhobor problem seems to have evaporated, it has only been at the cost of their surrendering their own visions. Their utopia of a self-contained communal society has been denied them, and they seem for the first time to have given up the attempt to achieve it.

It is entirely possible that the whole story of the Doukhobors in Canada would have been much happier had there been available to government and public a book such as this one. It might have swept away the misconceptions, the doubts and the fears bred of ignorance — attitudes which prompted many of our actions and reactions toward the Doukhobors.

DONALD STAINSBY

## CELEBRITIES ABROAD

JACQUES HEBERT and PIERRE ELLIOTT TRUDEAU, *Two Innocents in Red China*. Oxford. \$5.50.

THIS TRANSLATION of a book published in French in 1961 is an agreeable, sometimes witty and perceptive but seldom profound travelogue. It compares favour-

ably with a dozen other similar books on contemporary China by Western journalists and casual visitors but it adds little to our understanding of China's political, economic or cultural development under Communist rule up to 1960 (the year of the "two innocents" visit). One must assume that the book would probably not have been published in English had not the second author become a political celebrity. It would be interesting to discover that the book revealed something of Mr. Trudeau's personality or attitudes but the reader often finds it difficult to distinguish between the views of the two authors. In a few passages Hébert gives amusing accounts of Trudeau's mild escapades and his occasional puncturing of the pompous half-truths uttered by Chinese interpreters and officials.

Neither author was such an innocent as the title suggests; both had travelled widely and Trudeau had visited China just at the beginning of the Communist takeover in 1949. Their writing displays a pleasant combination of enthusiasm for the achievements of the Chinese people in the ensuing decade with an ironical scepticism for some of the naive and inflated claims of their humourless informants. They occasionally include some perceptive allusion to the Quebec scene (some of these are explained for English readers in a Translator's Note); thus at one point Mr. Trudeau remarks that "Chinese Marxists are like Quebec collegians. On questions of religion and sex they lose their sang-froid."

The two travellers followed a routine conducted tour of China, visiting schools, factories, communes, amusement halls and witnessing the October 1st procession in Peking. They seldom escape from the

appointed rounds but occasionally catch a glimpse of a grim underside of Chinese society (as in their abortive effort to interview a Catholic priest who reveals that he speaks impeccable French). In a discussion on hunger in China they make the astonishing remark: "Who was it that vanquished this implacable enemy? Mao." But such examples of naïveté are rare, and the two authors disarm criticism by their comment: "We had the naïveté to believe that what we saw with our own eyes did exist; and the further naïveté to think our readers capable of making the necessary adjustments in the often outrageous claims made by our Chinese informants." In a pleasant but unnecessarily apologetic preface (dated August 1968) Mr. Trudeau adds what he calls an all-purpose disclaimer: "If there are any statements in the book which can be used to prove that the authors are agents of the international Communist conspiracy, or alternatively fascist exploiters of the working classes, I am sure that my co-author, Jacques Hébert, who remains a private citizen, will be willing to accept entire responsibility for them."

The book is charmingly written and Mr. Owen has captured this quality in his admirable translation. The publisher has regrettably failed to provide an index.

WILLIAM L. HOLLAND

## PLAYBOYS AND BUNNIES

ROBERT FULFORD, *Crisis at the Victory Burlesk*. Oxford. \$5.95.

ROBERT FULFORD is one of the best literary journalists in Canada. This does not mean that he shares either the stature

or the writing power of such masters of the profession (and one gathers of Mr. Fulford) as George Orwell and Dwight Macdonald, Norman Mailer and Edmund Wilson, but it does mean that he is an interesting man with a live, roving mind and a sharp way of revealing it. *Crisis at the Victory Burlesk* is not high criticism nor is it, in any serious way, a book. It is a sampling, culled from newspapers and periodicals ranging from the *Toronto Star* to the *Tamarack Review*, of the occasional pieces of a working journalist.

What gives a touch of lasting relevance even to the more faded of these pieces is Mr. Fulford's eye to what is important in the ambiance of literature and art in our time. Though he has written many reviews of individual books, many comments on painters and films, he includes none of these. It is not as the critic but as the social commentator on the background of the arts that he sees himself, and at times he is good in the role: when, for instance, he talks about the social compulsions which are the driving furies of art collectors, or discusses the difficulties of creating a system of censorship effective even in the terms of those who think it necessary. But he is at his best when he is not talking about what — even at the greatest stretch of the term — might be called art, but about the seedier edges of the entertainment world. There is a piece on Playboys and Bunnies that looks with a devastating eye into the Late Roman decay of our society, and another — the title piece on strippers losing their pasties at the Victory Burlesk — which cuts pretty deeply into the hypocrisy by which we still try to sustain a shoddy and obsolete morality.

I am sure that the Victory Burlesk does spell its name that way, yet I do not think I am wrong in assuming that its use in the title of the book is meant as a manifesto by Mr. Fulford. For one of the burdens of his collection is that many Canadians are inclined to be nasty to Americans and that he is not. To the contrary, in fact. One of his sentences expresses succinctly what Mr. Fulford says at greater length in the rest of his book: "But an American I am, and so is every other English-speaking Canadian."

This may be true in a geographical sense, in that we all share in the American continent, but Mr. Fulford clearly means it in a much wider sense: that culturally also, we are Americans, and that even politically we might conceivably be no worse off if we were. Of course, on the next page Mr. Fulford tempers his statement with the qualification that "there is no Canadian who is not in some way anti-American." A paradox of Orwellian proportions, which completely misses the point.

For there is a position outside the artificial polarity of American and anti-American, and this is where a good many of us in Canada — though apparently not Mr. Fulford — stand. I am conscious of *not* being an American, though I am a Canadian by birth and have grown securely into the Canadian background during the twenty years since I returned. Neither am I anti-American. I detest American politics as it is displayed in the present decade; I loathe some of the products of American mass culture. But I also detest Russian and Chinese politics in this decade, and loathe some of the products of Russian and Chinese mass culture. Yet I still find many of my in-

tellectual roots in American thought and American literature and American radical action. But this does not make me an American, since I slip other roots behind the appalling facades of modern France and Russia. It does however make me a modern Canadian, citizen of a land where immigration has always been vital in ideas as well as people. I suspect — and may be wrong — that this is what Mr. Fulford also is. He prefers to give it a name that will annoy his fellow literati.

But, having made my point, I still find Mr. Fulford a civilized and usually sensible journalist, as down-to-earth and apparently as crochety as Orwell, and I could wish that he would find the time to write a book on our world and his part in it at once more substantial and more personal.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

## ENJOYABLE PESSIMISM

ALDEN NOWLAN, *Miracle at Indian River*.  
Clarke, Irwin. \$3.95.

IN THIS COLLECTION of eighteen short stories, Alden Nowlan turns a sympathetic but unsentimental eye on the rigours of life in a small Canadian province. The settings are various: a fundamentalist community, a lumber camp, a hospital ward; but underneath the variety of scene or character is the unifying vision of a complete world. Though local references give the stories a Canadian flavour, Nowlan's Canada is no *Weekend Magazine* stereotype; it is neither friendly nor promising, and its people are lonely and frustrated. The effect is to give the stories

a meaning that stretches beyond national boundaries.

Many of the stories are built around the tension between dream and reality, between the urge to escape and the impenetrable barrier of daily routine. "The songs spoke of dreams," reflects a young woman whose husband is away in the army, "but in dreams tricks were played on you: you reached for a rose and you were handed a dirty diaper." Dreams are fragile, like the glass roses that recall the irretrievable happiness of youth to an exiled Pole working in a lumber camp.

Nowlan's characters are fragile too, gentle people with small desires but with less hope. They are trapped by the drab environment of home or job, and their feelings are numbed or distorted by the constant repulses they must suffer. The process begins in childhood; Nowlan's children are imaginative and alert, but their sensibilities are warped by drunken or oppressive parents, and their impulse to love and be loved gives way to fear or guilt. The loss of feeling in the child becomes the loss of personal values and identity in the adult; so that the young wife in "Love Letter," writing to her absent husband, can see herself only in terms of movie characters: "She wrote slowly, imagining that each word was flashed on a luminous screen. Each day I grow more lonesome for you, my sweetest. Here the camera would zoom in for a close-up of her face. Tearful, but dauntless. Like William Holden's wife in that film about the war in Korea." Here, as elsewhere, Nowlan's vision is tinged with irony; but it is marked by compassion also.

In a world that seems bent on robbing the individual of his humanity and im-

prisoning his spirit, the only alternatives would seem to be withdrawal, either through madness or through death. The mad act out their dreams, create their own world, like the nineteen-year-old in "The Gunfighter" who thinks he is the Wichita Kid and dresses like a cowboy. The Kid's delusions give him some immunity, and make him seem more real than the televised image of a politician, seen in a shop window nearby, mouthing unfelt platitudes about brotherhood and the Canadian mosaic. Yet even madness is vulnerable; the Wichita Kid is haunted by the ghosts of the men he kills; he shoots passers-by with his toy guns, but they refuse to be dead. When Nowlan touches on death itself, he sees it as more than a means of release; in "Notes toward a Plot for an Unwritten Short Story," death becomes the moment of affirmation, of man's assertion of his humanity: a supremely personal moment that can give meaning to all that went before.

This is a sombre view of life; and though some of the stories are informed by humour, it is a grim kind of humour, more sad than funny. In plot or structure, the stories are simple enough for the most part: at least, they have that appearance of simplicity which usually marks the well-made story. What makes them carry such a weight of meaning is the author's fine eye for the significant detail. The character is created as much by his surroundings as by his words or actions; and sometimes, in the close relationship that is developed between a character and his environment, physical objects take on a malevolent life of their own. In "A Day's Work," George Mosher is a fireman whose life is dominated by the boiler he operates; the boiler

is an "old bitch," more important to George, and more demanding, than his wife. The romantic daydreams of Edith in "Anointed with Oils," of being discovered by a movie producer, are haunted by the smell of the chip plant where she works: "She could bathe herself a hundred times a day and drench herself in perfumes, but so long as she worked at the chip plant that smell would not go away."

Nowlan's background as a poet has served him well in the transition to fiction, for as in a good poem, experience is made concrete in his stories by sharply-defined images. The morbid tone of *Miracle at Indian River* may not appeal to all readers; but it is a good book, and despite its pessimism, even enjoyable.

HERBERT ROSENGARTEN

## SHOCK OF RECOGNITION

SAMUEL THOMPSON, *Reminiscences of a Canadian Pioneer for the Last Fifty Years: An Autobiography*. McClelland & Stewart. \$7.50.

REPRINTS OF EARLY Canadian books are becoming numerous, and are now regaining the dignity of hard covers, probably as a result of the Centennial revival. Samuel Thompson's *Reminiscences*, first published in 1884, re-appears without apology or editorial excuses, in full Victorian dress. It has the flavour of the years 1833 to 1883, while it conveys the feeling that our characteristic business and politics began generations earlier than we had supposed. The general effect is a mild, but wholesome, shock of recognition: people long dead are seen acting

and responding to one another very much as we do, under conditions differing from our own chiefly in superficial aspects.

Samuel Thompson was born in London, England, in 1810, emigrated to Upper Canada in 1833, published his *Reminiscences* in 1884, and died in 1886. When he left England, emigrant and travel literature about British North America was approaching its heyday; when he wrote his *Reminiscences*, the period of his emigration seemed an old story even to the Toronto publishers. For this reason perhaps, Thompson did not dwell upon his early life in the Canadian bush, as the Moodies and Traills did; he devoted himself largely to his experience of civic events in Toronto, beginning with the spectacular action of the rebellion of 1837. Thus he gives comfort to readers for whom pioneer *farming* is not the only pioneering in old Ontario.

The private, social and civic life of our early towns has not yet been revealed in its true complexity, and, one may dare to say, sophistication. Those immigrants who had "class," education and intelligence, or all of these, or even a trade, or possibly some money, were attracted to the towns and provided leadership. The number of these is rarely appreciated although they were then conspicuous in every centre: army officers, "younger" sons and daughters, business men, journalists, politicians, lawyers, builders, clerks, and, soon, clergy, teachers, even professors in the colleges.

Samuel Thompson's book is not a rounded account; it yields chiefly political reminiscences. This is not a literary "discovery"; the gentleman's verse is atrocious. Nor, as an autobiography is it

the intimate revelation of an extraordinary man. Thompson seems rather an uncomplicated person with a keen interest in public relationships. After five years of pioneer farms, which he developed (with the help of choppers) in Sunnidale and Nottawasaga, he found his true vocation in journalism.

His description of "Mackenzie's movements while in the neighbourhood of Gallow's Hill" shows an appreciation of vivid reporting and an editor's ingenuity in collecting and filing useful documents. In 1838 he became manager of the *Palladium*, a Toronto newspaper, and, after its collapse, he published successively, until the late 1850's, the *Herald*, *Patriot*, *News of the Week*, *Atlas* and *Daily Colonist*; in 1859-1860 he spent hectic days in Quebec City as editor and printer of the *Advertiser*.

Thompson's *Reminiscences*, therefore, cover many municipal events and political affairs of which he was a professional observer, and frequently a participant; in his candid account he drops many well-known names. Equally open and interesting are his reports of his own misfortunes in business, whether in publishing or in the collapse of the Beaver Insurance Company (1860-1876).

Although he became "the recipient of nearly every honorary distinction which it was in the power of [his] fellow citizens to confer," he was generally a supporter rather than a top official. His book closes with a brief account of the Toronto Mechanics' Institute (established in 1831) and the transfer of its property to the Free Public Library in Toronto in 1883. This was a great moment for the man who had, forty years earlier, made "the first effort" to establish such an institution in that city. "From log

cabin to public library” might stand as more than an idle cliché for this book reflecting the first to last stages of pioneering in Ontario.

CARL F. KLINCK

## NOUVELLE VAGUE

JACQUES GODBOUT, *Le Couteau sur la Table*.  
Editions du Seuil.

CE DEUXIEME ROMAN de Jacques Godbout (il en a maintenant trois à son actif, ainsi que quatre recueils de poésie et huit films) se place entièrement dans les cadres de la nouvelle vague. Au lieu de l'intrigue traditionnelle, un monologue intérieur achemine une seule personnalité, celle du narrateur, à travers les réminiscences d'un passé récent et les fragments épars du présent. Les deux jeunes filles qui partagent la vie de l'étudiant-aventurier ne servent qu'à mettre en valeur le conflit qui le divise. Trois niveaux s'établissent: la vie personnelle du narrateur en rapport avec Patricia et Madeleine, le manque d'appartenance du Canadien français dans un continent anglais, l'homme face à la misère du monde. L'action est à deux temps: le passé et le présent. Le passé, c'est la rencontre avec Patricia la riche Anglo-Saxonne, leur amour ponctué de jeux, la liaison avec Madeleine, issue du prolétariat canadien français. Le présent, c'est le retour vers Patricia et Montréal après une absence de trois ans. Le même dilemme marque les deux époques: celui de vivre lorsque l'on se sent inutile et que le dollar est roi. Alors pourquoi ne pas voler, faire le trafic des narcotiques, suivre les routes d'Amérique "à la recherche de son travesti", se laisser acheter par Patricia, redevenir enfant et jouer?

Cependant, le plaisir et le jeu ne font pas oublier les catastrophes, les petits Chinois qui meurent de faim, Hiroshima et Nagasaki, en somme, tous les maux qui affligent l'homme d'aujourd'hui. Le fait qu'il est "celui qui parle français" dans un continent anglais exacerbe son sentiment d'inutilité, le laisse flotter à la surface sans qu'il réussisse à se polariser. Viendra un temps où il faudra choisir: ce sera grâce à une comptine bretonne: "I, Ni, Mi, /Ni, Maï, Ni, Mo . . ."

Jacques Godbout ne préconise aucun remède, le narrateur accepte la vie sans discuter son absurdité. L'auteur souligne plutôt l'effervescence de la jeunesse canadienne française d'aujourd'hui, la nécessité où elle se trouve de choisir, comme le narrateur, et aussi de faire face au monde du vingtième siècle avec tous ses problèmes.

Le style retient l'attention. Des pans de mémoire numérotés alternent avec les fragments du présent, numérotés, eux aussi. Ces chiffres évoquent la prédominance des affaires et la mécanique indifférente de notre époque où tout est classé, catalogué. Bref, l'homme n'est plus qu'un chiffre au hasard dans un univers de chiffres. La comptine bretonne mise en exergue fait écho à ce sentiment. Les *flash-backs* appartiennent au cinéma ainsi que le langage vif et imagé. Le débit est parfois trop rapide pour une ponctuation régulière; parfois aussi la phrase reste en suspens, remplacée par une autre pensée qui vient de jaillir simultanément. Parce que le livre de Jacques Godbout reflète le tempo fébrile de la vie actuelle, ses images brutales, sa publicité tapageuse, et aussi ses moments de tendresse, il vaut la peine d'être lu et médité.

La traduction de Penny Williams,

*Knife on the Table* (McClelland & Stewart, Toronto, 1968), rend bien la prose poétique de la version originale. La traductrice a su se mettre dans la peau de l'auteur, de sorte que la version anglaise a l'accent de la vérité. Cette traduction est à recommander à tous ceux de langue anglaise qui s'intéressent à la nouvelle littérature canadienne française.

MARGUERITE PRIMEAU

## FAULKNERIAN QUEBEC

ROCH CARRIER, *La guerre, yes sir!* Editions du Jour.

THREE CANADIAN NOVELISTS have written books which take the William Faulkner approach to characters in a rural setting. George Ryga's *Ballad of a Stone Picker* and Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* both effectively dramatize the grotesque consequences of clinging to false values, of inverted or perverted ideas which have become life forces. It is the French-Canadian writer Roch Carrier, however, who comes closest to the significance, power and artistry of Faulkner at his best.

There are, of course, many contrasts between rural Quebec and the American Deep South, especially when the former is pictured under several feet of snow; but despite these contrasts and despite the book's striking originality, *La guerre, yes sir!* has much in common with *As I Lay Dying*. It has an atmosphere and flavour peculiar to Quebec, but it offers insight into the quirks and crudities of human nature with the subtle penetration characteristic of Faulkner's work. It has the same kind of black humour and devastat-

ing irony, and it also focuses on the central image of a coffin.

In Carrier's story the coffin contains the body of a soldier, Corriveau, who was killed in action and has been returned to his home village for burial. Complicating the situation, the Canadian Army has sent along a seven-man contingent of English-speaking soldiers to provide Corriveau with an appropriate military send-off. The railway station is quite a distance from the tiny, totally French-speaking village, and the soldiers have to carry the coffin the whole way along an unploughed road. On the same road at the same time, a local soldier on leave is carrying his new bride, a former Newfoundland whore called Molly, on his shoulders through the snow.

Roch Carrier has the capacity to bring extraordinary and convincing characters to life with a minimum of description. Besides those already mentioned, several others end up in the Corriveau house to sit through the night with the corpse. There is Amélie, whose husband Henri deserts from the Army when he discovers that his wife is sheltering a draft dodger. A simple soul, Henri nevertheless becomes disturbed upon learning that Amélie has given birth to two sets of twins since his departure years before. She carefully explains to him how the twins had simply developed inside of her "et puis, ils sont sortis." "Ce qui m'intéresse," Henri replies, "c'est de savoir comment ils sont entrés." Then there is Joseph, who has calmly chopped off his hand in order to avoid the draft, thus inadvertently providing the local boys with something to use as a puck in their hockey games.

The story proceeds in a series of scenes, each seemingly more fantastic than the



previous one. The English-Canadian soldiers, like creatures from another planet, sit stone-faced while the villagers get drunk on cider and eat "tortières."

Speaking about *La guerre*, Carrier once remarked that the events of the book take place in the Middle Ages—the Middle Ages of French Canada. The novel examines a variety of attitudes, prejudices and superstitions which warped the lives of the characters involved, just as they have warped and continue to warp the lives of many Quebecers. The influence of the Church in every aspect of life is underlined repeatedly. Throughout the wake, chanted prayers alternate with blasphemies and curses based upon the prayers. The reader witnesses a society turned in upon itself, a society seething with frustrations and inhibitions, ready to explode at any moment. Traditional outlets for these frustrations, in Carrier's novel as in Quebec itself, are in the process of breaking down.

With regard to French-English relations, Carrier's main point, of course, is that the language barrier, the absence of communication, constitutes a formidable obstacle. Despite prejudices and fears on both sides, the Corriveau's want to be hospitable to the English-Canadians who have come to bury their son, and the soldiers want simply to fulfill their duty to a fallen comrade, but because effective communication is impossible, the situation deteriorates and the old prejudices are heightened rather than weakened.

If at all possible, Carrier's *La guerre* should be read in the original French. The distinctive style is likely to lose a lot in translation. In fact, if the superb colloquial language of the book were to be rendered in the same way as similar

diction in Gabrielle Roy's *Bonheur d'occasion* was rendered in the English translation, then a major part of *La guerre*'s appeal and virtuosity could be lost entirely. But whatever happens in translation, Roch Carrier is a young writer with remarkable skill and originality. He might well be able to do for French Canada what Faulkner did for the American South. *La guerre, yes sir!* is certainly an impressive start.

RONALD SUTHERLAND

## NO BREW LIKE HOME-BREW

A. W. PURDY, *Wild Grape Wine*. McClelland & Stewart. \$3.95.

FIELDING once said that "every book ought to be read with the same spirit and in the same manner as it is writ." So I can be forgiven for sitting with *Wild Grape Wine* in one hand and a glass of sherry in the other and ruminating about the many different brews which Purdy has served up since his first volume of poetry was published twenty-five years ago. That was 1944. Since then he has published several chap-books and a number of major volumes, one of which received the Governor General's award. I come to Purdy's latest book with the taste of his earlier work still in my mouth and with great enthusiasm, because I think he is the most refreshing poet now writing in Canada.

*Wild Grape Wine* begins with the familiar Purdy of *Poems for All the Annettes* and *The Cariboo Horses*, the poet with a rich sense of humour and a delightful capacity for self-mockery. "The Winemaker's Beat-Étude" is a hilarious account of a confrontation with Bacchus

in the grape-vines and with a herd of lustful and inquisitive cows. By the end of the poem the poet has come to terms with the entire feminine principle and cries: "O my sisters / I give purple milk!" Familiar also is the more restrained descriptive and meditative Purdy, who emerged fully in *North of Summer*. Purdy's landscapes are most often rugged and bleak, characterized by vividness of outline rather than by colour and shading; but in "Roblin Mills (circa 1842)" and "Dark Landscape" he conveys an amazing awareness of the "gear and tackle of living" that his landscapes support.

Another Purdy we have come to recognize is Purdy the journalist—the unacknowledged poet laureate who writes on request for the dailies on such subjects as the death of Robert Kennedy and Armistice Day. This is the Purdy who will try any subject for the challenge or just for the hell of it. I do not like Purdy's Ottawa poems. They seem contrived, barely honest in expression and sentiment. Purdy is not political; and it takes more than a trip to Ottawa to come to terms imaginatively with personalities and institutions that direct our larger destinies.

For my money, the best poems in *Wild Grape Wine* are meditations upon things historical. Purdy, like Philip Larkin, is unusually sensitive to the passing of time, to manifestations of change. There is something about events and characters out of the past that releases his imagination in new and exciting ways. One felt this in *North of Summer*. Now, in "Lament for the Dorsets" and "The Runners", he achieves a rare beauty and strength, an escape from the dangers of a too-easy subjectivity.

For the most part, Purdy has left behind his early influences: Creeley, Layton and, generally, the "Beats" and "projectivists". He still prefers the short line, the Black Mountain column verse, but will dispense with this for a longer line occasionally. His recent influences are the modern English and European poets who are more descriptive and philosophical. *Wild Grape Wine* owes most to Earle Birney, to whom it is dedicated. Purdy has long been an admirer of Birney and is presently engaged on a critical study of Birney's poetry. One recognizes in Purdy's travel-poems a persona (that of a twentieth-century Gulliver) like that of Birney's "Cartagena de Indias" and "A Walk in Kyoto". In "Hombre", Purdy seems to have used very consciously the image of the *hand*, which is so striking in Birney's "Arrivals". As Eliot says, poor poets imitate; good poets steal. In "Hombre" the image of the hand assumes a much greater significance in terms of the overall structure of the poem. Ultimately, Purdy absorbs his influences and moves on to something new; his poems, whatever their debts, are persistently original.

If I have one objection to Purdy's present volume, it is in the overworking of certain characteristics in his speaking voice. He developed a certain *chattiness* in his earlier volumes which, by now, has become a kind of rhetorical cliché. In "Elegy for a Grandfather", for example, he slips too easily into redundancy:

Well, he died, I guess. They said he did.  
His wide whalebone hips will make a pre-  
historic barrow  
men of the future may find and perhaps  
may not. . . .

The trouble with this device is that it

may encourage the poet to be less precise than is desirable at crucial moments in the poem.

*Wild Grape Wine* is a superb achievement. What few limitations it has are not significant; they settle quickly to the bottom of the vat. A mean brew — yes, a mean brew.

GARY GEDDES

## TRUTH AND TEMPERAMENT

JACK SHADBOLT, *In Search of Form*. McClelland & Stewart. \$15.00.

*In Search of Form* is the most important analysis of his own work ever undertaken by a Canadian artist. Although it is not an autobiography, it reveals the total man: eloquent, intellectual, romantic, at times didactic, but always facing himself with complete honesty. And delivering a body of drawings done over thirty years which, with a few exceptions, would command respect anywhere.

These drawings are not illustrations: they are the book. They number more than two hundred with a text fitted alongside them, so that we are spared the usual irritation of flicking the pages back and forth between object and commentary.

Shadbolt construes as drawing anything primarily graphic in impact. Thus the medium may be the traditional conte or pencil; or india ink, ink and gouache, watercolour, acrylic and india ink, or other combinations blending into painting. All are vibrant, however, with that excitement which comes from the first capturing of a concept.

Around each Shadbolt has recon-

structed, with seemingly total recall and sustained intensity, his mood at the time, what he was reading and the artistic influences playing upon him. He can become intoxicated with his own words, but at least he conveys to us vividly the drama of his creative life.

The drawings are not arranged chronologically but so as to illustrate some aspect of the search for form. This method allowed the artist to see more clearly into himself, to note for example the deeper understanding of counter-rhythms in a drawing done in 1939, where they are purely decorative, and one done in 1959, where they are boldly integrated into the composition ("Gothic Head, Chartres"; "Battered Head").

For the reader such juxtapositions only enhance the already remarkable variety. The range is from the skeletal birds which translate Shadbolt's horror of the wartime death camps; to the clean prows of fishing boats at Collioure on the Mediterranean; to the densely massed ritual presences in *Edge of the Dark*; to the magical improvised owls of four years ago.

Underlying them all, nonetheless, is the continuity of the artist's temperament. In Shadbolt's case it is characterized by two tendencies which he had always considered contradictory: a free-flowing lyricism and a "rigid will" towards architectonic structure.

In the movingly direct *Postscript*, he realizes that this duality can also be complementary: "Reflection has told me that, in fact, it is me, I should accept it; and insight has suggested that it may be my strength, not my weakness, if I can contain it in a form."

He further acknowledges that he is basically a landscapist. His line is the

organic line. Identifying himself with the cosmic force he declares: "I am nature. Nature is *me*. . . I am both anonymous and very precious since I belong to all growth which is life."

This is Shadbolt's truth. If he cleaves to it, he will continue to produce authentic works, untrammled by the fear that they do not conform to current styles.

JOAN LOWNDES

## PARTISAN POEMS

DOUG FETHERLING, *The United States of Heaven/Gwendolyn Papers/That Chainletter Hiway*. Anansi. \$1.95.

I PICK UP his book from where it rubs shoulders with Ferlinghetti and Ginsberg on my shelf, smell the pages (a nervous olfactory habit of mine), and study his photograph on the back cover. He looks like a nineteenth-century sybarite, sardoniously rakish. This aspect of his person probably accounts for the partisanism in his poetry, and I would compare its intensity to a laser beam. Fetherling single-handedly launches an amphibious assault on bourgeois strongholds; he calls his native U.S.A. a myth, a wet dream of heaven; it's no wonder the tradition-bound flunkies croak in his wake. He denudes the Establishment, humiliates them. In his poem, "Mortal Ally, Trusted Enemy", he says ironically: "It's frightening, for I could have been arrested for carrying a concealed toothbrush." And he gambols away. The first part of his trilogy deals with the States. The titles of his poems in this particular section are indicative of malaise and disorder, the very symptoms which threaten peace of mind in America. Here are some of them: "A Resumption of

the Bombing in the North", "Dead on Arrival at the Other Location", "WOB", "Bad Neighborhood", "Unmerciful", and so on *ad rem*. The writing is a bit choppy, but the message is there.

The *Gwendolyn Papers*: Most of these poems are comic aspersions, Orwellian in the crude certainties they deliver. This is the grotesque record of a love affair where innuendoes run amuck. "Ours was the Vietnam of love affairs —" Fetherling confesses. "Everything about Gwendolyn was butterscotch." Intellectual love romps of the Sixties. Hippie conformity. Fetherling's love poems sound like Bob Dylan's sore throat. One might call them folk-rock acid I-Happenings and get away with it. After reading about poor paranoid *Gwendolyn* I can only say with equanimity: In the long run, women are infinitely more compassionate than men; look what they have to put up with. Perhaps love should be re-invented overnight. Philosophical existentialism is quite useless in bed, and Fetherling errs loudly in that respect because he tends to masculinize the female, indoctrinate his subject by superimposing the will on sweet instinct. All women (*Gwendolyn* too) want three things: marriage, security, and children. Fetherling gives a great deal more, but he goes on writing about them. This axiom is conceivably Freudian. Id is.

Who else but Al Purdy would pen a Prefatory Note to *That Chainletter Hiway*: Fetherling's soul discovery of the New Canada? Like Purdy, 22-year-old Fetherling has *seen* and *felt* the provinces; he has hitchhiked through them . . . he knows what he's talking about. Unlike laundromat romances he stands on safer ground . . . tearing up the terrain with his typewriter. His wild poem,

"Transcanadienne", deserves to be quoted in full, but for spatial reasons I'll only use this one stanza for its ironic significance.

red river adieu to conditions beyond our  
control  
like Winnipeg sinister on the horizon  
its queen victoria lost on the prairies  
homeless on the courthouse lawn  
looking for other serious statues like herself

Young Doug Fetherling is an ex-Yankee. He moved here two years ago. Whether or not he decides to make this country his permanent home only the little magazines will know. Americans are beginning to know what real freedom is. They have Canada.

LEN GASPARINI

## EARTHY IDYLL

ERNEST BUCKLER, *Ox Bells and Fireflies*.  
McClelland & Stewart. \$7.95.

THE REGIONAL IDYLL has a long and, on the whole, honourable history in Canadian writing. In the first and second decades of this century, it was the chief of our prose forms, and included such distinguished examples as L. M. Montgomery's *Anne of Green Gables* and Stephen Leacock's *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town*. In the twenties and thirties it lingered on chiefly in the *Jalna* novels of Mazo de le Roche. In the last thirty years it has been virtually extinct (although it might be argued that W. O. Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind* was a rare outcropping). Now Ernest Buckler, in this "fictional memoir", has produced a book which seems destined to take its place as one of the classics of its kind.

The persistence of the genre in our literature indicates that it expresses a permanent and to some extent distinguishing characteristic of our collective psyche. I think it could be argued that one of the most pervasive features of the Canadian sensibility is our tendency to alternate between the dream and the nightmare, between the hope of an impossible heaven and the dread of an all-destructive hell. Certainly this bifocal vision is to be found in our literature of travel and exploration, in the poetry of Lampman, Carman and D. C. Scott, and the more recent verse of Pratt, Scott, and Reaney. In our prose fiction, however, the two reactions exist not so much side by side in the same author as in two parallel but antagonistic traditions: the tradition of pessimistic realism best exhibited by the novels of Grove and the early novels on Callaghan, and the tradition of the regional idyll on the other.

The regional idyll lives by the faith that there is or at least was somewhere — in some Canadian small town or village or outport — a way of life which was finer, simpler, purer, more kindly and more honourable than the rat race which prevails in most parts of our industrial civilization. If this faith is pushed too far the work which results is incredible in its thematic optimism and saccharinely sentimental in its setting and characterization; but if the writer is sufficiently skilful and honest to weave into his predominantly bright-coloured fabric a few contrasting threads of ironic grey or sombre black, the resulting tapestry can be convincing and memorable. This feat is accomplished in *Ox Bells and Fireflies*.

Buckler seeks to bring back into collective memory the life of a Nova Scotia farming community as it existed in the

early decades of the present century, and he accomplishes his aim with almost complete success. It is an idyllic, at times a frankly sentimental, picture that he gives us, but most of the time it is saved from vapidness by the author's scrupulous fidelity of detail, by his frequent touches of subtle or coarse humour, and by his skill in interpolating patches of earthy realism without spoiling the overall idyllic effect. The characters are for the most part more independent, honourable, industrious and vivacious than they probably were in fact, but they are presented with just enough ironic shading to seem credible in the total context of the book.

It is, in fact, the anecdotes of character which seem to me the best part of the book. The passages which describe rural scenery are evocative enough, but to my taste they are somewhat over-written: one is too conscious of the author trying to find the exact, the unusual word. For example, Buckler describes a snowfall as follows:

The snow eyelashes the tufts of brown grass lingering friendless in the fields and comforts them like a blanket. The plowed land is smoothed white, and each twig on every bush is a white pipe cleaner. There is not a breath of wind. The snow shawls the spruces and ridges the bare branches of the chestnut trees with a white piping.

There the metaphors and similes are laid on too thickly, and distract attention from what is really being described; while the pathetic fallacy in the first sentence pushes the tone past honest sentiment into false sentimentality.

Fortunately, when Buckler turns from such set-pieces of nature description to the telling of anecdotes about people, his style loses its self-consciousness and be-

comes lithely idiomatic or earthily colloquial:

It was Aunt Lena's double distinction that she played the fiddle and was violently allergic to horse farts. She would arrive, wheezing like a bellows from her twenty-mile drive — but brave soul that she was, she never failed to oblige us with "Beautiful Isle of Somewhere" before getting her head down on the squawweed pillow that was the only real, or fancied, remedy for her condition. Each fall we youngsters scoured the pasture for a fresh supply of the knobby squawweed blossoms against just this emergency.

Indeed, an ear for the rich idioms of folk speech is one of the best features of Buckler's book.

DESMOND PACEY

## A WESTERN REALM

E. G. PERRAULT, *The Kingdom Carver*.  
Doubleday. \$6.95.

E. G. PERRAULT KNOWS and loves British Columbia — its cities and villages, its lakes, rivers and ocean inlets, its forests, and its people. *The Kingdom Carver* reflects this knowledge and affection. It is from cover to cover, a West Coast tale.

The time is clearly stated — the tough years from 1915 to 1920 — and the places are indicated with almost map-like precision — the forests near the Albernies; Stella Creek and Klahosat (thinly veiled fictional names) on the west coast of Vancouver Island, "well inside Clayquot Sound" and not far from To-fino; and Vancouver itself.

The action, loosely episodic, centres on the growth of David Laird from early adolescence to beginning manhood. Big beyond his years and physically tough-

fibred, he has been expelled from a Vancouver school because of an extra-curricular indiscretion, and, at fourteen, works beside his father as an axeman in the deep forests of the Alberni region. The senior Laird, discharged from the Canadian Army Forestry Corps because of ill health, is rich in experience and ideals, short of cash, and tired of always working for others. But he is not averse to taking chances, and, gaining some timber rights for himself, he moves his two great horses, his son, and himself to the vast but isolated forest area that runs to the ocean rim of Clayquot Sound. And it is here, at Stella Creek near Klahosat (an Indian village), that he and Dave, with minimum equipment, little help, slight credit, and unlimited courage, begin to carve their kingdom.

But the tale of how the kingdom is

carved, though not lacking in moments of dramatic suspense because of setbacks, frustrations, and double dealing, is not the central theme of the novel. That is found in the journey of young Laird towards manhood—his ever deepening awareness of the complexities and tensions of life. He learns how to work with men, and eventually how to lead and control men. Through harsh experience he is taught survival in the unrelenting struggle between man and the natural elements—in the darkness of the woods or on the rough and treacherous lanes of the sea. In his affair with Sylvia, the somewhat sentimental and pathetic daughter of the Mercers, missionaries to the Indians of Klahosat, he experiences the tenderness, the pain, and the frailty of young love. And he meets the horror and finality of death—in the death of

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the great horse, Charlie, in the drownings of the Chinese labourers, and in the death of his close friend, the Indian, Johnny George. At the end of the novel he is self-assured and mature — a young man capable of carving his own kingdom.

The style of the work is generally firm and precise, and much of the dialogue is excellent. Perrault, as I have said, knows and loves his land, and his descriptions of forest and water are sensitive, poetic, and effective. Memorable, too, is his handling of some of the more dramatic moments — the death of the great Clydesdale, the events leading to the death of Johnny George, the quarrel between young Laird and the Chinese labourers, and the massive forest fire that almost brings destruction to the cabin and the mill on the shores of Stella Creek.

Few novels, of course, are perfect. *The Kingdom Carver* is no exception. It has been faulted by at least one critic for anachronisms and historical inaccuracies, but these are of small matter; a novel is not a history. More serious, I believe, is the structural flaw that occurs in the last fifty or so pages. As a reader, I was unprepared for the sudden shift of scene from the untamed forests of Clayquot to

the rough-edged Vancouver of 1920. I also felt that the sudden reappearance of Teresa, the widow of Johnny George, as a voluptuous prostitute in Vancouver's most elegant bawdy house was both melodramatic and unconvincing.

On the West Coast, *The Kingdom Carver* has been greeted with gossip. The word is that a local lumber king and erstwhile politician, a man still very much alive, was the prototype of the novel's hero, the young, dashing, and at times obstreperous David Laird. Perhaps in all this there is an element of truth, for novelists have always drawn from the world around them, have used their acquaintances, their friends, and their enemies as models (or seed-germs) for the fictional creations of their pages. Fielding did it superbly when he fashioned Squire Allworthy, in *Tom Jones*, in a likeness of Ralph Allen, the great philanthropist of Bath. Perrault may well be in the Fielding tradition, though he himself says — emphatically — that *The Kingdom Carver* is a novel, a work of fiction, and is to be judged as such. So, in conclusion, I say, it is a good novel — and a very good first novel.

S. E. READ



## POETS AND CRITICS

### *A Poet Protests*

SIR,

Since I wrote one of the eleven books receipt of which Norman Newton uses as "an excuse for writing [his] essay on the state of Canadian poetry" (in *Canadian Literature*, 38, Autumn 1968, 58-70), my motives are bound to be suspect when I express disapproval of Mr. Newton's critical method. (His essay implies more about the state of Canadian criticism than it says about Canadian poetry.) I am, however, prepared to be told that this letter is evidence of a desire to justify myself rather than take Mr. Newton to task. "Self-interest speaks all sorts of languages and all sorts of roles, even that of disinterestedness." I do not pretend to disinterest, not in the face of Mr. Newton's personal attacks on the individuals he names in his essay. That they are personal attacks is clear from his own admission that the poets he discusses have no individuality as *poets*, only as "human souls". Thus, when he singles out Bowering, Bonnie Day, Freedman, Gustafson, McFadden, Helen Rosenthal and myself, he is singling out not the poet but the person. As a critic and a teacher of literature, I admit a vested interest in repudiating Mr. Newton's critical principles. Whatever motives may later be ascribed to me, I write as critic (not poet) to protest the failure of both yourself and Mr. Newton to fulfil your critical responsibilities.

To begin with, I cannot imagine why you, as editor, would ask anyone to undertake the impossible task of dealing with eleven books of poetry in one review or essay. You must know from your own experience how difficult it is to write a good review of a single book of poetry. By "good" I mean illuminating, agreeing with Helen Gardner that "Elucidation, or illumination, is the critic's primary task." I urge Mr. Newton to reflect on Gardner's assertion that a critic's function is "to assist his readers to find the value which

he believes the work to have. To attempt to measure the amount of value, to declare or attempt to demonstrate that this poem is more valuable than that, or to range writers in an order of merit does not seem to me the true purpose of criticism." The poets whose work Mr. Newton uses as examples of the state of Canadian poetry are (as I'm sure the majority of them would admit) beginners: unknown writers, for the most part, who have not yet established their claim to be considered as even minor Canadian poets. They certainly can't be said to represent the current state of Canadian poetry. And to use them as excuse for a discussion of that subject is as absurd as discussing the state of literature in any decade on the basis of anything but the best work being produced at that time. To compare the work of the poets in Newton's essay to that of Homer, Pindar, Coleridge, Mallarmé, Claudel, Whitman, Yeats, Pound, Eliot, Auden, etc., is very silly. To base critical evaluations on such comparisons is to declare oneself as inhabitant of that "lunar sphere" where one may buy "cages for gnats and chains to yoke a flea." But, Mr. Newton may ask, how can I assist readers to find value in poetry in which I myself find none? You can't. But you can take Helen Gardner's advice to critics when she says, they "are wise to leave alone those works which they feel a crusading itch to attack and whose reputations they feel a call to deflate."

No critic with a sense of responsibility to literature would, I think, ever agree to review or discuss eleven books of poetry in one article, let alone use them as an excuse for another kind of critical activity. If he didn't want to talk about the books he received for review because he didn't like them, Mr. Newton should have returned to you; if you agreed with Mr. Newton that none of them was worth reviewing then, obviously, they should not have been reviewed in *Canadian Literature*. If Mr. Newton wanted to write an article on the state of Canadian poetry, he should have done so and submitted it to you

for your consideration. To turn personal distaste for specific volumes into an excuse for some pretty dreary generalizations on Canadian poetry seems to me inexcusable.

With a modesty that mocks any sincere admission of critical humility, Mr. Newton asks us to blame on his "literal mind" what he says may appear to be a "bizarre" exegesis of part of a poem by Helene Rosenthal. Having proved in nine paragraphs that his literal mind is certainly not programmed to make sense of metaphor, Mr. Newton has the temerity to admit, as if with compassion, "It would be cruel to continue further." A single example will have to serve as illustration of Mr. Newton's extraordinary blindness to the meaning of metaphor. Of two lines in Rosenthal's poem — "Snow logged the days./ Wind thinned the hours" — Newton says, "I translate [them] roughly as 'there was snow and wind.'" It's astonishing to me that Mr. Newton should believe the critic's job is to *translate* metaphor into, presumably, the language of logical discourse. As Ushenko points out, "the logic of art, with the display of ambivalence as an essential part of it, is not to be judged by standards of elementary logic." Mr. Newton finds it difficult to understand "how wind thinned the hours, since, on a sailing ship, a wind would increase activity, and thus 'fill out' the hours." Mr. Newton's elementary logic fails to lead him to the conclusion which Iago arrives at in *Othello*: "Pleasure and action make the hours seem *short*." Time goes quicker, the hours seem *shorter* (thinner) when we are busy. Time is thinned like the canvas of the sails stretched tight by the wind that makes both ship and time pass quickly.

Though I might cite other examples of Mr. Newton's literal mindedness, and of his critical arrogance and condescension, I shall restrict myself to one further point: his observations on the subject of form in poetry which he describes as "something which has the coherent, self-contained, living beauty of an apple or a new-born child." Poems do not grow on trees, or in the womb of the artist's imagination (though I am familiar with that metaphor); they are made. Art may *imitate* nature, may strive to create the *illusion* of having come into being as naturally as leaves come on to a tree (to paraphrase Keats); but in fact art is the antithesis of nature. Schwarzkopf may appear to sing like a bird, naturally; but she has to work very hard to make her voice sound like that and the bird doesn't even know about trying.

Yeats provides us with a more telling image

to serve in place of Newton's apple (no pun intended) or new-born baby. It is the bird, "of hammered gold and gold enameling," set upon "a golden bough to sing/ To lords and ladies of Byzantium." And it is, as Yeats makes quite clear, an artifice to be found not in but only "out of nature." Mr. Newton denies, without argument or evidence, the achievement of "formal beauty" to Auden, to the early Eliot, the early Thomas, to Pound early and late. Whatever Mr. Newton means by the word *form* is obviously something exclusive and imprisoning; and what Blackmur says of "wholeness" (in a discussion of Pound's *Mauberry*) seems applicable to Newton's preconception of form: "wholeness, preconceived, is a prison into which the mind is not compelled to thrust itself; the parts, taken seriatim, establish parallels, sequences, connections, and conspire, *in spite of the prejudiced mind*, to produce an aggregate better, that is more useful, than a prison." Similarly, what James says about Besant's definition of the novel applies, *mutatis mutandis*, to Newton's comments on form in poetry: "He seems to me to mistake in attempting to say so definitely before hand what sort of affair the good novel will be."

Perhaps I am being unfair in comparing Mr. Newton's criticism with that of Yeats, Blackmur and James. To be fair to Mr. Newton, I'm sure I should quote Aristotelean and Thomistic definitions of form. They, I think, are closer to what he is fumbling for in his circumlocution of the subject. It ought not to be my responsibility as would-be poet to provide the critic with his tools; but since I write as a critic I cannot resist recommending to Mr. Newton's attention all the good things already said on the subject of form by Aristotle, Aquinas, Joyce, Maritain, Crane and Frye. It is the critic's responsibility to employ only the best critical instruments because only they will enable him to perform his task efficiently and meaningfully.

He has to start by learning not to bite off more than he can reasonably chew; and you, as the editor, can aid him by refraining from piling his plate too high.

JOHN F. HULCOOP

### *A Reviewer Replies*

MR. HULCOOP writes "as critic, not poet". Perhaps I should say I wrote my article, not as a professional critic, but as a poet con-

cerned with the state of the art. (I have published some verse here and in England, and even my first two published novels were, in intention, much influenced by the romantic narrative poem.)

I am sorry Mr. Hulcoop's feelings have been hurt. But every serious writer must face unfavourable reviews. I have had far worse (one in the pages of this magazine), and have submitted without a murmur. Courage, Mr. Hulcoop.

Mr. Hulcoop makes certain statements about your adequacy as an editor, and mine as a reviewer. You can defend yourself. For my part, I must state my belief that the reviewing of a number of bad books of verse as indicative of a trend is at times quite justified. This is because the unfortunate aspects of a decadent or ossified style are best illustrated in bad poems. Poets of great talent can do something even in a bad period—look at Collins, Gray and Crabbe. But bad poems are like stagnant pools, which have the marvellous property of concentrating in their murky depths all the silty materials which more vigorous waters bear along in suspension.

Mr. Hulcoop must surely have realized by now that what he calls my "admission" that the poets discussed had individual human souls was a disclaimer that I was attacking them as persons. Bad poets can be sensitive and admirable human beings: good poets can be scoundrels. I was saying, and this was clear in my first paragraph, that the poems had no individuality. How could I attack the poets as individuals when they did not reveal themselves as such?

Mr. Hulcoop has collected all the names of "famous poets" contained in my article (and mentioned, incidentally, in highly varied contexts), and has accused me of comparing his unfortunately "beginners" to them. Certainly, one must not expect from a reputable journal the charity of the remedial class. However, I do point out in the article that such comparisons cannot be made. Does he suggest that, when reviewing bad poets, one should be careful to mention only the names of other bad poets, so as not to embarrass? In any case, Bowering and Gustafson are well-known; Helene Rosenthal's book comes in to the world with an enthusiastic recommendation from Earle Birney; and Harris and Freedman preface their collection with a sexy, two-fisted commercial from Irving Layton.

I have not met Helene Rosenthal; I have no desire to cause her pain; and I honestly do not wish to go beyond what I said of her

verse in the article. But since Mr. Hulcoop has chosen to stand his ground on my analysis of her poem, I must point out that time "thinned" is necessarily time diluted, not shortened or concentrated.

Mr. Hulcoop ends with an attack on what he conceives to be my theory of form. I don't know how he comes to the conclusion that I am a Thomist: Thomism is not, after all, the only Christian philosophy with esthetic relevance. I have not read a great deal of Thomas Aquinas, though I have a good deal of respect for what little I have read. I like his definition of beauty as "involving the three conditions of integrity, proportion and splendour". But, for that matter, I also like Swedenborg's statement that "form is the essence of a thing, but aspect is the existence thence derived." Since the producing of identity papers seems to be in order, I should say that I am probably more of an Augustinian than a Thomist, and more of a Platonist than an Aristotelian.

I certainly do not agree with the somewhat Wildean statement that art is the antithesis of nature. But then, neither did Yeats' phrase "out of nature" must be understood in terms of his cosmology: he does, in the same poem, talk of "the artifice of eternity". What is above nature is not what is antithetical to nature. In any case, my admiration of Yeats' poetry does not compel me to accept his magical view of things.

Blackmur I have always found boring. I prefer to read poets on their art, rather than critics, and I find his style rather pompous and unpleasant. I do not, however, see the relevance of the passage Mr. Hulcoop quotes, which refers to a very distinguished, artful and finely-worked poem by Ezra Pound (as Blackmur says in that same essay, which I largely agree with, "Mr. Pound is at his best a maker of great verse rather than a great poet"). Since Mr. Hulcoop's point seems to be that I am the sort of person who would find the competent handling of a triolet evidence of superior formal genius, I must protest that I entirely agree with the statements he has quoted from Ushenko and James, and even, to a great extent, with the quotation from Blackmur. But I take it these statements were intended to apply to work on a fairly high level of proficiency.

To conclude, I must protest the accusation of arrogance. I really consider myself a kind of janitor, or street-sweeper. The only "crusading itch" (gorgeous phrase!) I feel is a desire to do my part in clearing away the decaying, dust-covered or petrified remnants of a long-

dead "modern" tradition, so that someday, somewhere, somebody can do something really alive.

NORMAN NEWTON

### *An Editor Answers*

I DO NOT PROPOSE to defend Mr. Newton. He has defended himself ably, and I will add merely that his article has aroused great attention, and more of it favourable than unfavourable. Miriam Waddington's unsolicited reaction is typical of those who think differently from Mr. Hulcoop. "I liked Norman Newton's article on the young Canadian poets in *Canadian Literature*. It was sharp but very good. He's a good writer . . ."

Since Mr. Hulcoop has chosen to implicate me as an accessory before the fact, I restrict myself to dealing with his letter so far as it attacks the editorial policies of *Canadian Literature*.

In the White Russian restaurants of Hong Kong, they produce a dessert of the most glittering visual appeal, crowned by a tower of spun sugar in a flickering blue nimbus of flaming brandy. The splendid structure burns and melts away, and what is left to eat is a little brown, toffee-like substance covering a very humble kind of millet porridge.

Mr. Hulcoop's is a performance of the same kind, decorative, entertaining, but burning down, if one waits long enough, to a couple of simple and quite unacceptable propositions: (a) that the quality of criticism is related to word count; (b) that the critic should devote himself to the appreciation of what he finds good, and should ignore whatever he finds bad.

In defending the first proposition, Mr. Hulcoop remarks: "You must know from your own experience how difficult it is to write a good review of a single book of poetry." Difficult indeed it is, and even more difficult to write a good *condensed* review; but by no means impossible. If it were, many of the established critical magazines, and most of the best critics, would stand condemned. Mr. Newton was indeed asked to review 11 books in a single essay. The essay was more than 5,000 words in length, which means he had between 450 and 500 words for each book of verse, and a critic who cannot say the gist of what he thinks in that space is a wretched craftsman. I have glanced through representative issues of the *Times Literary Supplement*

and the *New Statesman*; I find it customary in these respected journals for four to six books of verse to be reviewed in articles varying from 1,500 to 2,000 words, an average wordage rather less than Mr. Newton was allowed and accepted. To turn to Canada, the same practice was followed by Northrop Frye when he wrote omnibus reviews of the year's poetry in the *University of Toronto Quarterly's* annual "Letters in Canada" feature. I even find that the *Canadian Forum* recently dealt with no less than *sixteen* books of verse, including some reviewed by Mr. Newton, in about 1,200 words, a *quarter* of the space Mr. Newton took to review 11 books. That, perhaps, is carrying brevity rather too far, but it devastatingly proves my point so far as accepted critical practice is concerned. Mr. Hulcoop was merely mentioned in *Canadian Forum* (in terms he himself will doubtless remember), whereas he received almost nine lines in *Canadian Literature*.

I contend that there is in fact no relation between the length of a review and the insight it displays. Aphoristic criticism exists and is often just. Some critics have made single-sentence judgments of books or even of authors which strike readers seventy years afterwards with their justice and adequacy. I do not mean to imply that the lingering, luxuriating kind of study of a single work affected by academics of a passing generation is to be condemned. All kinds of criticism have their place. But in a literary magazine which sets as its aim to give a balanced picture of what is happening year by year in the literary activity of a single country, condensation will always be necessary and, *pace* Mr. Hulcoop, responsible, and will always be practiced.

Let Mr. Hulcoop remember that the situation of which he complains is not initially caused by editors or critics who seek to give attention to a fair sample of the work that is published. It is caused by writers who rush into print when they should perhaps still be merely circulating their poems among their friends, and by publishers who have little editorial judgment or fail to exercise what they have. Since *Canadian Literature* began publication ten years ago, the number of books of verse published annually has quadrupled; the number of *good* books among them has not increased appreciably. It is the lack of *self-criticism* among poets that often leads to brief and adverse criticism on the part of reviewers.

This brings us to Mr. Hulcoop's other point, derived from a somewhat free reading of

Helen Gardner: that it is adequate enough criticism to leave bad books unreviewed. I respect Dame Helen as a scholar in a limited field, but I do not regard her as authorized to speak for critics in general, nor do I accept the conclusions Mr. Hulcoop draws from her words. Again, I make the point that the aim of *Canadian Literature* is not to present appreciation of approved works; I would never have consented to edit a magazine with that purpose. Its intention is to present, through many viewpoints, a picture of what is being done by writers in Canada today, the poor as well as the good, the ephemeral as well as the enduring. In such an effort, Mr. Newton's viewpoint has its place and so — as the publication of his letter shows — has Mr. Hulcoop's. Mr. Newton speaks for himself. That is the only condition on which any writer speaks in *Canadian Literature*; judgments are independent, and writers are free to say what they wish of the work of other writers, so long as what they say is to the point.

Mr. Hulcoop may now pretend to condemn this liberty, but he has used it in the past. Let me mention a review which appeared in *Canadian Literature* No. 20. Dealing with Edward McCourt's *Fasting Friar*, the reviewer remarked that the novel stood condemned as "a trivial thing", that its "action is conducted by a collection of faculty clichés", that it represented a brand of realism "suffocating in its rigidity" and that its issues were "so absurdly over-simplified that they are not worth bothering about." This review, the reader will have surmised, was written neither by Norman Newton nor by George Woodcock. It is interesting to reflect that on that occasion Mr. Hulcoop did not return to me a book whose issues he thought "not worth bothering about"; he went sturdily ahead and condemned it, and was right to do so.

*Canadian Literature* will persist in what Mr. Hulcoop now — some years later — regards as its bad ways. It will give readers a picture of Canadian writing *as it is*, and not as reflected in selected good examples. At the same time it will present even briefer reviews of books which do not deserve longer treatment.

Finally, one should perhaps remark that when poets or other writers have presented their work to the forum of public opinion by the act of publication, they have exposed it to any criticism other writers may feel necessary. There are wounds in this process. It is part of the life of a writer to receive them — as we all have done — and to turn them to his own good. Stoicism is a useful

acquisition for those who practice any art. I can say — and I think many other writers would agree — that in the long run it is not the favourable reviews that have really helped me. It is those which, made in all honesty, have shown me flaws in my work that might be set right. Therefore I do not apologize for printing adverse reviews. Their final results are incalculable, and can be beneficial, at least as far as a writer's craft is concerned. As for the ultimate sources of his art, I doubt if criticism or any other peripheral circumstance can affect them.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

(*Having argued so lengthily on the merits of brevity, we will now put it into practice by declaring this correspondence closed.*)

## DIRTY LINEN?

Sir,

Having now read the two parts of A. J. M. Smith's comprehensive essay on "The Canadian Poet" (*Canadian Literature*, Nos. 37 and 38) I would like to make a small critical comment on its conclusion, also to point out a striking flaw which occurs in the second part, and then to raise some prickly questions about Canadian criticism which this and other examples I will cite bring to mind.

Professor Smith's essay follows a chain of reasoning, tracing the doubtful forms of Canadian nationalism in poetry from the beginning to the present, which parallel my own thoughts in an essay on the subject, recently published in *Queen's Quarterly*. We both end on the theme of "universality" (Professor Smith's closing word in the essay), but with very different implications.

Professor Smith, in what I would consider to be a not unusual case of "bandwagonism" (the chief vice of Canadian critics, according to M. Gnarowski), sees universality in terms of the current turning to world issues — Belzen, Dresden, Hiroshima, and Viet Nam; whereas I see it in terms of observed human experience, local experience, presented in universal terms. This is the great issue, "a local pride" (Williams to Souster) or intellectual internationalism.

Professor Smith's main objective was to get away from spurious nationalism — "journalistic verse" — to "the poetry . . . the spiritual reality which make a nation." His essay, however, is truncated in this search, since he never adequately explains the meaning of this

"poetry" or "spiritual reality" in terms of Canadian consciousness. His conclusion slumps into personal recollection—implying what?—and the example of poets who have moved from native grounds ("to be Canadian is not enough") to an obsession with global politics. I wish he had probed further into the needs of poetry grounded in Canadian life and experience.

Now for the fatal flaw. On page 42, in Part II, Professor Smith remarks that Patrick Anderson edited *Preview* "along with F. R. Scott, P. K. Page, and others, among whom for a time were Irving Layton and John Sutherland." (This major gaffe occurs also in *The Oxford Book of Canadian Verse*, p. xlvii: "Anderson . . . in association with F. R. Scott, P. K. Page, Irving Layton, Louis Dudek and others edited the experimental journal *Preview*.") Really, how could so flagrant an error occur in a critic of high reputation?

As we know, neither John Sutherland nor Irving Layton (nor myself) was ever part of the editorial group of *Preview* magazine. The point is important because they were actually ranged in conscious opposition to *Preview*, in a significant way, and were also engaged in editing an opposition magazine named *First Statement*. The contrast between the two schools, as illustrated in the criticism of John Sutherland directed at A. J. M. Smith himself in the Preface to *Other Canadians*, has constituted a major critical division in Canadian poetry which continues to this day. (It is perhaps illustrated in this very letter!) The story is fully documented and available to everyone in articles by Wynne Francis in *Canadian Literature*, in various special studies by Michael Gnarowski in *Culture*, and also in the book edited by Gnarowski and myself, *The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada*.

That book is a collection of literary documents. One wonders, indeed, why it is being disgracefully misinterpreted and misunderstood; or why a prominent critic ignores a glaring fact of literary history, which that book clearly documents. Is there something at stake that our reputable critics are simply unable to take into account? I will consider

an example from another critic of unquestionable reputation.

Desmond Pacey, reviewing *The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada* in *Wascana Review* (Vol. 3, No. 1), complains about the "complete absence" of W. E. Collin, E. K. Brown, and Irving Layton in the book. Yet he who runs (not too fast) may read about W. E. Collin in pages 127-128, 170, 131; and about E. K. Brown on pages 53, 83, 105, 128, 165, 170, and 231. In fact, on page 231 we refer to W. E. Collin and E. K. Brown as "the first scholarly critics of the new literature"; but the book itself is not a compilation of scholarly criticism, it is a collection of "documents intimately involved in the literary history of the period," so that no articles by Collin and Brown are included.

Most shocking of all, however, is Professor Pacey's failure to catch at least one of the forty-three separate references to Irving Layton (average, one in every seven pages), or the two articles by Irving Layton in the book, or the article about him by William Carlos Williams, "A Note on Layton". Has Professor Pacey at least read the Table of Contents, where Layton occurs three times?

How, then, are we to take Professor Pacey's strictures on the book, that it adopts a prejudice against Bliss Carman and Archibald Lampman, that it promotes a theory of "progress" in poetry, or that it works from a meaningless myth of "enemies and obstacles"? I leave it to the reader to decide whether these obstacles are imaginary, and whether the recording of literary history through literary documents is more objective than ill-assorted opinion.

I have the greatest regard and admiration for both A. J. M. Smith and Desmond Pacey. We are all deeply indebted to them for their work in Canadian literature, the one as an anthologist and poet, the other as a literary historian. No one has done more for our literature. But now that we are moving ahead toward scholarly respectability, can we let them get away with dirty collars?—in fact, who knows what the state of their underwear might be?

LOUIS DUDEK

# CANADIAN LITERATURE - 1968



A CHECKLIST EDITED BY RITA BUTTERFIELD

# ENGLISH-CANADIAN

## LITERATURE

*Compiled by Rita Butterfield*

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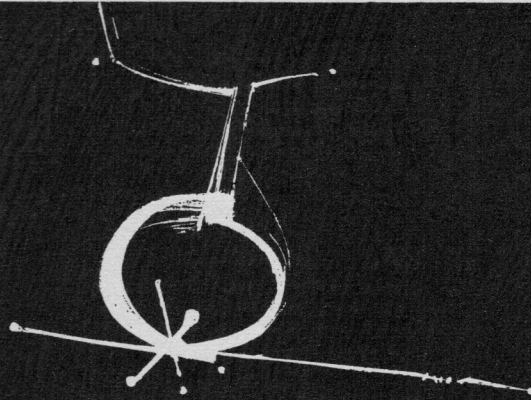
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IN THE UNIVERSE

There is a house  
and a wife  
and a child  
and a refrigerator  
and a book  
and a furnace.

There is a root  
and a trunk  
and a branch  
and a leaf  
and a bud  
and a sun.

There is a community  
and a friendship  
and a future  
and a hunger  
and a history  
and a reason for it all.

by john robert colombo

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