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Autumn, 1969

THE LIVING MOSAIC

Articles

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AN ABSENCE OF UTOPIAS

LITERATURES are defined as much by their lacks as by their abundances, and it is obviously significant that in the whole of Canadian writing there has appeared only one utopian novel of any real interest; it is significant in terms of our society as much as of our literature.

The book in question is *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*. It was written in the 1870's and published in 1888, eight years after the death of its author, James de Mille, a professor of English at Dalhousie, who combined teaching with the compulsive production of popular novels; by the time of his death at the age of 46 he had already thirty volumes to his credit, but only *A Strange Manuscript* has any lasting interest. It has been revived as one of the reprints in the New Canadian Library (McClelland & Stewart, \$2.75), with an introduction by R. E. Watters. One cannot go quite as far as Dr. Watters in his arguments for the great originality of *A Strange Manuscript*. As even he admits, the conception of the work, with its presentation of an imaginary society — that of the Kosekins at the South Pole — whose values are the opposite of those we sustain, owes an obvious debt to Samuel Butler and *Erewhon*; there are also perceptible echoes of Lord Lytton's underground Utopia, *The Coming Race*, which, like *Erewhon*, was published at the beginning of the 1870s, a few years before de Mille began work on his novel. Yet one can grant Dr. Watters — and de Mille posthumously — that his combination of elements from old books of antarctic exploration, from palaeontological treatises, and from a range of earlier utopian romances does result in a book which holds together, cemented by a moral vision that is perhaps not peculiar to the author so much as characteristic of Canada.

Yet in terms of our culture as a whole the interesting fact about this solitary successful Canadian utopian novel is that it is really not utopian at all. It is not

even — at least in the manner of *Brave New World* or *1984* — anti-utopian, since it is not concerned with either the defence or the refutation of the idea that men can live in a planned, “ideal” society. De Mille’s purpose, like that of Swift and Butler, is not to polemicize for or against a society that does not exist, but to present a satirical view of our own world by the simple and oft-used process of inversion. Where we love wealth, the Kosekin love poverty; where we regard happiness as the greatest goal, they strive after misery; where we love light, they yearn towards darkness; where we long for life, they desire death. In the process De Mille — like so many satirists — manages to have the best of both worlds, for the selflessness of the Kosekin reflects on the selfishness of our own world, and at the same time we realize that even virtue and self-sacrifice carried to an extreme can be repulsive, so that we see the man of aggressive virtue pilloried at the same time as the man of good-natured vice. If there is any moral to *A Strange Manuscript Found in a Copper Cylinder*, it is surely that of the middle way — moderation in all things.

But the fact that our one good utopian romance turns out to be no utopia at all, but a tract for the times, merely emphasizes the fact that the genuine utopia — positive or negative — is not a Canadian or, indeed, a North American genre, for the examples emanating from south of the border are so rare — Bellamy’s *Looking Backward* is the only one that comes immediately to mind — as to emphasize the slight interest in the New World (at least until the advent of science fiction) in this kind of fantasy.

The lack is not due to the absence of utopian inclinations in either the United States or Canada. The great number of practical experiments in utopian living from the early 19th to the early 20th century is a proof to the contrary. But here again there is an interesting point to be observed. The celebrated North American communities — and the list of them runs into hundreds — were either groups of religious zealots following millenarian doctrines which had their early origins in the Catharist teachings of medieval Europe, or secular groups inspired by socialist visions which originated — also in Europe — in the wake of the French Revolution. Brooke Farm sprang from the bizarre dreams of the French phalansterian, Charles Fourier, and many communities were inspired by a novel — *Voyage en Icarie* — by the French socialist Etienne Cabet. Neither Fourier nor Cabet set foot in the New World, but Robert Owen did, and a considerable communitarian movement sprang from his efforts. Possibly the most important secular utopia in Canada was that of the Finns who established a settlement at Sointula — the Place of Harmony — on Malcolm Island off the Pacific Coast; they too were responding to ideas formulated already in Europe.

In other words, in Europe men dreamed of utopias, but in North America they set about creating them as concrete entities, and often succeeded in sustaining them for generations, which did not happen in the urban pressures of Europe. It is the same relationship between imaginary and practical creation as one encounters everywhere in pioneer societies. Pioneers did not produce original works of art, because they were creating original human environments; they did not imagine utopias because they were shaping them. The peculiar conditions of the frontier allowed a great variety of experimentation, though the later advance of settlement brought in restrictive influences; one can see this in the fate of utopian sects like the Doukhobors, who were allowed to experiment in communal organization when they settled in the empty prairies, but were quite ruthlessly dispossessed as soon as land-abundance changed into land-scarcity. Even then, there were still places farther on to which one could emigrate, and the westward shift of utopias continued — Sointula was founded in the Edwardian decade — until, by World War I, the positive utopian ideal had run out of steam. By the time Canadians had become urbanized enough to lose the spaciousness and freedom of frontier life, which in itself constituted a kind of unacknowledged utopia, the literary utopia had lost its meaning in the recognition that rigid planning produces only the utopia of a nightmare. But Canada was never near enough to the totalitarian world of the 30s and 40s to make even that a meaningful vision, and so we have gone entirely without a utopian literature. Perhaps in that we are fortunate as, in other respects, are those lucky lands that have no history.

GABRIELLE ROY AND THE SILKEN NOOSE

Phyllis Grosskurth

I HAVE BEEN SO DEPRESSED by the self-indulgent writing that has been coming out of Quebec in the past few years that I recently turned back to Gabrielle Roy for reassurance. I re-read all her books and I think I found what I was looking for: a delicate, vibrant prose; an understanding of the longings of the heart; and a warm compassion for human beings. These simple attributes comforted me after the plethora of neurotic anti-heroes raging about the universe from psychotic wards or prison cells once they had made their supremely gratuitous gesture of igniting bombs which probably injured innocent people.

But I must confess, at the risk of sounding hopelessly impressionable, that I experienced a further reaction. As a reviewer my reading is riotously catholic in its comprehensiveness. Immediately after finishing the last of Gabrielle Roy's books I picked up *The Brighton Belle*, a collection of short stories by Francis King, a writer I have long admired who is not sufficiently known on this side of the Atlantic. These stories are an attempt to capture *genius loci*; no travel book could more successfully convey the Utrillo-like effect of Brighton on a summer day: the stark white Regency buildings outlined against a dazzling sky, the fanciful absurdity of the Pavilion, and the quaintness of the meandering Lanes. But Francis King is interested in something far more profound than writing picturesque travel vignettes for *Britain Today*. Behind the elegant Regency façades he reveals the dual nature of man. As Rebecca West once remarked, only part of us is sane. "The other half of us is nearly mad," she went on to say. "It prefers the disagreeable to the agreeable, loves pain and its darker night despair, and wants to die in a catastrophe that will set back life to its beginnings and leave nothing of our house save its blackened foundations."

What Francis King and Rebecca West are talking about is evil, no matter what

esoteric psychological terminology we apply to it in order not to appear hopelessly old-fashioned or a trifle naive. And it is precisely this aspect of reality from which Gabrielle Roy firmly averts her eyes. I found her attitude noble because her books told me that stoical man would not be defeated by the forces ranged against him so long as he possessed courage. I found them charming because they assured me that love and gentleness could create an oasis sufficient unto itself. They allowed me to indulge a pleasant wistfulness in the reflection that death is followed by renewal. As Plato said, "Everything that deceives may be said to enchant."

What in effect she was telling me was a fairy-tale. In a fairy tale all manner of misfortunes may befall the protagonists, but we know that they are protected by magic talismans. They are essentially good at heart, so while they may be sadder and wiser at the end, nothing very terrible has happened to them. The witches and ogres slink off ignominiously or are punished in some particularly revolting fashion. This is the sort of distortion that is implied in the view of reality we present to our children. But I am an adult and I know that this is a half-truth, a bulwark we set up to shield our children from a knowledge we hopelessly pray will never confront them. Whether we view evil as a force possessing permanent reality, or whether we regard it as an inconvenience to be handled pragmatically, an unfortunate aspect of contingent circumstances, few adults would deny that its disorderly presence forces itself upon our horrified attention from time to time. Gabrielle Roy will not admit this. Her characters are shielded from the encounter with the stalking familiar. They are treated as children not yet capable of venturing into the more sombre areas of existence.

Essentially Gabrielle Roy possesses a mother's-eye view of the world. The area of action in which her characters move is limited and conditioned both spatially and psychologically by the imposition such a focus places upon them. The predominant figure of her books is the earth-mother. In relation to her own characters, in her loving and protective concern Gabrielle Roy is an extension of this earth-mother. It is this *weltanschauung* which gives her novels their distinctively "feminine" quality.

The settings of her novels are Montreal, St. Boniface, and the wilds of northern Canada. An extensive arena, admittedly. But if one examines her novels closely, are her characters free to range within as wide a region as appears at first sight?

Montreal is the background for her first and third novels, *The Tin Flute* and *The Cashier*. A large, pulsating city throbs behind the action: but how does it function in the lives of the characters? The major point Gabrielle Roy is making about the Lacasse family is the inhibiting confinement of their lives. The riches

and the excitement of Montreal might as well be on the moon so far as they are available to the slum-dwellers of Saint-Henri. In a bitter harangue the unemployed Alphonse protests against being choked off from life's feast:

Have any of you guys ever walked on St. Catherine Street without a cent in your pocket and looked at all the stuff in the shop-windows? I guess so. Well, I have too. And I've seen some fine things, boys, as fine as you can see anywhere. I can hardly describe all the fine things I've seen while tramping up and down St. Catherine Street! Packards, Buicks, racing cars, sports cars. I've seen mannequins in beautiful evening dresses, and others without a stitch on . . . But that's not all, my friends. Society spreads everything out before us, all the finest things in the world. But don't get the idea that's all. Ah no! They urge us to buy too. You'd think they were scared we weren't tempted enough . . .

In *The Tin Flute* poverty assumes a terrifying presence that conditions lives and shapes character. Zola described his characters as subject to the same forces as the stone on the road — that is, helpless objects crushed by vast impersonal forces over which they have no control. A similar strain of fatalism runs through *The Tin Flute*. There are constant references to the feeling of imprisonment experienced by the inhabitants of Saint-Henri. Their only outlet is helpless rage, distorted ambitions, foolish day-dreams, or grim resignation. As Florentine, expecting her illegitimate baby, reflects: "She had made her choice, knowing full well that she could no more have done anything different than stop breathing."

Desperation to flee Saint-Henri only drives the characters into further imprisonment. By joining the army, young men escape destitution for probable death. When Azarius realizes that he can no longer regain self-respect as the wage-earner of his family, he too goes off to war, but it will mean the break-up of family unity. Florentine, with her frivolous day-dreams of luxury and romance, allows herself to be seduced by an ambitious mechanic who deserts her lest he be trapped into a life in Saint-Henri which an involvement with such a girl would imply. Consequently for the sake of her unknown baby, she marries Emmanuel who is thereby condemned to a loveless marriage with a capricious, sullen wife. There is no exit from this imprisoning circle of contingency.

Like a steady, gentle flame, the figure of Rose-Anna glows at the heart of the Lacasse family. Her tenacious strength and devotion provide the little ones with the only security they know. Yet she too represents imprisonment. When Florentine reacts in horror to the realization that her mother is expecting her twelfth child, Rose-Anna murmurs, "One can only do one's best." Additional children

mean a continuing round of poverty, yet Florentine herself perpetuates the cycle and it is significant that at the end of the book she returns to share a home with her mother.

Rose-Anna is able to resign herself to the fact that Eugène has joined the army because of what his allowance will mean to the younger children. (It is grimly ironical that Eugène takes the money away from her to spend on a trollop). For many years Azarius has regarded his role as father as a failure to provide for hungry mouths. Unless he enlists there will be further babies. Rose-Anna represents a continuation of his sense of imprisonment. Incidentally, her attitude towards the war is revelatory of the narrow encompassment of her view: she sees it essentially as a host of suffering mothers like herself.

The question is, does Gabrielle Roy understand these implications in Rose-Anna? She depicts her as a figure of fortitude, an earth-mother whose natural habitat is in the country with growing things. Fecund and vigorous, her natural role is to produce children, but she is thwarted in her need for happy fulfilment.

Gabrielle Roy seems to accept the traditional French-Canadian view of the mother as the strong centrifugal force in the home. Rose-Anna is planted firmly at the centre of the novel. Florentine works in the dime store, a microcosm of the larger world perhaps, yet her mother is able to visit her there. Daniel is taken away from her to die in the remote hospital on the mountain, and at the same time she gives birth to another child who will take his place. Azarius goes off to war — more as her son than her husband — but at this point the book ends. There is to be no consideration of a world beyond Rose-Anna's orbit. Finally, one must not forget that Jean Lévesque's drive to impel himself into the world of the city transports him beyond the scope of the novel. An unencumbered orphan, he possesses a lever of freedom that transcends his skills as a machinist.

Now what is the situation in *The Cashier*? Alexandre Chenevert works in the heart of the heart of the city — the Savings Bank of the City and Island of Montreal. He feels completely trapped in his Kafka-like cell within the vault of a building into which a sudden shaft of sunlight arouses startled heads. On the streets and in the bus, he finds only further forms of imprisonment. He is incapable of handling a bewildering urban environment. Unable to sleep, he stands helplessly before the cold impersonality of the refrigerator: "Alexandre sensed his utter inferiority as a man, with all his little stomach troubles, his endless colds, his confused problems." He has never managed to function outside the protection of the womb. His continual self-pampering is an extension of the uterine embrace. In the dream-fantasy that finally sends him off to sleep, "A feeling of restfulness

overwhelmed his soul as it found ease in the absence of all but vegetable life." Again, when he falls asleep at Lac Vert, the Freudian imagery is unmistakable:

The intoxication of sinking between secret shores, more thickly green than the night! How ravishing the blue fronds which curled about his limbs and then slipped by! The quality of the silence in this muffled land! The unutterable absence of all life, except for the water's even and continuous murmur.

The memory of his strong-minded mother threads in and out of his thoughts. He remembers her perpetual lament about what would become of him when she was gone. She too had been wracked by nagging ailments; is it too much to speculate that in the robustly healthy Edmondine he finds the mother he had always craved?

He had turned toward Edmondine's kindly countenance. It was to her he was furnishing his explanation. For if Edmondine was awesome in her commands, she was not in the least so in her face, which was moon-shaped, open, and smiling.

The two books set in the wide open spaces might seem exceptions to the theme of enclosure. The structure of *Where Nests the Water Hen*, however, is revealing. The first section, "Luzina Takes a Holiday," is an account of Luzina's annual pilgrimage from her lonely island to the comparative civilization of Sainte Rose du Lac to give birth to another addition to her enormous family. The next section, "The School on the Little Water Hen," is concerned with Luzina's attempts to bring learning to their isolation. The final section, "The Capuchin from Toutes Aides," while it centres on the activities of Father Joseph-Marie, is linked structurally and thematically to the earlier episodes.

The first section opens with a sense of remote isolation, of an immensity beyond the beyond. Yet note the pattern of development: we move progressively from open space to the inner island to our final destination, the enveloping warmth of the Tousignants' cabin.

When Luzina leaves for her annual delivery, her final view of her family is an image of desolation: "All five of them were huddled together, so that they made one minute spot against the widest and most deserted of the world's horizons." When she returns the heart of the home is restored.

In establishing a school on Little Water Hen, Luzina brings the outside world within her orbit. By the end of Part II we see Luzina almost alone now that her children are turning their faces gradually but inexorably toward the outside world. But we are never shown the children coping with the world beyond the Little

Water Hen. The last lines of Part II emphasize the ties that still hold them to their mother through her letters :

And Luzina's educated children momentarily felt their hearts contract, as though their childhood back there, on the island in the Little Water Hen, had reproached them for their high estate.

Part III focuses on the activities of Father Joseph-Marie. But note that chronological time is abandoned in this final section, in which the priest's visit to Little Water Hen occurs while Luzina is still surrounded by her children. When Luzina comes to him for confession, he has an impulse to touch her cheek :

Yet to this paternal emotion was added man's old hunger to be coddled, fondled, protected by a woman's wholly motherly affection. And it was at once to his daughter and to the woman's protective soul that he spoke: "Yes, my child!"

The earth-mother is the centrifugal force, the centre of a loving radius, embracing all those whose lives she touches.

Incidentally, after the unrelieved bleakness of *The Tin Flute, Where Nests the Water Hen* exhibits a genuinely humourous vein. The type of humour is significant. Gabrielle Roy laughs affectionately at the child-like qualities of Luzina and Father Joseph-Marie. The laugh has the ring of a parent's indulgent tolerance of a child's solemnity.

The Hidden Mountain is one book by Gabrielle Roy in which we do not find the figure of the protective strong woman. Here she is concerned with man alone in the freest possible environment. But it is only through contact with other people that character can be revealed and developed. Even in novels in which the interior monologue technique is employed, the character reveals himself through his reactions to the external populated world. Pierre remains a cipher because there are no other characters on whom he can hone himself.

The last part of the book, the account of Pierre's life in Paris, is a lamentable failure. It is a disaster precisely because there has been no opportunity in the major part of the book for his character to be established. His friendship with the young artist Stanislas is inadequate artistically, entirely unconvincing emotionally, since it is simply hero-worship on the younger man's part.

Pierre is completely incapable of adapting himself to an urban environment. His only response is to create in his flat a replica of an enclosed cabin on the Mackenzie River. He can paint Paris only as though it were transplanted to the banks of the Mackenzie. In sum, there is a failure of nerve on his creator's part.

She cannot trust him to launch out into the world with a complex personality and independent life of his own.

The two recollections of her childhood, *Street of Riches* and *The Road Past Altamont*, contain Gabrielle Roy's most overt treatment of dominant, protective motherhood. Although it is never named, one assumes that the town in the background is St. Boniface. Yet what a shadowy place it is! Christine's family live on the edge of town. In "The Move," one of the stories in *The Road Past Altamont*, Christine only on this single occasion passes through the town, but from the top of the cart it has the appearance of a mirage: "All the houses seemed to be still asleep, bathed in a curious and peaceful atmosphere of withdrawal. I had never seen our little town wearing this absent, gentle air of remoteness."

All the action radiates from the house on Rue Deschambault in which Maman plays the central role. In *The Road Past Altamont* Christine talks of breaking away to the wider world. In *Street of Riches* she moves only as far as Cardinal, but in *The Road Past Altamont* she speaks of having journeyed as far as Europe. However, we have never seen her leave and we have no idea what life on her own would be like. Before she leaves she battles Maman for her freedom. Maman struggles to keep her because she knows that once she has lost Christine, life is effectively over for her. "My mother failed very quickly. No doubt she died of illness, but, as so many people do fundamentally, of grief too, a little." In this book for the first time Gabrielle Roy faces the imprisoning noose of motherhood. In part she is endeavouring to understand and perhaps to forgive. Yet her attitude is ambiguous for home also means the security to which we all look back nostalgically from time to time. *The Road Past Altamont* is written in retrospect; we assume that Christine has already lived far away, yet the writing of the book is a pilgrimage to her past, to the roots that bind and cling.

There are other aspects of this circumscribed world which should be considered. Repeatedly Gabrielle Roy explores the illusion of individual freedom. Her characters are frequently torn between a longing for a more expansive existence and the undeniable circumstances which restrict them. This dichotomy is particularly true of Maman in the two St. Boniface books. Sometimes man is depicted as engaged in a struggle for existence which sets daily bounds on the opportunities available to him. Rose-Anna has mutely accepted the toil and the responsibility, the burdens that will accompany her as far as the grave. In *The Hidden Mountain* Pierre seems the freest of Gabrielle Roy's characters yet he is forced to accept the cruel fact that he must kill in order to survive.

In a sense Gabrielle Roy maintains the same loving yet firm control on her

characters as her various earth-mothers exert over their offspring. The virtues which she extols are fortitude, endurance, concern for others; these are the negative virtues, those necessary in a world in which man is at the mercy of forces beyond his control. Her characters act intuitively; they do not engage in rational or irrational analysis; they are not torn by mental conflict; they are uninterested in ideas. We find obsession in Pierre's creative urge and in Maman's eagerness to embrace a life she has not yet comprehended. But we never see any of them devastated by sexual desire, exalted by religious ardour, excited by intellectual passion or stirred by the darker passions. Gabrielle Roy's is not an easy world for her characters; yet its challenges are comparatively straightforward.

I have emphasized that they are never faced with agonizing moral problems; like Faulkner's Dilsey, they "endure." Her characters are lovable, gentle creatures, but they are simple and childlike. Gabrielle Roy totally ignores the darker spectres that inhabit men's souls; only occasionally, as with Florentine's pregnancy, she allows her characters to experience one of those sudden revelations which unexpectedly opens a precipice at our feet. Alexandre Chenevert frets about the death of Gandhi; yet there is some justification for Eugénie's remonstrance, "After all, he was no relative of ours!"

It is for these limitations that we must deny her a place with the greatest novelists. Tolstoi gives us the illusion that Anna Karenina is activated by a vitality of her own, that she exists in her own right. She must make real moral decisions; in her impellent drive to self-destruction, she is permitted to wreck her own life.

One cannot say that Gabrielle Roy's is a vision of the world before the Fall, even in what critics have described as her "pastoral" novels. Man is not in a garden where all good things are simply within reach. Her characters have been banished from Eden, but the most important step in the process has been ignored. These childlike creatures have never tasted the forbidden fruit of the Knowledge of Good and Evil. They are bewildered, innocent exiles banished by a capricious God.

BLACK AND SECRET POET

Notes on Eli Mandel

John Ower

THE PIECES IN Eli Mandel's four major collections, (in *Trio*, 1954; *Fuseli Poems*, 1960; *Black and Secret Man*, 1964; *An Idiot Joy*, 1967) are as strange and as knotty as anything in Canadian poetry. Given the difficulty and singularity of his work, it seems wise first of all to place it in some sort of meaningful context. Three lines of analysis seem particularly useful in this connection. The first is that Mandel's ethnic background appears significant not only with regard to those poems containing specifically Jewish allusions, but may also serve as a major formative influence upon both the poet's vision and his style. Secondly, Mandel is a poet of spiritual upset and rebellion, and can be appreciated only in the atmosphere of crisis that gave birth to romanticism, existentialism and contemporary anarchism. Thirdly, he is a myth-maker, and his work cannot be comprehended without some understanding of mythopoeia. In particular, his poetry shows both the radical imaginative re-arrangement of reality and the plumbing of the unconscious mind which are characteristically interrelated facets of myth-making poetry. A discussion centred upon the three points just mentioned should help to account for the tonality of Mandel's work, as well as providing an opportunity to touch upon at least some of his more important themes and techniques.

IN THE FIRST CHAPTER of *Mimesis*, Erich Auerbach plays his own variation on Matthew Arnold's distinction between Hebraism and Hellenism as polar mentalities and major forces in Western civilization. That Mandel is himself aware of such a distinction in personal and artistic terms is shown in "Charles Isaac Mandel":

Those uplands of the suburban mind,
sunlit, where dwell the lithe ironists,

athletic as greeks, boy-lovers,
 mathematical in love as in science.
 Formalists. What have I to do with them?
 I gather the few relics of my father:
 his soiled Tallis, his Tefillin,
 the strict black leather of his dark faith.

His poetry in fact provides almost a text-book example of the vision and the literary "style" which Auerbach finds in Old Testament literature. Auerbach observes that the Homeric preoccupation with a clearly articulated, uniformly illuminated sensory surface, in which everything is externalized and accounted for, is largely absent from the Biblical stories.¹ The empirical foreground yields precedence to spiritual and psychological matters running far beneath the surface, and only such aspects of a story as bear on these are narrated. These episodes derive their significance and coherence not from a "horizontal" linkage in the phenomenal, but rather from a "vertical" or symbolic connection to the secret purposes of God and to man's unexpressed responses. Both the impact and the difficulty of a poem like "Black and Secret Man" arises from just such a "Biblical" style:

These are the pictures that I took: you see
 The garden here outside my home. You see
 The roots which hung my father, mother's
 Tangled hedge, this runnelled creeper vine.
 Here is the tree where in the summer hung
 The guest of summer, temple-haunting martlet.
 And here the tree with twenty mortal murders
 On its crown.

This sort of poetry, characterized like the Old Testament by "certain parts brought into high relief, others left obscure, abruptness, suggestive influence of the unexpressed, 'background' quality, multiplicity of meanings and need for interpretation",² is also characteristically "modern". However, Mandel's Jewish background may account at least in part for the sensibility underlying the method.

In his discussion of the Old Testament narratives, Auerbach also stresses the relative depth of their characterizations, and their concern with the developmental and problematic aspects of human existence.³ Although these are again typical of modern literature, the almost obsessive self-exploration in Mandel's poetry, his preoccupation with evil and madness, and his search for a viable spiritual and psychological stance, could perhaps be classified as Hebraic. In particular, his concern with disintegration and degradation as a prelude to integrity follows the

pattern of humiliation and exaltation in the careers of the Biblical heroes.⁴ The macabre treatment of familial relationships in such poems as "Joy of Conquest", "Estevan Saskatchewan", "Black and Secret Man" and "Pictures in an institution" recalls Auerbach's observation that in Jewish life the connection between "the domestic and the spiritual, between the paternal blessings and the divine blessing, lead to daily life being permeated with the stuff of conflict, often with poison."⁵ This saturation of day to day existence with a profound and mysterious significance until it becomes supercharged with the "sublime, tragic and problematic"⁶ may also explain why in Mandel's poetry even the commonplace and the insignificant become charged with a strange and sometimes terrible *mana*.

All of the above comments can of course be summarized by saying that Mandel is a romantic. His, moreover, is a romanticism which is "decadent" in Tindall's sense of a late efflorescence of a particular movement which pushes its implications to the limits of extremity or elaboration.⁷ His first three volumes in particular can be seen as providing a Canadian counterpart to the late nineteenth and early twentieth century writers in whom romanticism reaches its logical or illogical conclusions.

Romanticism, and late romanticism in particular, is intimately related to the spiritual crisis which has been brewing since the end of the eighteenth century, and it is not surprising that spiritual upset and rebellion should form two major ingredients in Mandel's poetry. Like those of many of the romantics and the existentialists, his troubles may centre in the fact that something has gone wrong either with God or with man's relationship to Him. In "Day of Atonement: Standing", Mandel in a state of semi-rebellion confronts a "fierce" God, and it is obvious that only drastic measures can mend the relationship. In *An Idiot Joy* there are murmurings that God, if not uncaring or absent, has at least "failed to be unambiguous" in matters deeply concerning the poet. In this type of situation, the old values based on religious faith, which traditionally substantiated and regulated almost every aspect of civilized life, inevitably become either dead or oppressive. As "Hebraism" suggests negatively through its irony, this particular crisis will be felt with special acuteness by an individual from a background which was saturated with religion:

The law is the law and is
terribly Hebrew which is as you
know mostly poems about cooking
and meat to be cured in water and
salt and children to be counted

for pages of generation amid clean
and also unclean women

If God is still present in this world of sterile regulation, it is in the form of Joyce's *deo boia*, and the law and order which He sanctions have a punitive rather than a saving force. The whole of the present dispensation in fact becomes demonic and destructive:

When the echo of the last footstep dies
and on the empty street you turn empty eyes,
what do you think that you will see?
A hangman and a hanging tree.

Such a vision quite naturally promotes an attitude of rebelliousness which can affect every aspect of the life of the afflicted individual. It is seen as morally imperative to break with the old covenant in all its manifestations in search of new values. In Mandel's poetry this drama of multiple rebellion is acted out particularly in *An Idiot Joy*. Thus, in "Psalm 24" modern Judaism is seen as being no longer an intimately lived experience like the religion of David, but rather a rabbinical bookishness which does violence to life and must therefore be cast off. "The madness of our polity" rejects the present political and social order as the systematized sadism of bloodthirsty savages:

On the prairies where I lived
a boy who put a needle in a gopher's eye
knew more of civil law than all my friends,

The logical answer to such an establishment is the militant anarchism of "The burning man" and "Whence cometh our help?"

In Mandel's poetry even the workaday world can become a Kafkaesque nightmare in which the individual is imprisoned and destroyed by a demonic power-structure. In the first of the poems in *Trio*, an office-building becomes a labyrinth in which the poet, after hours of bemused wandering, is finally confronted by the Minotaur of authority. "Pictures in an institution" similarly portrays the university campus in terms of an insane authoritarianism which can only provoke a violent reply. Finally, it should be mentioned that Mandel's rebellion includes a psychological revolt against consciousness. If it is the reason and morality which we consciously accept, that have created the hangman's world, then it is only in the dark recesses of the Freudian or Jungian unconscious, however terrible these may seem initially, that we can possibly find salvation. This explains the poet's emphasis in *An Idiot Joy* upon the irrational as a force which is capable of

sweeping away the old, dead order. Idiots and barbarians provide at least a "kind of solution" to the problems of the modern world.

Mandel's poetry not only documents the various facets of existential rebellion, but also illustrates the danger inherent in cutting the umbilical cord of tradition. Urizen is expiring, but he is still alive enough to condemn to death, and the rebel Atlas-like assumes a terrible burden of guilt and anxiety. Thus, in "Thief Hanging in Baptist Halls", the poet's rejection of "polite vegetation, deans, a presbyterian sun,/brick minds quaintly shaped in Gothic and glass" is accompanied by a feeling of humiliating public condemnation:

I wish he would not shrug
and smile weakly at me
as if ashamed that he is hanging there,
his dean's suit fallen off, his leg cocked
as if to run
or (too weak, too tired, too undone)
to do what can be done
about his nakedness.

Nor is this sense of reprobation unwarranted. *Black and Secret Man* was, its author tells us, "written so that I could confront and recognize whatever is dark in human nature, and to discover how much of it is a reflection of self". Such pieces as "Secret Flower", "The burning man" and "The front lines" suggest that there is in fact as much evil to be exorcised from the rebel himself as there is in the world which he attacks. "To a friend who sued the mayor and lost" stresses this point by means of Camus' paradox of the altruistic revolutionary falling to the same moral level as his opponents.

The existential rebel is not only burdened with his personal albatross of evil and guilt, but is ultimately threatened with the disintegration of both his psyche and his world-order. His revolt brings with it alienation and a lack of spiritual guidelines. A new self and a new world must somehow be forged out of emptiness and chaos in a terrible isolation. For Mandel, as we have said, the only hope seems to lie in a surrender to the black and turbulent forces of the unconscious in the hope that they carry within themselves the seeds of a new dispensation. The ever-present possibility of madness which this gamble involves is a significant theme in his work. In the early piece "Orpheus", the act of poetic creation, which for Mandel is part and parcel of the revolt against consciousness, leads to the *sparagmos* of the personality. On the other hand, "Crusoe" in *An Idiot Joy* suggests that the poet has written "in order not to go mad". That his art may

indeed serve as a prophylaxis, releasing and objectifying his inner tensions, is suggested by the fact that many of his poems are permeated with what "Manner of Suicide" terms "the archaic symbolism of the psychotic". Thus, the macabre methods of self-extermination catalogued in that poem are really the grotesque projections of derangement. The poet evidently feels that there is a very real danger of suicide or insanity forestalling a spiritual rebirth.

However, there is in fact method behind much of the apparent madness of Mandel's imagery. Like Crawford, Jay Macpherson and Reaney, he is a myth-making poet, and some grasp of the theory and practice of mythopoeia is essential to an understanding of his work. Historically speaking, Mandel's myth-making proclivity is another aspect of his romanticism, being traceable through such twentieth-century visionaries as Pound, Yeats and Edith Sitwell to the climate of sensibility which produced the poetry of Shelley and Blake. It should, however, be noted that besides the influence of esoteric romanticism, the technique of the early poetry in particular shows a good deal of the more deliberate intellectuality of such modern "metaphysicals" as T. S. Eliot and Robert Lowell. This is especially true of the imagery, in which Mandel often achieves a powerful fusion of the romantic visionary metaphor with the metaphysical conceit. In some of the poems in *An Idiot Joy* there is a much freer association of images, but these pieces are closer to surrealism than to anything in English romanticism.

Speaking in rather crude generalities, we can say that romantic myth-making originates with a vision of the universe as being substantiated by a metaphysical principle by which it is rendered both one and alive. In the early poem "Aspects in a Mirror" Mandel expresses this sense of the fundamental unity of the cosmos in terms of the Platonism which has contributed so much to the myth-making tradition:

Delight me no longer with this glass,
There are many things I should have done.
All images grow dimmer, pass.
The many are sustained in one.

Because of the ultimate oneness of the world, the distinctions made by empirical consciousness between different places, times and material phenomena are in the last analysis meaningless. One mark of the myth-making poet is accordingly a radical vision which telescopes space and history and breaks down the logical compartments into which post-Aristotelian man has increasingly tended to divide his experience. Thus in the series of pieces which open his selection of *Trio*, Mandel the poet lost in the office building becomes the ancient Greek Theseus

braving the labyrinth; an amateur aviator, a combination of Daedalus and Icarus: a mining accident, the dismemberment of Orpheus. Just as the myth-making poet plays tricks with place and time, so he violates at will such "reasonable" distinctions as those normally drawn between man and nature, or between the animal, the vegetable, and the mineral:

But parrots bring in sleep only the surly shape
Of images of men turned into beasts
Carrying their loads of shame upon their backs,
That forest where the trees are shapes of girls
And every stone an image of a face, and eyes
Are in the flowers, and I could weep for all
Those lost and stoned and silent faces.

Ultimately, these lines suggest a poetic world in which, subject to the artist's intentions, anything is equatable with anything else. The poet's vision of faces in stone is especially characteristic of the mythopoeic sensibility. On the one hand, Mandel's image shows the proclivity of the myth-maker for representing everything in terms of life, and of human life in particular. On the other, it illustrates the characteristic belief that man can descend spiritually down the scale of being even as far as the inanimate. In "Leda and the Swan" and "Rapunzel" such downward transformations become part of a nightmare sexual fantasy, while in "Entomology" the vicious sterility of a Urizenic society is expressed in images of insect-life. However, in "The apology", a passage into the inanimate is associated with a process resembling the *samana* techniques for escaping the ego:

I want the table to appreciate my
delight in its leaves: I will stand on
four legs and try hard to be wooden
and brown with folding leaves
I will fold and unfold my leaves
like a wooden butterfly
and birthday cards can be put on me

Both this passage and the one quoted immediately before it imply that not only are categories which carve up space, time and matter in the last analysis unreal, but also that the dynamic unity of the universe finds expression in the metamorphosis of one form into another. In imagining himself a table, Mandel is participating in the activity of an "esemplastic power" which drives matter through an endless succession of changes. The next logical step is for the myth-maker to see metamorphosis in terms of a series of interlocking cycles of organic

growth and decay, evolution and atavism which are manifested in every aspect of existence. That Mandel is at least aware of such a possibility is suggested in "The moon in all her phases":

I'd say, in the old manner:
she [the moon] imagines our existence,
its changes, illusions

However, such a vision is yet to appear in his poetry in a systematically elaborated form.

It has been a standard assumption of romanticism that man is linked to the One which underlies the universe through his unconscious mind. With some apparent reinforcement from the psychology of Jung, this has obviously been adopted as a basic tenet of Mandel's poetic faith. Traditional symbols of the unconscious, including the cave, the labyrinthine building, and enveloping water, recur frequently in his work. His mythopoeia thus belongs to the world of archetypal symbolism which finds expression in dreams, hallucinations and madness, in primitive myth and legend, in folk and fairy-tales, and in the literary mode which Northrop Frye terms romance.⁸ It shares with these diverse phenomena a logic of symbolic association very different from the processes of the conscious reason, and an emotional pitch more intense than that considered proper to mimetic fiction.

As Jung quite properly emphasizes, the archetypes of the unconscious are ambivalent,⁹ and in linking himself to the *weltgeist* through the unconscious, the poet becomes possessed by a Dionysian energy which is at the same time good and evil, joyous and painful, beautiful and fearful, creative and destructive. From its very beginning romanticism was impelled to stress the negative side of the equation, and in its later phases a possession by and obsession with its demonic elements leads to the phenomenon of "the romantic agony". As the poem "Orpheus" clearly shows, Mandel is very much a poet of the romantic agony. In order to gain the divine inspiration which is necessary for his art, the singer must venture into the black "mine" of the unconscious. However, the "daemonic, chthonic powers"¹⁰ are terrible and destructive as well as creative, and the poet undergoes destruction at their hands:

Who found his body and who found his head
And who wiped god from off his eyes and face?

It is accordingly not surprising that mythopoeia should in Mandel's work be

associated with the nightmare world of madness, perversion, evil and violent crime. The poet is in fact "a black and secret man of blood" and, as "Manner of suicide" suggests, his act of creation is a form of self-destruction. In "Thief Hanging in Baptist Halls", the artist is represented as both immolated and condemned, thus powerfully combining two motifs of the romantic agony which recur a number of times in Mandel's poetry.

However, although the world of mythopoeia becomes one of satanism, horror and dissolution, it is paradoxically necessary for man's salvation. The poet, by submitting himself to the Dionysian through his unconscious, obtains the spiritual power to sweep away the sterile and demonic world of the hangman god. As is the case with the destruction wrought by the revolutionary, this negative process becomes a terrible but necessary first step in the recreation of a new order both externally and within. Through madness, perversion and evil, the individual's old spiritually dead order of conscience and consciousness will be shattered. Moreover, as Joseph Campbell suggests with regard to the hero-quest, the pain and disintegration which must be undergone are really the negative face of ambivalent archetypes, which if boldly approached, will show themselves to be propitious.¹¹ Through his very evil and agony, the poet returns to the radical innocence of "an idiot joy" in which true creativity and a "singular love" become possible. The imagination, in addition to being a power of vision, is thus one of recreation and redemption. The condemned and tormented artist is really analogous to the crucified Christ, whose act of sacrifice has regenerated both man and the world. Significantly enough, the poet's passion in "Thief Hanging in Baptist Halls" is followed by a personal apocalypse:

He dangles while the city bursts in green and steel,
black flower in the mouth of my speech:
The proud halls reel,
gothic and steel melt in the spinning sun.

Similarly, in "Manner of suicide", Mandel's contemplation of the most gruesome methods of self-destruction leads in the end to the revelation of "a new heaven and a new earth" in which man is in the loving care of a beneficent Divinity. Such glimpses of illumination may perhaps foreshadow a more sustained visionary ecstasy such as we encounter in the poetry of Blake or Edith Sitwell.

HAVING ATTEMPTED to place Mandel's poetry in context while touching upon some of his major themes and techniques, I will venture a

campus police
will see to co-eds' underwear

Despite his evident virtues, Mandel seems to me to remain a promising rather than a mature or a major artist. One of the biggest deficiencies of at least the work before *An Idiot Joy* is the relative narrowness of its emotional range. This is to be connected with the fact that the besetting sin which the poet reveals to us is perhaps not the Oedipus complex or a desire for violence but rather an inordinate fixation of a too, too sensitive self upon the negative. However, a piece like "Messages" shows that Mandel is capable of breaking out of his emotional straightjacket, and it is to be hoped that time will bring a more complete visionary conversion from the romantic agony to a divine comedy.

Mandel's poetry also seems to lack the all-embracing, precisely articulated world-picture and poetic structure which characterize the great visionaries. The backbone of the artistic stature of Dante, Milton, Blake and Yeats is that all of them managed to order a wide range of experience around a spiritual centre, and also to develop a syntax of ideas and images. Something of this sort would provide Mandel with a basis for more ambitious poetic structures than his present brief pieces, or at least give a greater degree of coherence and direction to his future output.

There are also a number of technical flaws in the fabric of Mandel's poetry. In the earlier volumes, his intellect occasionally escapes from the control necessary for artistic success, and blemishes his work with preciousness, artificiality or obscurity:

What he was skulled in and built, the frame of,
The grain and shelter of his house and place,
Bone's trust of jointure and contract, all claims have
Yielded in him who is separate and vagrant in flesh and place.

The typographical doodling of many of the poems in *An Idiot Joy*, although currently fashionable, also seems at times a bit contrived for comfort.

It is very much to Mandel's credit that his intellectual control prevents the melodramatic pitch which is proper to his world of romance from rising to the shrillness of Yeats' "hysterical women". However, in some of the poems in *An Idiot Joy*, his voice does descend to the quaver of sentimentality. Such conceptions as "dreaming beasts with huge unhurt eyes" and "walnut-coloured men" who in "far-off wind-swept voices/revolve their prayers as if they were wheels or stars" hover on the verge of whimsical pathos. The following passage has undoubtedly crossed the border-line:

Tonight
 in the sky's filing-cabinet
 I discover my unwritten letters,
 xerox of the last mss
 by an unnamed, doubtless poor, scholar.

In his future poetry, Mandel should definitely eschew the Charlie-Chaplinesque.

Moreover, even at its best, his work seldom rises beyond a rhetorical utterance to the lyricism which is the mark of the fully integrated poetic sensibility. The technical toughness of the early volumes precludes the singing voice, and even the more flexible verse of *An Idiot Joy* is rarely lyrical. Only on a few occasions, as in "The Speaking Earth", does he approach the fusion of intellect, emotion, and music which we find, for example, in Herbert's "Virtue". Perhaps Mandel should experiment more with the formal disciplines exemplified in the great lyric tradition of Spenser, Keats and Tennyson.

By way of conclusion, it should be stressed that Mandel's poetry shows development as well as continuity. If nothing else, the pieces in *An Idiot Joy* display a gain in technical suavity. Mandel's further growth as an artist is only to be expected, and it will be interesting to see what lines it will take. In particular, the future will tell whether he belongs to the company of what Frye calls unfolding artists, or whether he is a poet of metamorphic growth like Yeats. His work to date appears to be the expression of the metamorphic spiritual pattern of crisis and conversion. If this is indeed the case, his art may show some spectacular developments. As happened with Edith Sitwell, a relatively sudden onset of visionary ecstasy may be accompanied by an efflorescence of technique. Should this happen, Mandel may produce poetry which bears the same relationship to his present work as a butterfly to the chrysalis from which it painfully emerged.

¹ Erich Auerbach, *Mimesis* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1953), 11-12.

² *Ibid.*, 23.

³ *Ibid.*, 17-20.

⁴ *Ibid.*, 18.

⁵ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁶ *Ibid.*, 22.

⁷ William York Tindall, *Forces in Modern British Literature* (New York: Alfred A. Knopf, 1947), 18-19.

⁸ Northrop Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957), 33.

⁹ C. G. Jung, "Aion," *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung*, Vol. 9, Pt. II (New York: Pantheon Books, 1959), 68-69.

¹⁰ T. S. Eliot, "The Dry Salvages", V. 11, 40-41.

¹¹ Joseph Campbell, *The Hero with a Thousand Faces* (Cleveland: World Publishing Co., 1956), 97-171.

LA NEGRITUDE ET LA LITTERATURE QUEBECOISE

Max Dorsinville

C'EST UN POSTULAT RECONNU dans la critique littéraire que le social soit contenu dans le littéraire, c'est-à-dire que la littérature, en tant qu'acte spécifique issu de l'imagination créatrice de l'artiste, nécessite pour sa matière un contenu issu du contingent reconnu et souvent éprouvé par l'ensemble des hommes. C'est ainsi que pour Aristote Mimesis, ou "représentation de la Nature", n'est pas autre chose que l'action bonne ou mauvaise des hommes, pris tels qu'ils ont été, tels qu'ils sont, ou tels qu'ils devraient être.¹ Cette fonction sociale, en effet, est si fondamentale à la poésie, ou à l'art, que Platon y voyait une activité indésirable dans sa République, né méritant que l'anathème.² Malgré les nouvelles interprétations, tendances et approches, depuis le recours aux modèles de Horace, l'insistance sur le lyrisme personnel de Longin, jusqu'aux New Critics américains et anglais de l'époque moderne, en passant par l'arbitraire de la "Belle nature" du dix-septième siècle — il n'en demeure pas moins que la critique, fidèle à l'intuition première d'Aristote, reconnaît l'inhérente vérité et efficacité du postulat.

Le fait qu'il y ait constante inter-action entre le littéraire et le social, le lieu imaginé, ou recréé, et le lieu tel qu'il est dans la réalité conventionnelle, est démontré de plus à travers l'histoire littéraire. Que ce soit chez les Décadents de la fin et du tournant du siècle, où un Gide et un Wilde se réclament d'un esthétisme liant l'art et la vie, ou chez les Romantiques, avec un Goethe, par exemple, qui puise à même la chronique des faits divers pour la matière de *Werther*, qui une fois devenu oeuvre d'art suscite par contre la conséquence sociale du Weltschmerz. On pourrait aussi citer les appels répétés d'André Breton, de Tristan Tzara, de Guillaume Apollinaire pour la rencontre des pôles vie et art dans l'oeuvre surréaliste, dadaïste ou futuriste... C'est donc dire qu'il y a lieu de croire, avec Northrop Frye,³ que l'une des avenues les plus prometteuses pour la critique littéraire moderne soit l'investigation dans la littérature de l'expérience

collective de l'homme, en se prévalant des données des sciences humaines telles que la psychologie, l'anthropologie, etc. De là la connaissance des mythes, des archétypes, des symboles nous fournit un instrument fort utile et même indispensable pour la critique, étant donné que ces échaffaudages culturels soutiennent et le social et le littéraire.

Il n'est pas étonnant, par conséquent, que la critique québécoise contemporaine, délaissant l'historicisme suranné, l'impressionisme facile et le recours au potinage dogmatisé s'attache de plus en plus à analyser la littérature du Québec, partant de neuves approches. Déjà, il y a quelques années, Jean Le Moynes avait fait l'inventaire des mythes et de certains archétypes bien québécois.⁴ Il est repris, rajeuni et précisé maintenant par Gérard Bessette.⁵ Et surtout, les thèmes, les images, les symboles du Pays, de la Parole, de l'Appartenance, de l'Exil, de la Mère, sont approfondis dans les revues comme *Parti-Pris*, ou *Liberté*, par la critique universitaire établie ou en voie de s'établir (les thèses de Maîtrise ou de Doctorat).

Dans cette "littérature en ébullition", il me semble qu'il y a un mythe qui se fait de plus en plus fréquent et mérite qu'on y porte une attention critique. Il s'agit, on l'aura deviné, du mythe Nègre, sous-tendant le concept de la Négritude.

GILLES HÉNAULT est peut-être l'un des premiers écrivains du Québec à faire utilisation du mythe lorsque pour signifier le mal de vivre ancestral il s'exclame :

Avons-nous assez joué les Crusocé
 les nègres blancs, les insulaires
 qui n'avaient jamais navigué
 sauf pour la chasse à la chimère!⁶

Il est repris par Jacques Brault qui spécifie encore plus, lorsqu'il fait ressortir que l'aliénation historique des siens est, en partie, fondée sur la "chimère" entretenue :

Nous
 les seuls nègres aux belles certitudes blanches
 ô caravelles et grands appareillages des enfants-messies
 nous les sauvages cravatés
 nous attendons depuis trois siècles pêle-mêle
 la revanche de l'histoire
 la fée de l'occident
 la fonte des glaciers⁷

Paul Chamberland poursuit un même cheminement, et la hantise de nommer le “mal” québécois s’incarne dans *l’Afficheur hurle*. Reconnaisant son appartenance au tragique viscéral et senti, l’afficheur hurle, “je suis nègre nègre blanc québécois”.⁸ Plutôt que de se tourner vers l’ancestrale France et l’héritage traditionnel, l’afficheur, instruit d’une neuve compréhension du soi individuel et collectif, trace un nouvel itinéraire historique; celui du Tiers Monde des opprimés:

(quand j’irai à New-York c’est vers Harlem que j’appareillerai et non par exotisme j’ai trop le souci de parentés précises je connais le goût de la matraque à Alabama il y a des fraternités dans le malheur que vos libertés civiles savent mal dissimuler)⁹

Chez les romanciers, il y a une semblable appropriation du mythe. Jacques Godbout, par exemple, place en épigraphe à son roman, *Le Couteau sur la table*, comme “signifiant” le protagoniste à la recherche de son identité la comptine:

I, Ni, Mi. / Ni, Maï, Ni, Mo
 Catch a nigger by the toe
 If he hollers let him go
 I, Ni, Mi. / Ni, Maï, Ni, Mo¹⁰

Wilfrid Lemoine, pour sa part, dans *Le Funambule*, fait dialoguer un Américain et son héros Canadien français; et Sébastien identifie les siens de la façon suivante:

— Isn’t that funny! I can’t understand. All the world seems to speak English nowadays, but up there, with the British Queen and everything, you’re still French!

— Let’s say it’s like the colour of the skin, you can’t change it. Let’s say we are what you would call the Canadian Niggers!¹¹

Enfin, il y a cette apostrophe par un personnage du roman de Carrier, *La Guerre, Yes Sir!* à l’égard des soldats anglo-canadiens qui ramènent la dépouille du jeune Corriveau:

On voit par là que les maudits Anglais ont l’habitude d’avoir des nègres ou des Canadiens français pour fermer leurs portes. C’est ce qu’il devait faire Corriveau: ouvrir et fermer les portes des Anglais.¹²

Pour conclure, Claude Jasmin illustre l’antinomie Nègre-Noir, Mythe-Fait, dont il sera question plus loin. Un des principaux personnages d’*Ethel et le terroriste* est Slide, un Noir Américain, identifié et participant à l’intrigue comme un humain tout court, son caractère racial étant absolument accidentel. Paul, le

terroriste Canadien français, par contre, est vu sous couvert mythique: "Je suis ce nègre qui balbutie un dialecte, nu et masqué, et avec cette pagaie authentique, je promène Ethel sur le Zambèze. Je suis un primitif".¹³

Il faudrait de plus mentionner le mystérieux Ivoirien d'Aquin, Olympe Ghezso-Quénum,¹⁴ le climat interne et externe dans lequel baigne l'*Aquarium* de Jacques Godbout, et j'en passe, qui sont des caractéristiques indiquant à tout le moins une prise de conscience de la Négritude, dans son essence (à voir plus loin).

Il n'importe pas à notre propos de retracer la fortune du terme Nègre dans la littérature québécoise, c'est évident. Plutôt, après avoir souligné la présence probante du mythe, il s'agit de s'entendre sur sa signification dans la perspective du concept général de la Négritude. Qu'est-ce que c'est que "Nègre"? Qu'est-ce qu'est la "Négritude"? Aussitôt que ces questions auront été répondues, on pourra reprendre le fil de la discussion.

UN "NÈGRE", ce n'est pas un Noir. Il y a une race Noire, mais il n'y a pas de race "Nègre", et bien malin le scientifique qui de nos jours utilise la notion même de race comme hypothèse de travail.¹⁵ Mais, au point de vue "social" on nomme certains individus, ou groupes d'individus, "Nègres", et ce dans certains pays à passé ou présent raciste.¹⁶ La distinction entre le "social" et le "scientifique" est d'importance, car là repose les bases mythiques du terme Nègre. Le "Nègre" donc a été nommé par autrui, il ne s'est pas nommé lui-même tel.¹⁷ Premier élément du mythe. Second, l'individu nommé "Nègre", historiquement un individu de race Noire, a été nommé tel pour signifier son absence d'humanité, de dignité et d'individualité. Ce qui veut dire que c'est plus ou moins une brute, mi-animale, mi-humaine, bonne à accomplir des tâches de bête de somme et nullement pénétrée, va sans dire, des "lumières" de l'esprit, de l'imagination, de la raison, qui font la gloire de l'homme civilisé, bref de celui qui "nomme" les choses. (Ce qui fait dire à Césaire, "les pulsations de l'humanité s'arrêtent aux portes de la nègrerie".)¹⁸

En vérité, toujours dans une perspective historique (et j'entends par là l'histoire du colonialisme, bien entendu), le "Nègre" est une créature des ténèbres, c'est-à-dire une créature pénétrée de forces et d'instincts primitifs, donc barbares, qu'il faut maîtriser, subjugué, et à tout prix tenir au loin, car il est aux antipodes de l'homme éclairé, civilisé, pour qui son existence est une menace constante, un danger pour sa culture et sa civilisation. Le "Nègre" représente les ténèbres et le

primitivisme auxquels l'homme civilisé ne tient pas à retourner. Pas besoin d'être grand clerc pour savoir ce qu'une telle négation de Soi entraîne, car si l'homme complet est celui qui sait reconnaître et assumer *et ses ténèbres et ses lumières*, la négation d'un des termes de cette dualité entraîne la déshumanisation et ses horreurs. Là est tout le drame de Kurtz et le génie de Conrad dans *Heart of Darkness*:

This is the "horror" that Conrad's Marlowe came to confront in his journey in search of Kurtz, when, upon seeing the fundamental inhumanity of what the European has done to the African, he understood that in reality the world of darkness that was categorized as existing there was really the darkness that all individuals carry within themselves. The darkness that the European systematically and institutionally shut himself from, in his psychology and in his social and political institutions.¹⁹

En effet:

In naming a man "nègre," the European was trying to exorcise himself of his demons; in categorizing a whole body of people as inferior and of brutish character there was, albeit unconsciously, a deliberate and systematic projection of the European's irrational destructive forces that could not be recognized in a civilization of "light." Thus slavery is the institutional projection of the European's irrational unknown destructive forces.²⁰

Et c'est ainsi qu'à partir d'un tel mythe social que l'histoire connaît toujours les apartheid sud-africains et rhodésiens, et leurs parallèles.

Est-ce que, conséquemment, d'un point de vue littéraire, nous n'avons pas dans pareille mythologie les sèves de toute la question moderne de l'Absurde, des préoccupations existentialistes de Sartre, Camus, Genêt, et bien d'autres? C'est que, dans son essence, le mythe Nègre est peut-être l'un des grands mythes modernes en littérature (quant au point de vue social . . .). Il n'est pas étonnant que lorsque ceci fut compris tout artiste préoccupé par les problèmes de l'aliénation, de la déshumanisation, les questions de situation pour l'individu dans une société qui le "nomme" sans *lui* demander comment *lui* se nomme dira après Rimbaud, "Je suis Nègre".²¹ C'est ainsi que William Blake, bien-pensant, s'évertuera à désamorcer le contenu social du mythe en proclamant la blancheur de l'âme du jeune Noir ("And I am black, but O! my soul is white").²² Plus près de nous, Jean-Paul Sartre (l'Orphée Noir) et Jean Genêt (*Les Nègres*) ont compris la dimension absurde du mythe, et, fort de cette conscience, ont indiqué les possibilités révolutionnaires de la Négritude. Ce que ne manquera pas d'exploiter Frantz Fanon, par exemple, lorsqu'il proclame dans *Les Damnés de la*

Terre: “Retrouver son peuple, c’est quelquefois dans cette période vouloir être nègre, non un nègre pas comme les autres mais un véritable nègre, un chien de nègre, tel que le veut le Blanc”.²³ Dès lors, la Négritude est à la fois un concept culturel et une arme révolutionnaire. Cette dualité s’avère constante dans les écrits d’Aimé Césaire (*Cahier d’un Retour au Pays Natal, les Armes Miraculeuses*) et de Léopold Senghor. Ce dernier peut bien tenter de définir la Négritude comme étant “l’ensemble des valeurs culturelles du monde noir”,²⁴ mais on sent bien qu’il est conscient d’une certaine contradiction dans les termes (“Ce n’est pas nous qui avons inventé les expressions ‘art nègre’, ‘musique nègre’, ‘danse nègre’ . . .)²⁵, puisqu’il est question “d’assumer”²⁶ la Négritude, c’est-à-dire, dans l’optique existentialiste de s’armer de l’Absurde pour mieux en triompher, pour faire dans le littéraire, en s’armant du mythe, ce que Fanon recherche dans la praxis: “Le concept de négritude, par exemple, était l’antithèse affective sinon logique de cette insulte que l’homme blanc faisait à l’humanité. Cette négritude ruée contre le mépris du blanc s’est révélée dans certains secteurs seule capable de lever interdictions et malédictions”.²⁷

La Négritude, en réalité, demeure un concept, un effort rationnel pour comprendre et de là dépasser un mythe, ou un bagage mythique, imposé par l’autre, dans un dessein destructeur. Mais, traitée comme moyen ou artifice littéraire, la Négritude est mythe littéraire.

Aux Etats-Unis, des écrivains comme Norman Mailer (*The White Negro*) et Jack Kerouac (*On the Road*) ont pris conscience de la Négritude, malheureusement selon la conception Hipster de la fin des années cinquante. Le “Nègre” est le mythe de l’anti-conformisme de la Beat Generation, il est l’exemple du suprême Hipster, tenu en dehors de la société et qui fait la nique aux bien-pensants: à lui le Jazz, les drogues, le sexe, le plaisir . . . c’est le poète visionnaire sans sa plume. Richard Wright (*Native Son*), Ralph Ellison (*Invisible Man*), Jean Toomer (*Cane*), pour ne nommer que ceux-là, représentent bien ces écrivains Noirs Américains, qui, à l’instar de Césaire et de Senghor, ont approfondi la Négritude comme concept et comme mythe pour situer le drame de l’homme moderne, pour ne pas dire celui du Noir Américain. Ellison est celui qui a peut-être le mieux “signifié” le potentiel destructeur du mythe Nègre, à la façon de Conrad, lorsqu’il fait dire à son homme invisible: “Who knows but that, on the lower frequencies, I speak for you?”²⁸ Comme quoi il n’y a pas d’Objet (le “nommé”) sans Sujet (celui qui “nomme”), et vice-versa; en “nommant” l’Objet, le Sujet est inévitablement compromis dans le rapport dialectique qui s’établit: autrement dit, selon Ellison, la négation de l’homme Noir Américain

constitue irrémédiablement la négation du Blanc Américain. Les deux s'éliminant, l'Homme est assassiné.

LA NÉGRITUDE est donc un mythe littéraire qui repose sur le mythe social du Nègre. Elle l'assume, l'approfondit, et, puisque le medium choisi pour en traiter est celui de l'art, la Négritude est l'affirmation d'un humanisme. Partout, ses chantres, Césaire ou Senghor, Fanon ou Ellison, diront que dire Nègre c'est dire l'homme aliéné, l'homme partout dépossédé dans sa personne, dans son Soi individuel ou collectif. De dire Césaire :

Comme il y a des hommes-hyènes et des hommes-
panthères, je serais un homme-juif
un homme-cafre
un homme-hindou-de-Calcutta
un homme-de-Harlem-qui-ne-vote-pas²⁹

Conjuguant le social au littéraire, la politique au poétique, la négation à l'affirmation, la Négritude n'est pas autre chose que la condition de l'homme moderne en quête de son humanité perdue. Tant est-il que le combat pour n'importe quel groupe opprime est le combat pour l'Homme, et la poète, pour Césaire, Chamberland, Miron devient combattant :

[mon coeur] ne faites point de moi cet homme de haine pour
qui je n'ai que haine
car pour me cantonner en cette unique race
vous savez pourtant mon amour tyrannique
vous savez que ce n'est point par haine des autres
races
que je m'exige bêcheur de cette unique race
que ce que je veux
c'est pour la faim universelle
pour la soif universelle³⁰

Est-il surprenant, par conséquent, qu'au Québec, pays où se bousculent les hommes et les idées dans une quête exacerbée pour l'affirmation du Soi, le mythe de la Négritude soit de plus en plus utilisé comme levure littéraire (et slogan social) ? Il a semblé à certains jeunes critiques Québécois qu'en effet circonscrire l'histoire de l'homme d'ici c'est dire l'aliénation, la dépossession. Ainsi on a pu dire :

Calling himself "Negre," the French Canadian assumes a term that expresses his sense of alienation and dispossession. As the term means something "other" than what is presumably identified, as it is basically founded on a misconception and a historical and psychological delusion, the French Canadian modern writers say indeed that the understanding of what it means to be a French Canadian is to understand what a Nègre is.³¹

Mais qu'entend-t-on par "aliénation", "dépossession" québécoise? A d'autres, je laisse le soin de politiser la question. Mais, puisqu'ici le fait littéraire nous préoccupe d'abord, et avant tout, comment la Négritude en tant que symbole-archétype s'incarne-t-elle dans la littérature du Québec? Si on s'autorise, comme point de départ, de la position des critiques de *Parti-Pris* tels que Paul Chamberland.

Notre fuite dans le passé, dans la légende, n'a été qu'un mécanisme d'auto-défense contre l'envahissement du présent anglo-saxon. Incapables de nous faire le sujet de notre propre histoire, nous nous sommes livrés en objet de l'histoire des autres.³²

ou des accents déchirants d'un Gaston Miron

Je dis que je suis atteint dans mon âme, mon être, je dis que l'altérité pèse sur nous comme un glacier qui fond sur nous, qui nous déstructure, nous englué, nous dilue. Je dis que cette atteinte est la dernière phase d'une dépossession de soi comme être, ce qui suppose qu'elle a été précédée par l'aliénation du politique et de l'économique.³³

il est fort possible de considérer (puisque c'est semblable prise de conscience qui soutient les thèmes du Pays, de la Parole, chez les Pilon, Préfontaine, Giguère, etc.) l'histoire littéraire (et culturelle, qui entendrait au moins une part d'idéologie sociale) du Québec dans une perspective qui démontrerait précisément que le sentiment d'Exil, la recherche du Soi, individuel et collectif, la soif de l'enracinement sont des constantes, symptomatiques de la Négritude québécoise.

Dès lors, un des premiers thèmes à s'inscrire dans une telle perspective est celui de la mystique messianique, louangée par l'abbé Casgrain ("Quelle action la Providence nous réserve-t-elle en Amérique? Quel rôle nous appelle-t-elle à y exercer? Représentants de la race latine en face de l'élément anglo-saxon, dont l'expansion excessive, l'influence anormales doivent être balancées, de même qu'en Europe, pour le progrès de la civilisation...")³⁴ En consacrant et en célébrant comme dogme des notions aussi aléatoires que celles de Race, Sol, Vertus Traditionnelles, unies, comme le concept marital, dans une allégorie mystico-religieuse, le Messianisme a été pendant de longues années (jusqu'à la

dernière guerre, à vrai dire, où il devait céder sous la pression du démembrement rural et l'essor de la vie citadine; que l'on relise *Bonheur d'Occasion* de Gabrielle Roy) le principal élément-moteur symbolisant le sentiment d'Exil, de déracinement, de dépossession du Québécois en terre d'Amérique. Partant, les caractéristiques principales de la littérature traditionnelle, l'Anglophobie, la Xénophobie, les préoccupations pour la survivance s'axant sur la mystique messianique, la question du terroir, de la race, que l'on retrouve dans *Maria Chapdelaine*, *L'Appel de la Race*, *Menaud Maître-Draveur*, *Trente Arpents*, etc. sont autant d'aspects, sinon de conséquences découlant d'une fondamentale négritude.

Ainsi donc, la littérature de revendication, de "contestation"³⁵ de l'époque moderne s'élevant contre la mystique messianique et ses conséquences, que ce soit chez un Aquin (*Prochain Episode*), ou chez Renaud (*Le Cassé*), Bessette (*Le Librairie*) ou Jasmin (*Ethel et le Terroriste*) témoigne elle aussi dans la perspective de la Négritude. Car chez Aquin comme chez Renaud, et d'autres, la prise de conscience lucide d'une façon de vivre périmée et "imposée" (par les prêcheurs du Messianisme: les Clercs et les "élites" formées par eux), la nécessité d'assumer les égarements passés pour mieux affirmer le présent séculier sont similaires aux constantes d'un Césaire ou d'un Ellison. Les uns et les autres revendiquent l'identité de l'individu ou du groupe dont il est issu, ils désirent "nommer" plutôt que "d'être nommé", "dire" plutôt que "d'être dit". C'est ainsi que Chamberland, Miron, Brault peuvent dire, à l'instar de Césaire, "je pousserai d'une telle raideur le grand cri nègre que les assises du monde en seront ébranlées".³⁶

AUSSI INTÉRESSANTE qu'elle puisse sembler il est fort possible que la perspective de la Négritude, appliquée en tant qu'interprétation historico-littéraire, peut ne pas convaincre entièrement. Qu'à cela ne tienne! Il n'appartient pas à la critique de cerner la littérature dans ce qui prendrait forme de gangue, pour une satisfaction dilettantiste, ou dogmatique quelconque. (Et Dieu sait comment une telle attitude avait trop duré au Québec.) Non, il faut dire avec simplicité qu'en tant que concept critique la Négritude faut pour le Québec, dans ses généralités (aliénation, recherche d'identité, etc.) autant qu'elle vaut pour toute oeuvre littéraire, ou toute littérature, démontrant de telles préoccupations. (Mais on voit d'ici comment pourrait s'étendre le concept, jusqu'à perte de signification). Je crois qu'à ce stade-ci il appartient à la création de sauver la critique, si l'on peut ainsi dire. Afin d'éviter à la critique de sombrer dans le nominalisme, danger toujours présent, il appartient aux poètes et roman-

ciers du Québec, qui s'autorisent d'un mythe reçu, d'approfondir cette Négritude en la "québecisant" en sorte. Il s'agirait pour eux de différencier la part purement sociale du mythe (en soi argument essentiellement politique qui identifie le lot du Québécois-citoyen à celui du Noir historiquement défini, comme c'est le cas chez un Vallières)³⁷ de la part littéraire (qui n'exclue pas le social, comme nous avons vu, mais qui *privilegie* le médium de l'imagination créatrice, puisque l'on présume que faire acte littéraire ce n'est pas faire acte d'orateur). Autrement dit, il appartient aux créateurs québécois de "dire" partant de *leur* champ d'action, à la façon de Genêt, Conrad, Wright, Rimbaud, ce qu'est la négritude québécoise, d'explorer les ténèbres de se savoir Français et Américain, Profane et Religieux, Provincial et Continental, Rêveur et Pragmatique.

Car ne nous leurrions pas, comme dans un premier temps chez Césaire, Fanon, Wright et même Ellison, il est clair que l'utilisation dans la littérature québécoise du mythe social Nègre dans une symbolique souvent plus sociale que littéraire (n'est-ce pas Chamberland qui préface son *Afficheur* en prévenant, "je ne sais plus parler/ je ne sais plus que dire/ la poésie n'existe plus")³⁸ est faite en fonction d'un but politique bien défini. Faudra-t-il attendre sa réalisation pour approfondir le mythe?

A tout évènement, il n'en demeure pas moins que l'apparition d'un mythe nouveau, dans la littérature québécoise, permettant aux Aquin, Godbout, Jasmin, Chamberland de se tenir en compagnie des Ellison Césaire, Wright, Rimbaud est d'une augure qui devrait rassérer ceux qui se demandent encore si la littérature québécoise est de teneur universelle.

¹ *Introduction to Aristotle*, Richard McKeon ed. (New York: The Modern Library, 1947), pp. 624-637.

² *Great Dialogues of Plato*, Wh. D. Rouse, trans. (New York: Mentor, 1956), pp. 393-404.

³ *Anatomy of Criticism* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1957).

⁴ *Convergences* (Montréal: HMH, 1961).

⁵ *Une Littérature en Ebullition* (Montréal: Ed. du Jour, 1968).

⁶ "Notre Jeunesse," in Alain Bosquet ed. *La Poésie Canadienne* (Montréal: HMH, 1966), p. 105.

⁷ "Suite Fraternelle," in Alain Bosquet ed. *La Poésie Canadienne* (Montréal: HMH, 1966), p. 218.

⁸ *L'Afficheur Hurlé* (Montréal: Parti Pris, 1964), p. 71.

⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 59.

¹⁰ *Le Couteau sur la Table* (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1965).

¹¹ *Le Funambule* (Montréal: Cercle du Livre de France, 1965), p. 125.

- ¹² *La Guerre, Yes Sir!* (Montréal: Ed. du Jour, 1968), p. 28.
- ¹³ *Ethel et le Terroriste* (Montréal: Déom, 1964), p. 111.
- ¹⁴ Hubert Aquin, *Trou de Mémoire* (Montréal: Cercle du Livre de France, 1968).
- ¹⁵ Gunnar Myrdal, *An American Dilemma* (New York: Harper and Row, 1962), p. 115.
- ¹⁶ Juan Comas, "Racial Myths, Unesco ed., *The Race Question in Modern Science* (New York: Whiteside, 1956), p. 26.
- ¹⁷ Kenneth Little, "Race and Society," *Ibid.*, p. 201, 210.
- ¹⁸ Aimé Césaire, *Cahier d'un Retour au Pays Natal* (Paris: Présence Africaine, 1956), pp. 61-62.
- ¹⁹ Max Dorsinville, *Black Negroes and White Negroes: A Comparative Analysis of the Black American and the French Canadian Novel of Protest*, Thèse de Maîtrise en Littérature Canadienne Comparée (Inédite), p. 232.
- ²⁰ *Ibid.*, 232-233.
- ²¹ "Une Saison en Enter," in *Oeuvres Poétiques d'Arthur Rimbaud* (Paris: Garnier-Flammarion 1964) p. 121.
- ²² "The Little Black Boy," in *Poems and Prophecies* (London: J. M. Dent and Sons, 1934), p. 10.
- ²³ *Les Damnés de la Terre* (Paris: François Maspéro, 1961), p. 165.
- ²⁴ *Négritude et Humanisme*, Liberté I (Paris: Editions du Seuil, 1964), p. 9.
- ²⁵ *Ibid.*
- ²⁶ *Ibid.*
- ²⁷ Fanon, *Ibid.*, p. 159.
- ²⁸ *Invisible Man* (New York: Signet, 1964), p. 503.
- ²⁹ Césaire, *Ibid.*, p. 39.
- ³⁰ Césaire, *Ibid.*, p. 75.
- ³¹ Dorsinville, *Ibid.*, p. 235.
- ³² Paul Chamberland, "De la Damnation à la Liberté," *Parti Pris* (été 1964), 70.
- ³³ Gaston Miron, "Notes sur le Non-Poème et le Poème," *Parti Pris*, II (Juin-Juillet 1965), 90-91.
- ³⁴ H. D. Casgrain, *Oeuvres Complètes* (Montréal: Beauchemin, 1896), p. 370.
- ³⁵ Voir Marcel Rioux, "Aliénation Culturelle et Roman Canadien," *Recherches Sociographiques*, V (1964), 145.
- ³⁶ Aimé Césaire, "Et les Chiens se Taisaient", in *Les Armes Miraculeuses* (Paris: Gallimard, 1946), p. 156.
- ³⁷ Pierre Vallières, *Nègres Blancs d'Amérique* (Montréal: Parti Pris, 1968).
- ³⁸ Chamberland, *L'Afficheur Hurle*, p. 9.

THE VARIOUS VOICES

Poems of the Unofficial Cultures

Compiled and

Introduced by John Reeves

CANADIAN POETRY is almost always thought of as being in English or French. The bulk of it is. But not all. Not all our poets have been born here: some have immigrated, and have continued to write in their mother tongues. And so poetry, like many other traditions, has been part of the Canadian scene in other than the two official cultures. Its publication has been various: sometimes the poet is published in his native land, either out of nostalgia or necessity; sometimes his books are put out here in Canada or in other countries with a thriving emigré community; and sometimes he publishes in the so-called ethnic press. The quality of this work, as in any literature, varies much. But the best is very good and well worth sharing.

I've long thought something should be done about sharing this achievement. An enterprising publisher with lots of money to lose would do us all a great service if he'd put out a poetry series of French and English translations from our other languages and of translations into those other languages from our English and French verse. Since that will probably never happen, I decided a few years ago to cover at least a small section of this territory on radio. Philip Lanthier was available at the time to undertake the main research, which was both difficult and extensive: he had to trace the poems from all over the country, find a consultant in each language to advise him on their quality, and then skim off the cream. This took a long time: years, not months. But in the end we found a respectable body of evidently good verse in twelve languages: Estonian, German, Hungarian, Irish Gaelic, Italian, Latvian, Lithuanian, Low German, Polish, Serbian, Ukranian, and Yiddish. That list is perhaps not comprehensive. There may well have been good poems written in Canada in other languages. But, if so, we failed to turn them up.

The most noticeable absentees, of course, are poems in the indigenous languages. So far as we could discover, none of the Indian cultures has a tradition of verse apart from song, and there seems to have been no modern recourse to verse. We did find one Eskimo poet of impressive quality; but to our great regret she declined to contribute.

Eventually we chose twenty-three poems which seemed to go well together. Good translations already existed in some cases. For the rest, we had to commission translations. When they were done, I was at last ready to go on the air: bilingually: each poem was read first in English translation and then in the original. The programmes (three half-hours) were broadcast on the C.B.C. radio network in February 1968, and the response from listeners was enthusiastic: it is worth noting, by the way, that the programmes seem to have pleased many listeners whose only language is English; in other words, the project had a general appeal beyond its obvious built-in audience.

Some of this success was due, no doubt, to the work of pioneers who were in the field before us. Miriam Waddington, for instance, has done much for Yiddish poetry in Canada, both as a critic and as a translator. John Robert Colombo and George Jonas have been active, with Hungarian poetry. And the large German output of Walter Bauer has been well served, in translation, by Humphrey Milnes. Others, in various ways, have done what they can to promote this part of our literature. Bringing the several strands of it together into one place was merely an obvious piece of anthologising. But it was also overdue, and it deserved the acceptance it won. So I am glad that at least some of the translations are being printed here and preserved, and will not pass into the limbo that waits for radio programmes as soon as they're off the air.

I've chosen ten poems for this publication. The first four have to do with emigration: variously they concern exile and nostalgia, adaptation to a new land, and the sense here of roots elsewhere. The fifth poem is simply a nature poem. The sixth and seventh lightly and seriously, touch on the writer's craft. And the last three are love lyrics. All, in my view, are the work of true poets.

THE HOUSE

*translated by Myra Haas
from the Ukrainian of Yar Slavutych*

ON A SUMMIT ascending the banks of the Dnieper's
Far reaching blue
Where the ripening wheat in the sun's heat breaks foam
A house once stood. Immeasurably blessed, its sovereign circle
grew
Like the white crown of a poppy in the poplared wood.
The sea-foaming sound of the rain swells the river's
High rising banks.
The field with its huge yield of bread, grows, swells
Momentously. Abundant in their praise, man, woman, swell with
thanks
Boasting the good seed of a fruitful family.
Who came then? Who came by the soft stealth of midnight
To trouble the dust
Of the ancient ones? Daughters and sons: for the evil of others
Who shall atone? In exile enduring, the blameless, the innocent
must,
Until their waiting wanes the spirit and the bone.
Without touch or direction the children of exile
Blindly go,
Redeeming the past, they re-live the last measure of home
Brimming memory and sight. Do they labour the truth, seeking
causes or knowing it so
Make real the dream prophetic as their fathers might?
From a summit descending smoke ruins, black fires
That rend the sky
Sounds and voices in one chanting unison, shiver the house
Like a prayer. The dried poplars crackle. The silence snaps,
barren and dry,
And the wind thins in a wolf-howl, holding nothing there.

TERRA INCOGNITA

*translated by Robert and Aldona Page
from the Lithuanian of Henrikas Nagys*

IN THE LAND of blue snow there are no trees:
only the shadows of trees and the names of trees
written by a sombre hermit in the writing of the blind.

In the hall of mirrors not a single person is left:
only profiles cut out by the cutter of Tilsit fair,
and silhouettes traced on the dusty glass by the fingers
of the dead violinist late in the evening of All Souls.

In the valley of the ebbing rivers there is no birthplace:
only long rows of barracks, wooden sphinxes
with their sooty heads on their paws, dreaming
of flags, summer, sun and sand.

In the land of blue snow only names remain,
lines and drawings and letters remain on ashes.
In the land of blue snow there is no land.

COME, SAYS THIS LAND

*translated by Humphrey Milnes
from the German of Walter Bauer*

COME, says this land,
Come, all of you, I can hold you,
I can satisfy your wishes, great or small,
No one will be left out —
Wage earners, gamblers, tough guys, dreamers —
Each will get what's coming to him.
But you won't belong to me, you are foreigners.
I can't adopt you.
Don't complain that I'm unfriendly. I am just indifferent.
Don't say that you are lonely; what prize did you expect
For leaving to come here?

And what were you willing to give?
I will grant you what you want and no more.
Europe's echo will gradually fade in your children.
I will gradually draw them to me.
And then you will experience an even bitterer loneliness.
It will be left to one of your children's children
To sing the song of my boundless horizons
And to be at home here.
He will understand the melody of my rivers and not be afraid,
He will understand the great language of my silence that
frightened you.
For him, love will find its reward,
I will tell him who I am.

LATE AUTUMN IN MONTREAL

*translated by Miriam Waddington
from the Yiddish of Y. Y. Segal*

THE WORM CRAWLS into the dark earth,
The wind glitters and sharpens his sword,
And where did all the coloured leaves fly to?
The branches are lost in their hard grey sleep,
The skies seem high and lift up higher.
Their clear light drips blue over the roof tops,
And the stillness assures us that all is well.
Our churchy city becomes even more pious,
And on Sundays the golden crosses gleam brightly,
The big bells ring out hallelujahs
And the little bells answer with an amen.
The tidy peaceful streets dream in broad daylight
And smile serenely at me who am such a Jewish Jew
That even in my way of walking everyone can hear
The music of my ancestral song
And the rhythm of my Hebrew prayer.

MAY

*translated by Janina Gembicka
from the Polish of Zofja Bohdanowicz*

How MANY varying emerging shades
dissipate like filmy images
pink greenness looks into the eyes of golden green

The black greenness pins its thorny wind-swept comb
gently
into the braid of the emerald green

The grey green enfolds in her hands
featherless newborn greenness
trembling with dew and immaturity
green greenness

PENCIL

*translated by John Robert Colombo
from the Hungarian of Robert Zend*

SOMEONE WRITES with me
his fingers clutch my waist
he holds me tight leads me on
holds me tight again

The poem done he drops me
I feel diminished
with surprise I read
the part of me he wore away

AND SO WHAT

*translated by Astrid Ivask
from the Estonian of Arved Viirlaid*

AND SO WHAT if poetry
is the thread in the needle's eye,
stitching the patterns of a shroud
into the bridal gown.

And so what

Even towards silence all roads run
with the happy yapping of puppies.

Trickles and worms
knot the fringes of the garment,
and the Bride's arms
are always open for embraces,
for thought carries fire into the earth —
roots full of dynamite.
With every heartbeat the earth
pumps fire
to sleep in granite.

NOW

*translated by Ingride Viksna
from her own Latvian original*

Now is the time
when silenced are
sea,
 birds,
 and wind,
and even the voices of men.

I tell you: — there is nothing —
no love,
no doomsday,
no death —
but you trembled.
Did you guess
the final secret:

 under this sun we
 will never quench
 our deepest thirst?

PURITAN REFLECTION

*translated by Elio Costa
from the Italian of Luigi Romeo*

“No”, you said
“I beg you”.
But
the faint prayer
begged with your eyes
“Come back”.

And my throbbing heart
lifted its sail
prowed across waves
then
tired it paused
before a harbour
still closed.

So
it will always be
so.

You call me
with eyes of dawn
and then you reject me
at the last glimmer of
light.

FEARGUS THE RED DISREMEMBERS

*translated by Pádraig O Broin
from his own Irish Gaelic original*

I REMEMBER her name — the music of pipes.

I have forgotten her hair —

And the butterfly

That lighted on it.

I have forgotten her face,

And her mouth —
Meant for kissing.

I have forgotten the sound of her voice,
That night, that night;
I have forgotten her two hands
Holding me, shyly, eagerly;
I have forgotten the very shape of her body,
That night, that night.

I do not remember anything at all;
Except,
The living warmth of her mouth on my mouth
In our first kiss;
And
Light as a tress, as a feather, as breath itself,
Curve of her maiden's exquisite breast
Touching my breast,
That night, that night.

Wife to another, she,
This night.

THE HOUSE ON THE PRAIRIES

Susan Jackel

GIVEN THE RELATIVELY RAPID SETTLEMENT of Canada's prairie region and the opportunities open to individual enterprise during the formative years of Western society, the frequent moral examination of materialism in prairie fiction up to 1935 is understandable; so is the altered mood of prairie novelists after the economic and spiritual trials of drought and depression in the Thirties. The broad outlines of this shift from social commentary to character study can be indicated in a few paragraphs. What will be noted at greater length in the following pages is the consistency with which one symbol — the house — speaks for the changing attitudes of Western writers over half a century, from Nellie McClung in 1908 to Margaret Laurence in 1964. In brief, the significance of the word "house" begins from a straight-forward reference to the physical structure which provides shelter, and by association extends to the money needed to build and support it, and develops into the broader concept of a family establishment, a continuing blood line which inherits both material and cultural acquisitions. This development reflects a recurring theme in the fiction of rural Western Canada: that of the family as the basis of social organization and the source of moral values.

The fiction of "settlement", *i.e.*, those novels which concern themselves with the development of rural society in the Canadian prairies, falls into two main phases: the morally-directed fiction of writers up to and including F. P. Grove; and the psychological enquiry of novels which followed Ross's *As For Me and My House*. (1941). Until the late 1920's the rural West built up a social ideal that was rampantly acquisitive, to which many prairie writers responded by insisting on the superiority of spiritual resources over material ones. Ralph Connor and Nellie McClung pictured the spiritual poverty of the material life, while showing how those who were poor but selfless — the Sky Pilot, Shock McGregor, Pearl Watson, Maggie Corbett — could lead their misguided neighbours back to

the true path. In Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese* the curse of Mammon is less explicit; nevertheless, the novel is constructed in such a way that Caleb Gare's death could easily be interpreted as retribution for his perverse search for wealth and power. In the novels of Grove, the corrupting influence of wealth is an inescapable theme, particularly evident in the two novels of the southern prairies, *Fruits of the Earth* and *Two Generations*. Abe Spalding is the materialist who comes to see the futility of his possessions; John Elliot, Spalding's moral opposite, subordinates financial success to his ideal of family life. This ideal is undermined by Elliot's inability to arouse love and respect in his children, but also by what Grove saw as the spirit of the age — financial and moral irresponsibility.

To this tradition of moral writing in prairie fiction R. J. C. Stead contributes an interesting variation. He too warns against the dangers of dedication to material success: see, for example, John Harris and Hiram Riles in *The Homesteaders* and Dave Eldon in *The Cowpuncher*. However, Stead sees ambition as a danger only if allowed to crowd out the more important task of "widening one's horizons", Stead's shorthand formula for increased mental, social and cultural activity of all descriptions. For Stead, full participation in life is the moral good; he values material ambitions in so far as they lead outward to wider horizons. Dennison Grant, the philanthropic idealist, represents Stead's only unabashed indulgence in Utopian moralizing; in his other novels Stead points up the restrictions of poverty, leading his heroes through the temptations of Mammon to the appreciation of the finer life which financial security permits.

In the novels published after Grove, however, this insistence on the moral use of Mammon has faded into the background, to be replaced by greater emphasis on character study. The West had grown up during the thirties; the rapid expansion of the century's first three decades and the questions which this phase presented belonged to a by-gone age of adolescence. The concern of fiction writers became not, how should the young sensibility be guided, but, in what form has the adult Western character emerged? Grove had spoken (in *In Search of Myself*, pp. 224-7) of the pioneer "race", made up of certain types of men and women who were particularly attracted by the challenge of pioneering; in *Fruits of the Earth* he referred to the "distinct local character and mentality" of the residents of Spalding District. With Ross's *As For Me and My House*, Grove's generalized interest in prairie psychology became the primary concern of most Western writers.

The two phases of rural prairie fiction here distinguished, the preceptive social fiction up to Grove and the analytic psychological fiction of 1940 and after, are

intended only as broad categories; however, their over-all accuracy is illustrated by a survey of the various uses by Western writers of one major symbol, the house. The presence of the house as symbol is surprising only in its ubiquity, for a moment's reflection on the nature of settlement on the plains will indicate how natural is the symbolic use of this physical object as a means of expressing certain themes. As Stead and Grove show more explicitly, the provision of shelter on the prairies was equivalent to proclaiming one's social status: the settler could initially build a sod hut at no expense, progress to a lumber shack with lean-to additions at a cost of perhaps forty dollars, and finally, should he prove to be a financial success, announce his wealth with the building of a "New House".

The erection of the New House became more than a question of comfortable housing in almost all the pre-World War II novels, for it was to reflect as well the state of the soul: a moral wrong was committed when a settler demanded from the soil wealth and grandeur, in the form of extravagant housing, instead of a modest living for himself and his family. This view, while again most evident in the writing of Stead and Grove, can be traced back to Nellie McClung's first novel in the first decade of the century. After 1940, with the shift from social concerns to individual characterization, the house/home theme reflects more closely relations within the family group. It is a truism that Canadian writers prefer to examine the relations between generations rather than between individuals of the same generation, and this preference is particularly marked among prairie novelists. In the Western fiction of the past quarter-century the house frequently symbolizes the dominant power within the household, the character who asserts, implicitly or (as is more often the case) explicitly, "This is *my* house." This tendency culminates in Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* and Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*, where the house is seen to be expressive of the very existence of the central characters. In these novels the "new place" takes on a more clearly symbolic aspect, representing the human need of hope for the future. The word "house" thus progresses in meaning from the moral significance of absorption in material possessions to an inquiry into the rights and responsibilities of individuals within the family.

NELLIE MCCLUNG first employs the house as a symbol of spiritual values in *Sowing Seeds in Danny* (1908). The Motherwells live in "a large stone house, square and gray, lonely and bare". Mrs. Motherwell protests when the visiting Pearl Watson opens a window, saying, "There hasn't been a

window open in this house since it was built." Mrs. Motherwell did not always have a soul of "dull drab dryness", for her avarice developed only after she had become mistress of the big stone house. Late in the story Mrs. Motherwell is made to feel remorse for her selfishness, and, making more explicit the equation of Mrs. Motherwell and her house, Mrs. McClung entitles the chapter which deals with this temporary reformation, "A Crack in the Granite". Mrs. McClung's symbolism is never subtle (*cf.* the poppies in the same book); we can see her use of the house as evidence that it is a symbol which comes readily to hand.

R. J. C. Stead makes more extensive use of the house as an indication of moral health. In *The Homesteaders*, Stead's second novel, the Harrises' first house is a sod hut, humble perhaps, but "absolutely the product of their own labour." The Harrises prosper, as do their neighbours; yet amid the advance of "civilization and prosperity",

There were those, too, who thought that perhaps the country had lost something in all its gaining; that perhaps there was less idealism and less unreckoning hospitality in the brick house on the hill than there once had been in the sod shack in the hollow.

Idealism is a virtue in Stead's novels: Dennison Grant, in the novel of that name, plans and builds his house to express his own ideals. The house is modest in size, yet sun-lit, airy and gracious, with a whim-room to allow for the exercise of impulse and imagination.

Although Stead's moral framework is essentially romantic, his eye for everyday facts of life on the prairies has given him a considerable reputation as a realistic writer. One commonplace in Western life which Stead deals with in *Grain* is the fact that the farm wife often has to wait for a decent house until the debts on land and machinery are paid off — an eventuality which might be postponed until her children have grown up and left home. The most persistent disappointment in Susie Stake's life is the house which Jackson promises will be built "next year, if the crop comes off."

There was a cheerful virility about [Jackson], and when he had promised Susan Harden a frame house with lathed and plastered walls and an upstairs she had said yes, not for the house, but for himself. But that was before he left the East, when he and his hopes were young. Gander was driving a four-horse team before the ribs of his father's frame house at last rose stark against the prairie sky.

By the time the New House is built, when Susie Stake is forty-five, she has "ceased to be an optimist." However, as Jackson Stake points out to his rebellious son, who sneers at "that log shack we eat and sleep in", "Lath an' plaster don' make

a home, an' sometimes poplar logs do." It is not the house itself that is important, but the spirit of contentment and family unity within.

In Martha Ostenso's *Wild Geese* the New House exists only in Martin Gare's dream, a dream which will continue to be frustrated as long as his father lives:

Martin loved the land, but there was something else in him that craved expression. It had been represented by the dream of the new house, the dream of the thing that was to be made by his own hands, guided by his own will. Now that, too, was gone. Nothing to do now but toil on without a dream. It might have been kinder of Caleb to have deceived him until the end of the harvest — there would then have been a vision to ease the burden. A false vision was better than none.

Here the New House in its very absence symbolizes Caleb's maniacal determination to chain his family to the soil, his conviction that thinking is a threat to having and therefore must be rooted out as one would root out a dangerous weed. In other novels of this period the New House is an outward manifestation of wealth and power; in Miss Ostenso's novel its denial is a symptom of avarice and tyranny.

With F. P. Grove we return to a more conventional use of the house as representative of the moral condition of the novel's characters. Grove seems to be particularly conscious of the symbolic expressiveness of the house. Pacey notes, for instance, how in *Our Daily Bread* Grove equates the disintegration of the house with John Elliot's gradual decay; when Elliot's children gather at his deathbed, they are "horrified" at the condition of the house and of the aged man within, as if only the sight of the physical structure of their former home can make them see clearly the man they have treated as a thing. In *Fruits of the Earth* the house becomes the dominant symbol. Grove explains that his conception of the novel took shape after he had come across a huge farmhouse which had been abandoned by its owners. This house, in the back of Grove's mind while he wrote, represents the tragic experience of Abe Spalding, heroic pioneer.

To Abe the building of the New House means the culmination of his labours, to be not just a house but a mansion. The contrast between Abe's longing for pre-eminence in the district and his wife's more moderate aims is shown in their attitudes to the proposed house: "When Abe said that . . . one day he would build her a house which was to be the envy of everybody, she could not summon any enthusiasm; she wanted comfort, not splendour; convenience, not luxury." The house also represents Abe's patriarchal ambitions. In answer to Ruth's question, "What is it all for?" he says, "To build up a place any man can be proud of, a place to leave to my children for them to be proud of." However, the

building of the house is put off until twelve years after the Spaldings' marriage, leaving Ruth to cope with four small children in a two-room shack. By the time the house is built Abe can no longer give her a home; he can only give her all the labour-saving devices money can buy. As far as the neighbours are concerned, moreover, the huge edifice that Abe erects is "Spalding Hall", the ancestral seat of the great lord.

After the death of his favourite son, Abe questions the meaning of his achievement. He looks at his brick house and notes that already nature is reclaiming her own. His attitude to the house changes:

When, these days, he approached his place, the place built to dominate the prairie, he succumbed to the illusion that he who had built it was essentially different from him who had to live in it. More and more the wind-break surrounding his yard seemed to be a rampart which, without knowing it, he had erected to keep out a hostile world. Occasionally the great house seemed nothing less than a mausoleum to enshrine the memory of a child.

Because the house serves to emphasize Abe's isolation from the rest of the community, his pride in it as a status symbol becomes meaningless and empty; so too does his patriarchal ambition when the child who was meant to inherit the house dies.

Abe Spalding's desire for a house of which he can be proud, as a material possession signifying his success to the world, and which he can leave to his children, as a tangible representation of the family line he hopes to establish, combines the two symbolic meanings of the house earlier distinguished. Ross's *As For Me and My House* is typical of prairie novels since 1940 in its use of the house in relation to the family group. Certainly Ross employs the confining and depressing aspects of the Bentley's house in *Horizon* to emphasize the repression of their lives there, but these details are used realistically rather than with primarily symbolic intent. "The house of Bentley", however, is a semi-ironic reference to the internal tensions which exist behind the false front Mrs. Bentley so painstakingly erects. The title itself suggests the domestic conflict around which the novel centres, for although the text ("As for me and my house we will serve the Lord") is Philip's introduction to his professed creed, he is unable to believe in it himself. Mrs. Bentley, on the other hand, is the speaking voice in the novel, and the logical referent in the reader's mind of the pronoun "my". Finally, when one considers that Mrs. Bentley rather than her husband makes all the major decisions, the controlling power in "the house of Bentley" is left in little doubt.

Like Greta Potter and Hagar Shipley after her, Mrs. Bentley tells the reader, "This is *my* house," although not in so many words.

Nellie McClung's inclusion of the house among her few symbols was, it was suggested, a sign-post that such an object formed obvious associations in the reader's mind, for Mrs. McClung desired above all that her message be clear. Similarly, although for different reasons, its prominent use in Edward McCourt's *Home is the Stranger* is a sign that the concept of the house as representing the establishment of family roots is a congenial one to Western fiction. Published in 1949, two years after McCourt's critical study of Canadian Western fiction, *Home is the Stranger* offers its own commentary on what McCourt found to be the prominent features of prairie fiction to that date.

McCourt first considers the house as home. When Norah Armstrong first sees the prairie house that is to be such a pain-filled home to her, she is amused by the figure her imagination makes of it: "'Jim, it's human! It's alive'" she laughs, thinking that it looks like a funny old man. Moving in, she feels that "fear and insecurity were at last vanquished." Norah has to learn to be at home with fear and insecurity, for they accompany her to this house and invest its "aliveness" with a terrible malignity.

In the Armstrongs' future there is also a New House, which they plan to build some day. This plan represents Jim Armstrong's fundamental ambition, that of establishing roots in the West. Jim and Norah are the second generation; Jim envisions sons and grandsons to carry on. Then, with the existence of family traditions, there may come the spiritual traditions which constitute a culture: "'The house of Armstrong,' Jim said. 'And maybe, if we stay long enough, the gods will come.'"

Brian Malory is the advocate of 'culture' in its more obvious forms. He insists that Armstrong House be built facing the river, so that it will have a view of something besides unrelieved prairie. But "he was not just arguing about the proposed site of a house. Some principle was involved, for the time being obscured by irrelevancies." The principle is that of the North American contribution to the cultural heritage of the western world, and according to Brian this contribution can be represented by the sound of that great material invention, "water flushing down a toilet bowl." The modern North American house becomes for him the symbol of all that is lacking in our spiritual life. "'We're a people without anything to pass on to the next generation,'" he says. "'Not a book or a picture or a symphony. Or a faith!'" Only indoor plumbing.

In *Home is the Stranger* McCourt brings together several familiar themes to form a new synthesis. Cultural traditions — the coming of the gods — are made the moral good; North American materialism is detrimental to this process because it concentrates on bodily comfort rather than intellectual creativity; therefore the house as a physical structure is of doubtful value in society. On the other hand, the house as representative of a family heritage, of a continuing blood line, contributes to the stability and traditionalism of society, and is therefore of prime importance to the cultural maturation of the West.

TWO WESTERN NOVELS of the past decade, Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook*¹ and Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel*, carry this process one step further by analyzing relations between successive generations within a family in terms of the houses they occupy. The struggle between generations expresses itself in a fight for possession of the house, a fight embittered by the reluctance of the older generation to give way to the newer one.

In the novels referred to so far, the house has had both a realistic and a symbolic role; for that matter, the symbolic role has often been merely to suggest a readily-recognizable pattern of life, as when Nellie McClung, Stead and Grove question the rewards of material success. In *The Double Hook* the house, as we might expect, takes on a predominantly symbolic value. The control of the house and its inhabitants lies at the root of the Potters' "trouble". For one thing, control of the house means privacy, protection from Mrs. Potter's prying eyes. Greta snaps at Ara, "You've got your own house. I want this house to myself. Every living being has a right to something."

For Greta the house also represents the thin rope of power she wields over James. Greta announces their mother's death by claiming possession of the house: "Get out, she said. Go way. This is my house. Now Ma's lying dead in her bed I give the orders here." But it is a "rebellious house", doomed to destruction. To James, the house is a curse, as he dwells under the successive tyranny of his mother and his sister. Knowing that her rope of power over James has been broken by Lenchen, Greta burns the house with herself inside, and when James sees the charred ruins, his relief is instantaneous:

He felt as he stood with his eyes closed on the destruction of what his heart had wished destroyed that by some generous gesture he had been turned once more into the first pasture of things.

I will build the new house further down the creek, he thought. All on one floor.

In the new house will live the new generation, born of Lenchen and James.

Margaret Laurence's use of the house as symbol in *The Stone Angel* is frequent and expressive. Hagar's house comes at last to represent as does no other object the spiritual revelations of the dying woman. Hagar recounts her life in terms of the houses in which she has lived: the Currie place, solid and pretentious, as befits the town's leading merchant; the Shipley place, gray, unpainted, the scene of her greatest pleasures and her greatest sorrows; the Oatley place, "like a stone barn", where she worked as a housekeeper, although as a girl she had pitied her Aunt Doll, thinking, "how sad to spend one's life caring for the houses of others."

The first half of the narrative is given the nominal setting of Hagar's own house in Vancouver. That it is more than just another house to Hagar is made clear when she realizes that her son and daughter-in-law want to sell it. "'You'll never sell this house, Marvin. It's my house. It's my house, Doris. Mine.'" Thinking of her house and of the "shreds and remnants of years . . . scattered through it visibly" in the form of furniture and personal possessions, she tells the reader, "If I am not somehow contained in them and in this house, something of all change caught and fixed here, eternal enough for my purposes, then I do not know where I am to be found at all." The house and its contents become the external manifestation of all that her experience has made her. She declares that she is "unreconciled to this question of the house, my house, mine"; however, she bows to the inevitable, saying, "We drive . . . back to Marvin and Doris's house."

Shorn of the home she feels she has earned, Hagar hides in an old cannery with an adjacent house. Remembering the Shipley farmhouse, she notes, "This house of mine is gray, too. . . . I find a certain reassurance in this fact, and think I'll feel quite at home here." Her reaction to her new dwelling contains the same intention of starting over which James had felt in *The Double Hook*, but with sadly ironic overtones:

To move to a new place — that's the greatest excitement. For a while you believe you carry nothing with you — all is cancelled from before, or cauterized, and you begin again and nothing will go wrong this time.

The house as symbol has been effectively used by a number of major writers of English and American fiction: one thinks of Dickens, Poe, Hawthorne, Henry James and Virginia Woolf among others. However, these writers have used the physical structure of the house to express highly individual themes. Poe's import and technique, in "The Fall of the House of Usher", for example, can be readily

distinguished from Virginia Woolf's in *To the Lighthouse*; the houses in *Bleak House*, *Great Expectations* and *David Copperfield* represent a variety of themes. The unanimity with which prairie writers interpret this symbol is one element of the "regionalism" of their fiction, inasmuch as the house seems to represent inevitable associations in the minds of both Western writers and Western readers. To them the house stands first for material security and later for cultural security, in a land where both have been hard won. In two writers of the past decade, however, there has been an extension of previous symbolic patterns: both Sheila Watson and Margaret Laurence associate the New House with the unknown future rather than with the social realities of the past and present. Hagar Shipley's consciousness that we are never "turned once more into the first pasture of things" exhibits Mrs. Laurence's more conservative and (for this reader) more satisfying attitude to life.

NOTE

- ¹ Because the setting for this novel originated in Mrs. Watson's experiences in the Cariboo District of British Columbia, this cannot properly be called a prairie novel; nor, since it is, by the author's own definition, an anti-regional novel, should it be classified under the slightly vaguer heading of Western novels. (See John Grube's introduction to the NCL edition.) In atmosphere, however, it is closer to the prairie provinces during the drought years than to the mountains, forest or sea-coast more typical of British Columbia; and if parody of the regional novel was intended, it is offset by the naturalistic details on which Mrs. Watson insists of creek, hill and drought-parched land.

THE ELEMENTS TRANSCENDED

Margaret Morriss

THE UNIVERSE which Sheila Watson creates in *The Double Hook* is one of dust and rock, rutted roads and receding streams. With its “flat ribs” it is a starving animal, ruled by a deified beast held responsible for its aridity and barrenness. The pervasive fear of Coyote is related to the repression imposed by the Old Lady, and is intensified by an awareness of isolation from God.

The opening lines of the novel define the limits of its universe by a literal list of its inhabitants, and by a visual typography that abruptly circumscribes the personal relationship it contains. This created world is characterized by isolation, visually presented in the suddenness of its syntax, and shown in the narrative by the presentation of characters either alone or reacting to one another rather than responding. The only unity present is animalistic: “You can always hide in a herd”.

Along with the stark physical and psychological isolation is the prevailing passivity of the characters. Felix Prosper fishes and fiddles, refusing both physical activity and the spiritual suffering imposed on him by Angel’s departure. Combined with this passivity is a voluntary ignorance embraced in order to protect the negative, self-defensive peace which suffocates rather than activates the wasteland. “I hear nothing. I see nothing.”

Inhering in every aspect of this world is repression, embodied psychologically in the Old Lady, sexually in Greta, and supernaturally in Coyote. Ignorance is not only passively accepted, it is actively imposed. Coyote says, “In my mouth is forgetting / In my darkness is rest”. James meditates on this world, realizing that his destruction of his mother has left things essentially unchanged:

This was the way they’d lived. Suspended in silence. . . .

They’d lived waiting. Waiting to come together at the same lake as dogs creep out of the night to the same fire. Moving their lips when they moved them at all

as hunters talk smelling the deer. Edged closer wiping plates and forks while the old lady sat in her corner. Moved her lips saying: She'll live forever. And when they'd raised their eyes their mother was watching as a deer watches.

Now Greta'd sat in the old lady's chair. Eyes everywhere. . . . Eyes multiplied. Eyes. Eyes and padded feet. Coyote moving in rank-smelling.

Nothing had changed. The old lady was there in every fold of the country.

The image of life as a silent suspension, waiting for the end of a factor seen as immortal; the implications of disease and distortion, primitive animalism, and a repressive dictatorship; the fear of vision, knowledge and immortality; the relation of eyes, Coyote, Greta, the Old Lady, death and decay; all these elements are integral to the wasteland of *The Double Hook*. Most of all, this passage reveals James as a native inhabitant of the wasteland. His act of revolt was not an affirmation of the new life, but just an impulsive, essentially irrational rejection of the old.

Irrationality as such is an important part of this world. There is no logical basis for the tyranny of the Old Lady, Greta or Coyote, and most actions are basically purposeless. Ara unconsciously wanders to the Potter home; Felix lives according to the moment; no immediate aim lay behind James' revolt. Underlying this illogicality is the confusion of nature, illusion and the supernatural that informs the superstitious belief in Coyote and the various appearances of Mrs. Potter. But just as irrationality maintains the wasteland's *status quo* of fear, so too it offers the only opportunity for achieving the glory of a redeemed world. The irrationality of superstition must be conquered by the faith which imaginatively transcends the logic of the intellect.

The mythic structure of *The Double Hook* is the archetypal pattern of redemption through death and rebirth, the religious ritual celebrating the re-entry of love into the wasteland.¹ But not just the inhabitants are transformed. The elemental symbolic structure underlying the narrative is metamorphosed into a transcendental symbolic structure, which surpasses the unredeemed state while yet incorporating it into human experience.

In keeping with the setting's primitive starkness, the initial symbolic structure of the novel is elemental, incorporating earth, air, fire and water. In the wasteland water is not creative, but is drying away. It is basically powerless, its motion controlled by the land: "the creek flowed this way and that at the land's whim". Water is even incapable of destruction. In the town, James longs to destroy himself, but is prevented by the water's association with his mother. In turn, the earth

produces only death. "Ara felt death leaking through from the centre of the earth. Death rising to the knee. Death rising to the loin."

These aspects of the elemental universe are associated with fear, darkness, and the primitive force of Coyote, who offers the relief of passivity to those who are only living and partly living. He is usually associated with Mrs. Potter, and between them they pervade the world with negation. But at the same time, Ara notices the ability of water to transform and give life: "She saw the shallow water plocking over the roots of the cottonwood, transfiguring bark and stone. She bent towards the water. Her fingers divided it. A stone breathed in her hand. Then life drained to its centre."

For Felix, the rain of the storm merges with remembrance of past events, an essential factor in his contribution to the redemptive process. Felix and Ara seem to accept their premonitions with little immediate awareness of their implications. But the most ironic note of significant interaction between water and earth is sounded by Greta. At the height of her rage against Lenchen, motivated by her repressive instincts, she justifies herself by a *contrast* with the elements: "The pot-holes are filled with rain from time to time. I've seen them stiff with thirst. Ashed white and bitter at the edge. But the rain or the run-off fills them at last. The bitterness licked up."

Greta's self-insulation from her environment prevents earth and water from providing a comparative analogy for human experience. Until denial gives way to affirmation, nature must remain destructive and earth and water are in constant conflict. For most of the characters the storm is a manifestation of evil, lashing the earth "with adder tongues. With lariats. With bull-whips." This conflict contains within itself the potential to annihilate the wilderness, as William foresees: "The day will come, he'd say, when the land will swallow the last drop. The creek'll be as dry as a parched mouth. The earth, he'd say, won't have enough spit left to smack its lips."

The elements of air and fire are associated with the images of light and glory, and to this extent they are opposed to the fear and darkness related to earth and water. But these elements still have their negative aspects. Greta sees the air as a rope stretched between people, uniting them only partially. The ambiguity of fire is related to the precarious balance of fear and glory. "The curious thing about fire . . . is you need it and fear it at once."

Heinrich Wagner establishes a relation between the four elements that is basic to the symbolic structure of the novel:

He stood there thinking of the light he had known. Of pitch fires lit on the hills. Of leaning out of the black wind into the light of a small flame. Stood thinking how a horse can stand in the sunlight and know nothing but the saddle and the sting of sweat on the side and the salt line forming under the saddle's edge. Stood thinking of sweat and heat and the pain of living, the pain of fire in the middle of a haystack. Stood thinking of light burning free on the hills and flashing like the glory against the hides of things.

The elements are here related to both the pain of living and to the glory, which exist in opposition. But the stallion is a recurring image for James and his rebellion. Thus there is the implication that if glory and pain are integrated, redemption is achieved through the pain of living, that the heat and the sweat and the pain can transform the hills.

This suggestion is reinforced by the storm, the conflict of the four elements. The storm is cataclysmic rather than creative because Greta's spirit of denial dominates the wasteland. Darkness is preferred to light, which is feared rather than welcomed, as Heinrich demonstrates: "In the sky above darkness had overlaid light. But the boy knew as well as he knew anything that until the hills fell on him or the ground sucked him in the light would come again. He had tried to hold darkness to him, but it grew thin and formless and took shape as something else." The individual embraces the darkness and fear of the passivity offered by Coyote to protect himself from the active responsibility of the light. But the elusive darkness he desires escapes his grasp and takes shape as something he fears, like the vision of Mrs. Potter or the tyranny of Coyote.

The redemption of the wasteland is associated with no single figure, for the entire community must participate to some degree in its own salvation. This rebirth is achieved by the transformation of the elemental structure of earth, air, fire and water into a transcendental one of seeing, knowing, communication and unity. But the redeemed world does not abandon the elemental universe, for the rebirth process is within, affecting not the exterior environment but the attitude to it and use of it by its inhabitants.

In the elemental symbolic structure there is a hierarchy of power; the light and glory of the flame must conquer the pain of living, integrating it with individual experience, so that water may renew the earth. In the transcendental symbolic structure an analogous order exists. Sight gives knowledge, motivating the impulse for communication which is necessary for the social and spiritual integration of the community. The theme of sight and blindness is related to the ideas of light and darkness, fear and glory, desire for knowledge and voluntary igno-

rance. It is Kip who is associated with sight, knowledge and the glory, but just as Mrs. Potter is incapable of significant action in the elemental world, so too Kip, either unaware of or exploiting his perceptive power, dissipates his potential by becoming a go-between, a tale bearer. It is Ara who is granted the vision which is the glory of physical sight, and her insight, significantly, is in terms of a transfigured environment:

Now her tired eyes saw water issuing from under the burned threshold. Welling up and flowing down to fill the dry creek. Until dry lips drank. Until the trees stood knee-deep in water.

Everything shall live where the river comes, she said out loud. And she saw a great multitude of fish, each fish springing arched through the slanting light.

The physical starkness has been replaced by a vision of abundance. The process of salvation has clarified the confusion of nature, illusion and the supernatural that resulted from the passive ignorance of the characters. The knowledge inherent in this illumination has replaced the sight of Mrs. Potter, whose concentrated ferocity brought fear, darkness and death, with a vision of life, integration and abundance. The Old Lady is seen last by Felix. "But she wasn't fishing, he said. Just standing like a tree with its roots reaching out to water." The power of Mrs. Potter has been broken by a vision in which she can never share; her death is a spiritual terminal rather than a redemption, and the water cannot help her.

The old lady, lost like Jonah perhaps,
in the cleft belly of the rock
the water washing over her.

The only knowledge in the wilderness is the secret knowledge of Greta and the Old Lady. "You don't know what I know." For the rest, passive ignorance is embraced in protective self-defence against both humanity and environment. But after Ara's vision of rebirth, sight enables knowledge and Coyote is really seen for the first time. His voice still preaches the relief of negation: "Happy are the dead / For their eyes see no more", but knowledge by this time is blessing the characters with the courage to really "see". Coyote can no longer enthrall, but must take his place in the new order of things.

The idea of communication is not totally absent from the wasteland. Ara wanders to the Potter farm because of a need to talk; Heinrich feels he should have been able to tell Lenchen something; Angel warns the utterly passive Theophil, "A man can't peg himself in so tight that nothing can creep through the cracks." But ruled by Greta and Mrs. Potter, individuals refuse to hear, see

or listen to each other. Through the regenerative process an awareness of the necessity of communication gradually replaces the impulse to isolation. Heinrich says: "Can a man speak to no one because he's a man? Who says so? Those who want to be sheltered by his silence. I've held my tongue . . . when I should have used my voice like an axe to cut down the wall between us."

In the stagnating wasteland unity is feared or ignored. Widow Wagner tells Lenchen to leave if she wishes; Mrs. Potter rejects all society; Lenchen wants only to escape, from James if necessary. The sight of another results only in rejection. When Ara sees Mrs. Potter she is aware of isolation. Felix wants to chase her off, but sinks into physical indifference. Heinrich wants to fence her out, Lenchen sees her as the image of her own frustration, and the Widow sees a reflection of her own despair. The first gathering at the Potter farm is accidental. Such a meeting is instinctive rather than unitive, and any sympathy present is overpowered by the self-destructive violence of Greta's expression of hate.

Angel Prosper talks to Felix about isolation and union in the individual, lovers and the community, in a passage that represents the wasteland's attitudes while attempting to question them, as she pounds Felix's shoulder asking for a denial:

But if loneliness is being one's own skin and flesh, there's only more lonely people there than here.

. . . One man is one man and two men or ten men aren't something else. One board is one board. Nailed together they might be a pig-pen or a hen-house. But I never knew men could nail together like boards. . . .

Take a man and a woman, she said. There's no word to tell that when they get together in bed they're still anything but two people.

When Angel arrives back at Prosper's home, she realizes that "no word" is necessary. Practical action is required, and through that action Angel helps to achieve the unity she desires.

The final gathering at Felix's mirrors the new integration of the community. Lenchen and Kip have come out of need; Angel has returned to her proper responsibilities after her previous escape; for Felix it is a triumphant restoration of appropriate order. Mrs. Potter and Greta withheld themselves and rejected others; here another mother and daughter, Widow Wagner and Ara, come offering forgiveness and aid. The return of James includes all these motives; he wants human support; he is assuming his proper obligations; he is coming to restore order to the wilderness; and he comes offering a tenderness and compassion whose potency can regenerate his world. This new human inter-dependence is

seen in terms of a proper relation to one's physical environment. "A man needs living things about him", William says, "to remind him he's not a stone or a stick."

Thus the world is reborn from passivity into purposeful significance. Yet this redemption does not mean entry into a world of peaceful perfection; suffering is still a large part of its universe. Ara says, "We don't choose what we will suffer. We can't even see how suffering will come." The pain of living is unavoidable, and in a narrow world results in negative endurance or violence. But the regenerated world is based on the qualitative equation of fear and glory; the enlarged consciousness accepts the inevitable suffering and incorporates it into a meaningful pattern including the transcendent glory of human existence. Thus the regenerative process is cyclic rather than singular; it consists in a conscious maintenance of perspective between resignation to the uncontrollable, and recognition of its constancy. This duality is expressed as well in Mrs. Watson's short story "Antigone", significantly enough in a water image.

See how quickly the water flows. However agile a man is, however nimbly he swims, or runs, or flies, the water slips away before him. . . .

But after all, Antigone says, one must admit that it is the same kind of water. . . . The gulls cry above the same banks. Boats drift toward the Delta and circle back against the current to gather up the catch.²

Thus regeneration consists in a constant awareness of one's environment, physical and social, and one's relation to it. Defiance of the uncontrollable is ineffectual; passivity is even worse. It is spiritual compromise that enables integration to replace inactivity or exploitation.

THE REGENERATION of the wasteland from an elemental to a transcendental universe is accomplished in terms of a quest for value initiated by James and accomplished by community participation. But before examining the process of rebirth, it is interesting to consider the attempt to deal with the wilderness by defiance.

The idea of defiance is inseparable from the figure of Mrs. Potter and her fishing. She fishes "with a concentrated ferocity", "upstream to the source", and "it's not for fish she fishes". Her fishing, associated with the quest for significance in both the religious sense and in terms of the maimed Fisher King of "The Wasteland", is an act of defiance against both God and nature:

Still the old lady had fished. If the reeds had dried up and the banks folded and crumbled down she would have fished still. If God had come into the valley, come holding out the long finger of salvation . . . asking where, asking why, defying an answer, she would have thrown her line against the rebuke; she would have caught a piece of mud and looked it over; she would have drawn a line with the barb when the fire of righteousness baked the bottom.

Mrs. Potter's defiance is demonstrated as well in her holding up the lamp in broad daylight "looking where there's nothing to be found", for "something hid from every living thing". In each case Mrs. Potter is abusing the natural elements and attempting to assume divine prerogatives. Using the wrong methods and approach, the Old Lady's quest is inevitably sterile, distortive, and self-destructive.

Mrs. Potter is more of a force than a character in the novel, and her figure is comparable to that of Addie Bundren in William Faulkner's *As I Lay Dying*. Addie is essentially selfish, refusing the ties of love and family responsibility. Her temperamental isolation imposes itself on others physically and psychologically. Her adultery with the Reverend Whitfield is an act of defiance, a quest for sin so that she might be condemned rather than forgotten by God.³ So too Mrs. Potter turns her flesh from all living flesh and pursues a course of concentrated defiance.

Addie Bundren dominates and shapes her children's complex psychological reactions, for she is the source of latent tension and violence each of them expresses.⁴ A similar relationship exists between mother and child in *The Double Hook*; Mrs. Potter's influence over her children is a matter of blood as well as of power. James' murder of his mother is an act worthy of the Old Lady herself; the ferocious interaction of will, words and hands in a deed that is ineffectual in an immediate sense because it is without definite aim. Similarly, when he blinds Kip, James says, "If you were God Almighty, if you had as many eyes as a spider I'd get them all." In the exact manner of the Old Lady, James defies both God and nature. His final act of violent rejection and defiance is the whipping of Lenchen and Greta. This act demonstrates the flaw inherent in the method of defiance; James is punishing these people because he had relied on them, on forces outside himself, to effect a transformation of his world. Now James is ready to learn that regeneration must come from within.

Greta is the sterile figure who replaces her mother in the unredeemed wasteland. She embodies the same defiance of nature and humanity as the Old Lady, but is even more negative than her mother. The scene of her self-destruction is a complex one, mirroring the ultimate inefficacy of rebellion alone. Greta rejects

the human companionship of her family; she abuses the nature, already distorted, symbolized in her flowered housecoat; she thirsts for revenge against the life-force of Lenchen and the potentiality for salvation of James; finally, all these challenges are consumed in her defiance of the vision of her mother, forbidding her to handle the matches. And Greta's reward is not escape or oblivion, but the embrace of Coyote in his darkness and fear.

In this way the children are deeply related to the mother. Her death is a longed-for event, finally precipitated by James' violent action. Her death is a fundamental necessity for the survival of the community. As Daedalus learns in Sheila Watson's "The Black Farm", some must die so that others may live more abundantly.⁵ Furthermore, James must utterly reject his mother and temper the qualities that relate her to him. Like Mrs. Watson's Oedipus in "Brother Oedipus", James must learn that "We are her children. She is not our mother."⁶

The whole concept of defiance, like most of the elements in *The Double Hook*, is an ambiguous one. Ara provides some justification for violence when she says there are some things "that can't be straightened out. They have to be pulled and wrenched and torn." But such action is necessarily limited, since man cannot "hold and shape the world." William, discussing rebellious horses, points out the final uselessness of defiance: "Some, he said, are pure outlaw. But there's the torment of loneliness and the will of snow and heat they can't escape, and the likelihood that some stranger will put a rope on them at last."

The narrator of Sheila Watson's "Antigone" discusses, in a different context, the ideas of escape and defiance. Antigone lives in a world of sensory experience:

Yet she defies what she sees with a defiance which is almost denial. Like Atlas she tries to keep the vaulted sky from crushing the flat earth. Like Hermes she brings a message that there is life if one can escape to it in the brush and bulrushes in some dim Hades beyond the river. It is defiance not belief and I tell her that this time we walk the bridge to a walled cave where we can deny death no longer.⁷

Defiance is a denial that leads ultimately to death; escape is possible only to a dim Hades next door to death. To regenerate the wilderness, affirmation and belief, awareness and submission, must unite in a transcendent compromise for the good of the community.

THE PATTERN of rebirth in *The Double Hook* is that which Sheila Watson's Oedipus voices: "recognition, rejection, redemption."⁸ Kip is

most closely associated with the power of perception and one of his meditations provides the novel's epigraph and the core of its interior symbolic pattern:

Kip's mind was on James. . . .

He's like his old lady, Kip thought. There's a thing he doesn't know. He doesn't know you can't catch the glory on a hook and hold on to it. That when you fish for the glory you catch the darkness too. That if you hook twice the glory you hook twice the fear. That Coyote plotting to catch the glory for himself is fooled and every day fools others. He doesn't know, Kip thought, how much mischief Coyote can make.

Coyote reaching out reflected glory. Like a fire to warm. Then shoving the brand between a man's teeth right into his belly's pit. Fear making mischief. . . . Fear walking round in the living shape of the dead. No stone was big enough, no pile of stones, to weigh down fear.

His mind awake floated on the tide of objects about him. Was swirled in a pool. Caught in the fork of a tangle. Diverted from its course.

This passage demonstrates the nature of the wasteland, dominated by fear, Coyote and the living dead. Kip perceives that no heap of broken images is large enough to bury fear, that no fragments can be shored against the ruin of the wilderness. Kip is also aware of Coyote's basic inadequacy. Coyote, like Kip himself, like Mrs. Potter, reaches for the glory and is deceived. And Coyote deceives others with "reflected glory"; the glory he reflects is that of the human consciousness that has been subjected to his potent darkness. Knowing this, Kip can see the pattern that will change the world; the power of knowledge over ignorance, and the integral relation between fear and glory.

For all his perception, Kip is unable to initiate the rebirth process, for his consciousness, though heightened, is essentially passive, "diverted from its course". Coyote calls Kip his servant, and in this relationship Kip's abuse of his perceptive power is made evident. As Coyote's servant, as a messenger, Kip's awareness leads to no discovery of new life, but rather to an increase in the paralyzing fear and passivity of the characters. Kip becomes a true inhabitant of the unredeemed world in his attempt to seduce Lenchen and in his refusal to deliver James' message to her. Above all, the limits of his perception become plain when he errs in assessing James; Kip assumes James is habitually docile and therefore not to be feared.

It is appropriate that Kip be blinded, "because Kip had been playing around with the glory of the world." The power he had abused must be taken from him. But in the community's rebirth through its own efforts Kip too is saved, for he admits his blame. In the redeemed world that integrates glory and fear, Kip

deserves his place, for by his constant antagonizing of the other characters he assists the purgatorial process by which suffering transforms the earth.

James is the catalytic figure who instigates the pattern of renewal. He has no heightened awareness to help him in his progress from recognition to rejection and redemption, but rather achieves perception in his individual participation in the collective experience. In the beginning, James is a native of the wasteland, conditioned by environment. His affair with Lenchen and the conception of his child are initially without meaning, part of the inarticulate and ultimately ineffectual defiance of circumstance. The murder of his mother is an almost ironic symbol; will, words and hands meet in an action that is ferocious but meaningless because rejection has preceded recognition. Thus action leads only to stasis and fear, which James had tried to conquer rather than incorporate into his experience. "Since the fury of the morning he'd not been able to act. He'd thrown fear as a horse balks. Then he'd frozen on the trail. He was afraid. Afraid what Greta might do." Thus violence leads only to further violence, the blinding of Kip and the whipping of Lenchen and Greta. These actions are a logical working out of his initial deed, but they signify a decreasing scale of ferocity. They also represent the infliction of the purgatorial process on other members of the community. James' final act of rejection is the most passive of all; that of escape. "He wanted only one thing. To get away. To bolt noisily and violently out of the present. To leave the valley. To attach himself to another life which moved at a different rhythm." James' search for value is still parasitic and materialistic, just like his mother's questing defiance. He still does not realize that the transformation of the life-rhythm has its source within man rather than in external circumstances.

In the town James no longer defies his environment, but rather moves parallel to it. Its nature is basically that of the wilderness. The hotel, like his home, has a "hanging and a waiting look". The brothel smells of "bodies and kerosene burning away", recalling Greta's self-destruction of which James is unaware. It smells of mud and dead fish, thus including Coyote's bed-hole and Mrs. Potter in its desolation. In effect, James has merely escaped to another wasteland. James sees his mother as he enters the town, continuing to envelop him in fear and darkness. He sees her for the first time since the murder; his departure has thus only brought him closer to the atmosphere of the unredeemed world. James cannot escape his mother. He cannot escape himself.

Confronted with a wilderness even more barren than that he had escaped, for

the first time James asks "what he'd really intended to do when he defied his mother at the head of the stairs." Coyote replies,

To gather briars and thorns,
To go down in the holes of the rock
and into the caves of the earth.
In my fear is peace.

In Coyote's terms the result of the murder is suffering, the confrontation of fear in a handful of dust. This is of course true, and an essential part of the rebirth process. But Coyote would have the pattern suspended at this point, offering only the peace of surrender to fear, the abdication of the glory inherent in responsible human existence. Here James achieves recognition; Coyote's bed-hole is not enough. "This bed is too short for a man to stretch himself in. The covering's too narrow for a man to wrap himself in." Moreover, James realizes the inadequacy of his defiant attempts to change things. "All he'd done was scum rolled up to the top of a pot by the boiling motion beneath. Now the fire was out." The fire of violence James discovers, burns without cleansing. James' encounter with the hotel parrot who has the rights of a dumb beast and a speaking man adds to his growing awareness of his true situation. Its uniqueness provides a low-keyed analogy for Coyote. Perhaps unconsciously James recognizes that so far he himself has acted as a dumb beast, motivated by fear; it is time to assert the rights of a speaking man, and affirm the individual and collective glory of humanity.

The process of recognition enables James to reject the brothel and its symbolic embodiment of the wasteland. As he leaves it he stands in the cool air by the earthy bank of the flowing river, and he finally experiences the freedom from his mother he had so desperately desired. James exists here in a peaceful isolation which contains the potentiality of his redemption; the elements are converging for his salvation. But the pattern is not complete. Lilly comes to him and the fire of her simulated passion recalls the nature of James' initial attachment to Lenchen. Here James experiences the fire which, ironically, can cleanse without destroying. Lilly steals James' newly purchased wallet, thereby exacting the price of his escape, his escape not from the wasteland, but from the inherited materialistic attitude to it which rendered it sterile.

James' thought now naturally turns to "Lenchen and the child who would wear his face", and he realizes that there lies his "simple hope". His town experiences have "freed him from freedom"; that is, he now recognizes the necessity of assuming his new responsibilities. Freed from its stable, James' horse naturally turns toward home and James moves with it in unified rhythm. Coyote tries to

deny James' quickening spirit of hope, but his purposeful activity creates a tempo more significant than Coyote's advice to rest in the dust. In a microcosm of the regenerative pattern, James moves from dead grass and spraying dust into a meadow of wild hay watered by a hidden spring, upon a stallion that draws life with every breath.

As he nears home, light defines the world for James, validating his rejection of the desolate town. He is uncertain about what he will find, expecting a cry of hate. His perception is still limited, yet from the distanced heights James is aware of the ordered regularity of the terrain to which he returns. He comes with a question and a resolution; he asks if the water must dry up forever, and determines to find Lenchen and transform their relationship. "Out of corruption life had leafed and he'd stepped on it carelessly as a man steps on spring shoots." And in the fulfilment of his resolution, James answers his own question.

The final step in the pattern of recognition, rejection and redemption is accomplished when James confronts the ruin of the Potter farm. Here he recognizes and rejects the fire that burns and only destroys, but he sees that such a flame enables redemption. He sees the "bare hot cinder of a still unpeopled world", and feels that "by some generous gesture he had been turned once more into the first pasture of things". The implication here is not of a newly created world, but of one recreated by a combination of man's effort and some inexplicable but benevolent gift from beyond man's power. And in planning the reconstruction of the reborn world and embracing his child, James fulfils his major role in the redemption of the wasteland.

The child is called Felix, Happy; he is born, not to redeem the world, but to figure forth its redemption. Physically the child of James and Lenchen, he will participate in their regenerative activity; spiritually the child of Felix Prosper, who brings him into the world, he will share the supernatural milieu which Felix contributes to the rebirth of the community.

Felix's initial passivity is seen in his indifference to the storm and his refusal to accept suffering. His earlier association with Angel, like that between James and Lenchen, had come about "by chance. By necessity. By indifference". Felix's gradual awakening to his role as spiritual leader is rooted in this passivity. When Lenchen comes to him for help, his first reaction is to chase her away. This desire, unlike his response to Mrs. Potter, does not sink into indifference, but moves to the half-forgotten ritual of religion and hospitality. This scene, introducing Part II of the novel, adapts the Visitation of the Virgin Mary to her cousin Elizabeth, the joyous salute, "Blessed is the fruit of thy womb". But Felix is still

gripped by inactivity. "He'd had his say. Come to the end of his saying. He put a stick on the fire. There was nothing else he could do."

Felix ends Part II with a dream vision which conceals James' escape with a symbolic fantasy of Angel's return. This vision involves the entry of the Virgin into Bethlehem, and that of Christ into Jerusalem, the ideas of death and life and the deceptive nature of mere appearances. In the dream, Felix assumes his priestly garments in the dawn, stressing the need of remembrance. He feels the pull of Coyote, but rejects him for Angel's return, and he welcomes her with the words that begin the Canon of the Mass, suggesting the mysteries of the Incarnation and the redemption of mankind. This dream, superimposed on James' escape, seems to imply that Felix's passivity has given way to a vision that transcends physical activity. But when confronted by the needs of Kip, Felix undertakes his pilgrimage of humility to Angel. His return home undercuts his vision with gentle irony, for she comes with him, not on a sleek ass, but "on her two feet, her children tagging behind her." Felix's spiritual perception must be modified by the actuality of practical activity.

The invasion of his indifferent isolation by the needs of others enables Felix to achieve both spiritual and practical wisdom, symbolized by the classical image of the owl. It is his assistance at the Nativity that results in his own rebirth, and his contribution to the salvation of his world. "It was not until the girl had come battering at his peace that he'd wondered at all about the pain of a growing root. . . . His eyelids dropped. His flesh melted. He rose from the bed on soft owl wings. And below he saw his old body crouched down like an ox by the manger."

Recognition, rejection, redemption. Kip, James, Felix. Each is associated with a particular part of the rebirth pattern, but James, because of his activity, is the main figure who initiates its process. Each of the other characters is caught up in the collective experience, contributing to it in varying degrees. Lenchen, initially marked by fear and frustration, is a passive participant. Her awareness is limited; just before the birth of her child, she fears she has wrecked the world, while, ironically, she is assisting its salvation. But Lenchen's association with the fire image and her natural oneness with her environment make her a fruitful life-force. When she rode, "she was part of the horse. Its crest and the edge of its fire."

Her mother, Widow Wagner, embodies the fatalistic despair, the fear of God and His Judgment, which have turned the terrain into a wilderness of waiting women. Cornered by circumstance at last, her waiting gives way to practical aid, and prompted by Angel, she is able to give of herself spiritually, to offer the con-

cern, help and forgiveness that are the true maternal virtues. Ara has greater perception. She is aware of their passive isolation, and tries to fit the pieces into a pattern. She admits her own blindness, but rejects love as a unifying force and thus fails to find the pattern she is seeking. So Ara embodies the suffering of her world, aware of and experiencing it. She was "made to walk on roads and to climb cliffs. Made to bear her hands against rock faces and to set her foot on sliding shale."

Angel possesses a unique curiosity and tolerance, and the ability to articulate her thoughts. Felix's recollection of her encounter with the imaginary bear implies that she has conquered the fear of mere illusion and so enjoys a relative freedom and sense of realism. Angel has a saving adaptability to circumstances and the art of recognizing and achieving what is needful. She too is associated with the flame, in a personal and redemptive sense, in a passage that deftly reveals her mild superstition, her valid spiritual function, and her human practicality. Felix recalls her: "He'd seen Angel light a lamp against the storm. Not a wax candle to the Virgin, but the light she'd said her father kept burning against the mist that brought death."

Heinrich Wagner acts as a dormant parallel to the activity of James Potter. At first his impulse to isolation is manifest in his fence-building. He fears the light, prefers the darkness, procrastinates in his purpose to confront James about Lenchen, and is inarticulate in his desire to communicate with his sister. But Heinrich offers hope to his mother and goes out to search for Lenchen. Heinrich halts at the destroyed farmhouse, for his role is not of achievement, but the reflection of the potentiality of redemption. His ignorance of love thwarts his activity but not his perception. ". . . he thought of light blazed into a branch of fire. How could he say that the earth scorched his foot. That he must become ash and be born into a light which burned but did not destroy."

William Potter is the character who is caught up in the rebirth process, without contributing much more than proof of its efficacy. His irrelevant anecdotes and too-ready explanations give way gradually to more perceptive comments pertinent to the situation. His goal is physical comfort and peace, the completion of his daily chores. His only impulse to unity is a limited familial instinct, against which the final communal integrity can be seen as transcendental. William sees his limitations, but refers only to his own household and not the world at large. Yet William is redeemed by the concerted efforts of others, and aptly finds his task in waiting for James to return, not the passive suspension of the wasteland, but positive waiting with a social purpose.

Thus the wasteland inhabitants undergo a rebirth into a spiritually and physically ordered world, in which fear and glory are both incorporated into human experience. In the redeemed universe, each has his place, even Coyote. He has played his part of imposing fear on his subjects. Recognition of his inadequacy enables a realization of the function of suffering, and hope for a wider world of transformed values. So it is fitting that Coyote should have the last word, announcing man's triumph:

I have set his feet on soft ground;
I have set his feet on the sloping shoulders
of the world.

NOTES

- ¹ Don Summerhaves, "Glory and Fear," *Alphabet* 3 (Dec. 1961), p. 50 (Review article).
- ² Sheila Watson, "Antigone," *Tamarack Review*, II (Spring, 1959), p. 6.
- ³ Peter Swiggart, *The Art of Faulkner's Novels* (University of Texas Press, 1962), p. 118.
- ⁴ Olga W. Vickery, *The Novels of William Faulkner* (Louisiana State University Press, 1959), p. 52.
- ⁵ Sheila Watson, "Black Farm," *Queen's Quarterly*, 65 (Summer, 1956), p. 209.
- ⁶ Sheila Watson, "Brother Oedipus," *Queen's Quarterly*, 61 (Summer, 1954), p. 227.
- ⁷ Sheila Watson, "Antigone," p. 8-9.
- ⁸ Sheila Watson, "Brother Oedipus," p. 226.

VIRTUE IS NOT ENOUGH

Ralph Gustafson

SANDRA KOLBER, *All There Is of Love*. McClelland & Stewart. \$4.95.
ELIZABETH BREWSTER, *Passage of Summer*. Ryerson. \$4.95.
DAVID WEISSTUB, *Heaven Take my Hand*. McClelland & Stewart. \$3.95.
GEORGE BOWERING, *Rocky Mountain Foot*. McClelland & Stewart. \$3.95.
IRVING LAYTON, *The Whole Bloody Bird*. McClelland & Stewart. \$5.95.

ONE TRIES TO SKIP the blurbs and hand-outs and public-relations jobs and shed preconceptions. It is hard when the author is a pretty housewife who loves her children and husband and yet has two books of poems published, one of which, "in its first season," went into a second edition. The extraneous is disconcerting and confusing. If the poet is on television and pretty to boot (I am not speaking of Irving Layton) is it not certain that she writes bad poetry? If the blurbist tells me that "her poems are addressed directly to the modern man," am I not naturally hooked? Why, then, do I feel guilty in lodging my verdict that *All There Is of Love* is one of the worst books of poetry that a Toronto publisher has offered in a long time? (Would it be different if the editorial office were in Lime Ridge, say, or Bella Bella?) Mind you, I say that this book is one of the worst as poetry (I am still chivalrous, God grant). A book of poetry can adhere to the Ptolemaic system or liken love to a red, red rose; I don't care, as long as the author knows what a poem is. Not what a thought is; what a poem is.

Sandra Kolber is pretty and a housewife and I wish her well and I wish her new book were a thumping poetic explosion and she our Emily Dickinson or whoever Sandra Kolber wishes herself poetically to be. But it isn't and she isn't. The trouble is the book isn't even good prose — which at the least poetry has to be, as Uncle Ezra long ago pointed out.

If you were full and I were whole
we should not need this love
that fleshes in the core of me
and heals your breach somehow.

("Grateful Omissions")

When feminine wit (and Mrs. Kolber has that) turns to honest earnestness, the result is always in need of a sense of comedy. Why is that? Why don't males take such pratfalls (even when their wit is male, of course, and life is earnest)?

Tomorrow is a dream
that rarely, if ever, comes true.
So drink the rum that makes the dreams
that make tomorrow now.

("Flight")

The publishers of Mrs. Kolber's first book of poetry, *Bitter Sweet Lemons and Love*, tell us that her poetry while (at times) "sugary" nevertheless is "under-

standable" (that's a give-away of Canada's degree of sophistication). I am a little worried that I am stupid (or tired, or bored with poetry?):

Except no one would ever cry public
when loving is even alone,
and sex is redressed unto neuter
and self is a thing to disown
from the backlash they promise austerely —
rerigid and stolid anon —
emancipate fellows refuse being squared
by —
who know how to turn themselves off.

These lines are about the "Generation Gap." That is the title. But they flummox me. Perhaps, if I am stupid, I could, with concentration, win through. But there is nothing to make me want to make the effort: neither the possible rhythm, the lethal precision, nor the glorious music of the English language.

One can read through the 129 pages of quiet verse by Elizabeth Brewster, remain unengaged, undisturbed, and yet prefer this quiet, unpretentious verse that knows about the *Passage of Summer* to the stridence that persists that this is *All There Is of Love*. One can prefer; yet also, alas, disclaim both.

Neither is poetry. The verses of Elizabeth Brewster, a retrospective collection that looks back to 1951, sometimes hover on the edge of a passionate commitment to content and language, then withdraw themselves and continue to tell us about life, never showing us. The rhythm is banal or non-existent; the language unexceptional; no irony brings the romanticism into accord with fact; no emotion disturbs the sincerity. Once or twice her Maritime small-town portraits impress the reader in the way that the emotional geography of Cogswell or Nowlan does; once does the section "Songs and Sonnets" conjure even the name of Dickin-

son. Then all is peaceful; memories annihilate time and death (this book can speak of "death's kiss"!); the author withdraws and looks on remotely and with all she says we are in sympathy, unmoved. Life undoubtedly has touched the author and deeply and cruelly. But life is not art. And here is no art.

My cousin, having survived
Five years of active service
As a wartime pilot,
Smashed into a freight train.
With his car and two small children.
I do not know if he was drunk or not.

("Deaths")

David Weisstub is a Canadian of 25 years, born in Port Arthur, raised in Winnipeg, now studying at Yale Law School. He is new to Canadian poetic circles, and *Heaven Take my Hand* is his first book of verse. Again alas, I do not like the book. Saying so in this case, puts me under special obligation to explain myself. The subject matter of the book is deeply based on Hebraic theology and culture. This is a particularly rich area for a poet to draw on. I remember once, over a lunch with A. M. Klein, telling him that I envied him the possibility to draw on Hebraic culture for moving, fresh image and metaphor. He looked up at me as if I was crazy, struck dumb with astonishment. It was the time of Hitler; just before Klein published his *The Hitleriad*. I was fed up with the Christian apparatus as a metaphor for poetry; it was cliché; it was a wobbling organum. Unless the poet could be as concentric as Hopkins or Eliot, Christianity as a poetic metaphor was about as good as June and a moon — though the moon, of course, now that it has been landed on, is once more good poetic cheese. After that first incredulous, sufferable moment, Klein realized what we

both meant and were talking about, the *art* of poetry.

It is the art of poetry that is lacking in these first three volumes before us. In Weisstub's book I find no, or very little, sign that this author is a poet. Emphatically, Weisstub's heart is in the right place. But a blood pump doesn't make a poet.

Weisstub is deeply dedicated religiously and is deeply aware (of course, alas) of suffering. I have forgotten, pretty much, who Miriam was, and am hopeless in remembering what exactly was the relationship between Leah and Laban. Thus, I disqualify myself. But only up to a certain point. I looked the relationship up. I consulted the glossary in the back of *Heaven Take My Hand* when I came on phrases I could not be expected to know. But I got irritated. There came a point when I knew the author was aware that the Hebraic phrases were necessary only to him. They could not possibly convey their connotations beyond. As Henry James cracked about Walt Whitman: "He knew too many foreign languages." As Berlioz said of Saint-Saens: "He knows everything but he lacks inexperience." The erudition is the sort of humiliation (or condescension) we occasionally get from Eliot and Joyce. Why not:

master of Israel's palm groves
ascend to the gates of heaven

rather than:

rebbe of Israel's palm groves
ascend to the shearim.

(Mr. Weisstub does not like punctuation or capitals like so many lower-case Canadians who don't know a rhythm from a riot). A. M. Klein never got reconдите.

(Weisstub has a poem to Klein). Neither does Layton (*vide infra*).

But let all this be necessary to convey the ambience of the book. I should educate myself. The fatal flaw is that Weisstub does not convey the passion he feels; nor does he hear what he writes:

embrace my mind, dialogicize
my daemonia
playing on dead corpses
eyes the aeternitatis
wincing at my modality
jesting with my determinacy
("discovery")

There is much prose of this nature. It is a relief to come on such prose as this:

he
met
her
in a west side
laundry room
("encounter")

Let us go west. Look at the last page of George Bowering's *Rocky Mountain Foot*:

nobody
belongs anywhere,

even the
Rocky Mountains

are still
moving

Even the comma in there doesn't hold us up. Yea, verily. We all are moving gravely. Our "small durance," as Hopkins says, naught availeth much. Move from one end of the book to the other. Look at page 11 now, where the epigraph/epitaph says "all / Life death does end and each day dies with sleep." Are you out of breath? Dead sure? Yup, I'm dead sure, as George Bowering might say — and does. And because he does, his book is full of life. Paradox? Figure it

out for yourself. Many people can't. I too am always being accused of seeing the skull beneath the skin, and answer to know you are dead is a sure way to keep yourself quick. As Kirkegaard says, "Man must live his contradiction." And this present book is one that does. Look, now, if you aren't completely out of breath, at the bottoms of the pages (all of them). Here you will find some pretty nasty counterpoint (usually in prose; counterpoint to Bowering's poetry which sometimes is, alas, prose). Counterpoint (not petitpoint) is what makes music rise up and hit you where you live; it is what makes poetry. Counterpoint is wisdom; on the one hand, you have experience, on the other hand, you have illumination. The Word was made Flesh. As pretty a piece of counterpoint as you are likely to find — or as pretty a piece of irony, or comedy, or tragedy — whatever your poet naked (foot to brain) has a conviction of. Yeats has a word for it (he usually has): "Sex and the dead are the only things that can interest a serious mind."

Bowering has a serious mind. Take that frivolous bit of counterpoint he puts on page 17 (tired looking up?) about the Reverend John McDougall who ran up and down a valley in the Rocky Mountains faster than any man alive; "not because I was a good runner, but because a big buffalo was after me." That bit of fugue punctures pretension. Fugues generally do. They are as pragmatic as a bagpipe. I am reminded of why the keyboard is as long as it is. Answer: to accommodate the hoop skirts of Elizabethan ladies who liked to play duets.

People write names
in mountains
& come down

where the wind blows
around things,

as George Bowering says.

Now, go right back to the last page of the book (got your second wind?) where he says nobody belongs anywhere. Apart from this slippery foothold on today, Bowering certainly does; smack in Alberta (too bad it has to be a smack involving Queen Victoria; why couldn't the province be named Minnewissawatagan or some such?). The book celebrates Alberta as it seldom has been celebrated — and in a way that provincial Albertans won't much care for.

It's an elegy, in essence; an elegy with wit. Bowering mourns the blight of civilization, "this present enormity"; shows us how humanity pollutes mountains.

Video people! Calgarians, hopeless
automobile graveyard contractions
squasht into steel cubes . . .
somebody save them!

(“above calgary”)

His elegiac stance is mighty precarious, however. With nostalgia and neuralgia, the poet would wipe out everything, everything but irradiating wild flowers; his realistic grasp of the horrible present yearns itself into the impossibility of a longing for the “untouchable blue mountain.” The attitude is inverse romanticism. Bowering's saving grace is that he knows that in dreams begins responsibility.

His verse is an easy-going, projective verse, with an occasional wit-clinching rhyme. There are several descents into self-conscious rhetoric (that poem partly quoted above); and the stenographic syntax and blunt line eventually make one long for the grand style. But (as you have gathered) this is an accomplished,

jolting, entertaining book of Canadian poetry.

Earlier in this Canadian literary racket, still breaking up into self-righteous coteries and nasty firing-squads ultimately revealing themselves as toothed specimens that eat their own kind, in turn disintegrating into self-appointed foremosts consigning the hindmosts to oblivion (that gets at the truth of it) — earlier in this racket, as I say, who would have thought that Irving Layton would turn out to be self-competitive? Yet, now that we have *The Whole Bloody Bird*, here he is: the poet competing with the writer of prose; the sober thinker upstaging the clown with the red nose and umbrella on his low wire; the passionate man outrivalling the “prowling satyr in suburbia,” exorcizing the “unaging lover-boy.” Layton finally reveals himself. Out of all those 22 books of posturing pages and resplendent poems, exhibitionism and universal praise, assertion and compassion, out of all this the celebrant of screwing and heaven, hyperbole and truth, aggression and gentleness emerges now as complete man to whom ripeness is all, around whom, in his ageing, wisdom (though he will have none of it) gathers. Out of all the fiddle faddle of the past, his own and

his commentators’, emerges a writer of primacy, the man of letters that Canada deserves or doesn’t.

Read *The Whole Bloody Bird* without preconception. Good Lord! this man listens! He *listens*. Is there any other poet in Canada who does? Try talking to one, if you think so. Layton knows what is said. What is more important artistically, he hears what he writes. He is one of the three poets in Canada who command the grand style: the great memorable music, the linguistic line no longer words but meaning. What a relief to pass to this from the upcoming pages of Canadian poets who see no reason to listen to anyone but themselves and who do not hear what they say.

None of the great, sweeping, resonant poems Layton is capable of is to be found in this present book, though one or two (“Climbing Hills,” “Holocaust”) come close; Layton himself is aware of this, he calls its poems “pomes.” The poetic evidence here is of less tense a cast, an easy-going pliancy. But, as with all Layton writes, what there is is vital with death and sex.

The prose sections, the Obs and Aphs, as Layton calls them, are the ones which display the man of letters — observations

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as arrogant and observant, aphorisms as glib and as memorably cogent, as ever. The sections answer their author's own question: "Where has the man of independent mind disappeared to? Who saw him last?" Judicious and sober-headed are the comments on Israel, India, the Hippies, whatever. And what a salutary gust it is to find a Canadian writer praising the United States. It will perhaps now shake up Al Purdy to supervise a book of protests against the rape of Estonia.

The Whole Bloody Bird is not Layton's best book but it is a book by Layton and as such it is "open-eyed, courageous, truthful. And humane," as he wishes man to be. Layton helps make it "no longer possible to believe in saviours that neither laugh nor screw." His is the right prescription:

I want nothing in my hand
but water and sunlight
— a fist cannot hold them

Why should I contend with anyone?
Surely death is his enemy
as he is mine

BEYOND CAMELOT

Warren Tallman

MORDECAI RICHLER, *Hunting Tigers Under Glass*. McClelland & Stewart.

AT FIRST GLANCE there would seem to be two of him during the 1960's, Mordecai Richler the traveller and commentator in *Hunting Tigers Under Glass*, and Mordecai Richler the novelist in *The Incomparable Atuk* and *Cocksure*. The one in *Hunting Tigers* brings matter-of-fact attention to bear, the direct if droll eyes of the trained observer. The one in the novels calls on whatever spirit rules over the truth of exaggeration as his eyes go madcap and every day is crazy day for me. However, it would be wrong to diagnose a slight case of literary schizophrenia, Dr. Mordecai meet Mr. Richler. The way of looking differs but the traveller's eye is on the same beam as the novelist's and the notes are the same for

both: lowbrow Jewishness, lowbrow Canadiana, lowbrow culture. More, whether he looks through his direct or his madcap eyes the ruling spirit is a kind of gentle melancholy and the guardian angel, if there is one, a justifiable pride that he has remained his own writer, own visionary, own man.

The two "literary" essays in *Hunting Tigers* reveal his independence as he takes Norman Mailer and Bernard Malamud to task. Though he admires Mailer's personal charm, circa 1965, Richler is put off by the jackass egotism that erupts whenever Mailer gets into proximity to a theatre stage, a literary reputation like Hemingway's or an even more looming one like Kennedy's. One wonders how

Richler feels now that Mailer has refined his genius for self-publicity so that however many hooves he puts into his mouth he comes up roses, not to mention rich. The contrast can be seen in Richler's self-effacement in "Writing For The Movies" and in the 1962 journal account, "That Year in Jerusalem," the two longest essays in *Hunting Tigers*. In both he stays on the matter-of-fact side. Not the distinguished young Canadian writer swinging high among the sweet starlets of London, à la Fellini or Antonioni, but hired-hand Richler learning how to compose minimal dialogue followed by "with a far-off wondering look," followed by appalling conferences with cretin producers, followed by movies that are often enough likewise. And not the celebrated Jewish-Canadian novelist winging his way into the heartland of the Talmud and Torah in promised Tel Aviv, but plain Mordecai Richler visiting relatives and friends of friends and noticing a quality of life remarkably similar to the quality he notices in "The Catskills", his superb account of a sentimental journey to the Borscht Belt vacation resorts in upstate New York. In Israel he talks with a good many intelligent people, high-brows, but he tends to record these conversations perfunctorily, with a certain embarrassment (keeping the wives' names straight) and to feel much more at ease and observant in chance conversations with persons who could be interchanged with those at Grossinger's resort in the Catskills. Only at Grossinger's the quality of the place is more relaxed because out in the open. And so is Richler, almost at home, enjoying himself.

The essay on Malamud helps clarify what is at stake. In accepting the National Book Award for *The Fixer*, Mala-

ud quotes Herman Melville, "to produce a mighty book you must choose a mighty theme." But he goes on to wonder whether one couldn't write a great and enduring novel about the life of a flea. Richler finds *The Fixer* "curiously without an inner life, a will of its own," and concludes the essay by hoping that having "done his duty to the mighty theme" Malamud will "return to chronicles of the 'fleas' of his time, a form in which he is more likely to leave us with an enduring work." Notice that Malamud's "great and enduring" becomes simply "enduring." And surely, "chronicles of the fleas" chimes directly into Richler's preoccupation with lowbrow life, general mankind's overwhelming taste for buffoonery, vulgarity, corn, never a super-subtle soul around but instead a more or less endless procession of schlemiels. Ever since *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* in 1959 it has been to a high comedy of these lowlifers that Richler has turned and returned. It seems fair to assume that "low" is the level at which his imagination discovers the "inner life, a will of its own" which he misses in Malamud's work. Which assumption makes for a puzzle.

For Richler is himself a highbrow in the sense that he possesses exceptionally independent intelligence and bases his judgement of Mailer and Malamud on their writing talent, their ability to write well. What he scores against them are deviations from this strict standard, Malamud for moving outside sphere of his talent by attempting to write in "a middlebrow form," Mailer for letting inept writing move in as his ego looms up larger than his typewriter. This stance is aristocratic, that a good writer has a duty to write well every time out. Yet his high

view twists when one turns to his predilection for lowlife protagonists, the fleas of the world. Mind you these fleas are not arranged on some social scale, the wrong side of the dog's back. His most extravagant comedy usually concerns middlebrows, establishment people who have not so much a low as a severely limited view of life, through a glass with enormous anxiety — and not very far. See it, for the moment, as a battle of the brows: that Richler's is high, aristocratic; that middle impresses him as low and becomes the target for his comic exaggerations; but that low, the real schlemiels, have something like his special affection because their wackiness provides the "inner life" the responsive energy that lends shaping force to his imagination. Or, as he puts it in "The Catskills," speaking of Grossinger's resort,

here too are the big TV comics, only this is their real audience and they appreciate it. They reveal the authentic joke behind the bland story they had to tell on TV.

Note "real audience" and "authentic joke" and remember that in the 1960's Richler has been almost exclusively a comic writer. Small wonder that he feels more at ease at Grossinger's than in Israel.

Granted, this high-middle-low formula is too pat. However, it does point up a split in Richler's art. He for instance is too aristocratic as writer to take the kind of low road present-day Norman Mailer has elected. Mailer in 1969 is the same as the one Richler takes to task in 1965, only more so. In *Armies of the Night* he negotiates his penchant for self-advertisement beyond mania into an institution. The self he chooses to advertise is the one that turns jackass on public occa-

sions — all the world a drunken stage — particularly when he comes into contact with such highbrows as Dwight Macdonald, Bert Lowell, Paul Goodman, arms linked, we're all pals together. One suspects that their reaction to this camaraderie must be extreme consternation since the more he plays the fool the more inept they seem as leaders of the march on the pentagon, we're all stumbling over our own feet together. The difference here is between Richler writing about lowlifers, and Mailer becoming one, a kind of literary Duddy Kravitz scrambling every step of the way down to Washington in order to make it up to the top of reputation, bring your own cameraman. Yet the more overtly Mailer indulges his desire to be Number One the better the writing becomes. Rather than abandon his egotism Mailer indulges it, putting his hooves into everyone's mouth. But his typewriter sings. Which on the face of it would seem to disprove Richler's criticisms.

Yet there is good writing, and good writing. However well Mailer writes in *Armies of the Night*, his achievement is negative, a brilliantly narrated confession of questionable motives all around. The honesty helps wash Mailer clean so that his humanity shines through the sly corrosion of his confessions. But the negativism shows in form of his basic assumption, which is approximately the one Charles Olson identifies in criticizing the existentialists, a belief "that the pigs have won." There are more searching artists than Mailer who believe with Whitman, Blake, Shelley, Yeats, Lawrence, Pound, Williams and Hart Crane, to name a few, that human life is still ruled by angels, gods and demons rather than the Pentagon, Daly, Yorty, or New York's

finest, or Montreal's. Thus Mailer marching his image of himself against the pentagon may be a rose, sweet Norman. But an Allen Ginsberg trying to convince mankind that "heaven exists and is everywhere around us" is a far more profound public artist. And however admirable Mailer's attempts to stay on his feet and out front in Pigsville they are less significant than a Ginsberg chanting mantras in the midst of the Chicago police riots, exorcising Mayor Daly's mob spirit in convention hall, singing Blake songs to maligned flower children or raising a clawed prophetic hand in Witchita to cry down the bad language of our leaders all around the world, their black magic lies. Soul of Allen.

Yet just as Richler's aristocratic view of writing prevents him from taking the

kind of low road Mailer chooses, his commitment to lowlife comedy prevents him from taking the kind of high road an Allen Ginsberg walks. However, these limitations seem to me self-elected, deliberate, and subject to change. The essays on Mailer and Malamud can be read not only as criticism, one artist appraising a couple of others, but as gestures, a way of warding off writers with whom it would be a mistake to identify. Similarly, his opting for the chronicles of fleas, the goofy trials and tribulations of lowlifers, can be construed as a warding off, go in fear of "mighty themes." In "Writing For The Movies," "That Year In Israel" and "The Catskills" one senses how thoroughly Richler is not a public personality. This rules out Mailer's kind of writing which assumes *me first*, then

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art, a process of more or less throwing yourself off cliffs and hoping that your typewriter will catch up down. Richler isn't the type, but any writer of reputation can be tempted. Likewise with the mighty themes, witness some of the more disastrous writing of Hugh MacLennan and Morley Callaghan. Richler must be aware that both of these men write best when they stay close to direct experience and most mechanically when they turn to mighty themes. Yet I suspect that there is a further motive having to do with a patient sense on Richler's part of his past, present and future as an artist.

From the first he's been a wanderer. During the 1950's, starting from Montreal he moves to Spain to England then back to Montreal. During the 1960's its Toronto, England, Israel, and back to Montreal. I find the stopover in "The Catskills" the most revealing, particularly the passage from which he draws the title for *Hunting Tigers Under Glass*. He is writing of Arthur Winarick, the "Doctor Strangelove" of the Catskills, owner of the Concord, largest of the resort hotels:

A guest intruded; he wore a baseball cap with sunglasses fastened to the peak. "What's the matter, Winarick, you only put up one new building this year?" "Three." One of them is that "exciting new sno-time rendezvous," King Arthur's Court 'where every boy is a Galahad or a Lancelot and every damsel a Guinevere or a fair Elaine.' Winarick, an obsessive builder, once asked comedian Zero Mostel, "What else can I do? What more can I add?" "An indoor jungle, Arthur. Hunting for tigers under glass."

The cast of the early work is Romantic, protagonists who seek for subtler experience than their surroundings afford, with no great success its true but nonetheless with considerable ardour. The cast of his work in the 1960's is, as noted, madcap experiences of lowlifers. All roads lead to the Catskills, and Camelot at the Concord, or, better still, just over the way to where "Grossinger's Has Everything," the grand hotel of the world. See Galahad and Guinevere descending the great stairway, to bingo. Or possibly something more apropos, perhaps Grail, Grail, who's got the Grail? My guess would be that when you finally make it to lowlife Camelot it's time to move on. But as of the moment, 1969, Richler is in Montreal at work on a novel with that town as setting. So another guess would be that this novel will conclude the lowlife phase. And a final guess would be that after the early romantic cycle of the 1950's, and after the present lowlife cycle of the 1960's, a music and a melancholy are due to start, a slow movement, will it be grim? will it be sad? will it be sentimental? in which the voice of Zeyda will be heard again, as at the first. But these are only guesses. The present fact is that across two decades, and still a young man, Richler has written his way to a position that none of his predecessors in Canada attained. A young writer or reader can think he's the greatest or hate his guts. But he's *here*, like a city you will eventually have to visit if you want to get into the country.

TRANSLATING BRILLIANCE

Jack Warwick

CLAIRE MARTIN, *In an Iron Glove*. Ryerson.

CLAIRE MARTIN's claim to fame in Canadian literature rests principally on her brilliant French style. So it is quite natural that a serious translator should take up the challenge of rendering this uncommon commodity into English. Philip Stratford's version of *Dans un gant de fer* is a very good one; it reads like English and it reads almost like Claire Martin, which is no mean feat for an author whose brio is so intimately bound to the syntax and idiom of her own language. The reader whose French is too labouring to take the polished original at its own effervescent pace would have less to lose by reading it in Stratford's English.

Because this is an important matter in an age threatened by ersatz culture, it is still necessary to insist that no translation equals the original. This one has a few gallicisms, and a few phrases which give the right meaning but the wrong colour. Yet the author's urbane wit, so important in her treatment of this the lugubrious story of her life, is far from perishable; witness this remark on her father's endless warnings about the danger of young men:

The fact remains that it's a real disservice to girls to lead them to think that men are so ardent. They can't be anything but disappointed.

The intricate equilibrium of Claire Martin's first page, too, has been admirably preserved. Bitterness, irony, sober reflec-

tion, and an indomitable desire to wrest some fun out of life, are not only all visible, but also in the right proportions.

An exact and exacting sense of proportion, found above all in Claire Martin's style, is essential to understanding her work. Without it this autobiography risks falling, at times indeed does fall, into a closed world of self-pity. It is the quality of expression that shows the way out.

The following passage gives some idea how delicate the task can be:

...les clercs bretons et autres que nous valut l'anticléricalisme français et qui nous arrivèrent bien résolus à lutter contre tout ce qui pourrait les amener à déménager encore un coup.

*

...clerics from Brittany and elsewhere sent our way by a wave of French anticlericalism, immigrants who arrived firmly resolved to fight anything that might ever force them to move on again.

"Sent by a wave" and "force them to move on" are a shade stronger than the original, while "déménager encore un coup" suggests a vein of irony lost in the simple adverb "again". The result is that the English version evokes a picture of inveterate tenacity and shades of the heroic homesteader, whereas the French maliciously suggests stupidity bordering on sloth. This difference carries over much of the work, and the diminution of that ironic deftness tends to give the narrator a more indignant character in Eng-

lish, a more mocking attitude in French. What I am saying here, it must be emphasized, simply brings us back to the commonplace that literature is not complete in translation, not even such a painstaking and sensitive one as this. It may even go beyond questions of language, for with the cult of the Pilgrim Fathers resounding in our ears, how could we ever avoid the wrong connotations?

The world revealed by Claire Martin's autobiography is predominantly one of the Self struggling with other Selves. The main enemies of the budding author were the stupidity and hypocrisy of the other characters. These highly prized virtues made a deadly combination, amounting in some instances to brutal or hysterical cruelty. Though entirely credible and convincing, the account has the unfortunate effect of harping all the time on the contrast between the author's innocent intelligence and the limitations of everyone else, even of those she respected and loved. Covering a period which is better known for the Crash, the Spanish Civil War and Buchenwald, it runs the grave risk of seeming like a privileged form of suffering, the misfortunes of a pert young miss. Yet the well-to-do child's suffering also commands our respect, for her situation was (as her foreword to this translation comments) hazardous like that of any weak and persecuted sector of humanity. The value of this recital of complaints lies precisely in the fact that the author has chosen to run her risks brazenly. She includes the narrow horizons of her bourgeois education (anti-semitism and all) in her own tribulations. The work holds our attention by the total absence of sentimentality, as well as by the response it has aroused in readers

who see in it something of their own experience.

The characterization of a milieu is the other side of what we expect from autobiographies. At first sight, this is secondary to personal analysis in *Dans un gant de fer*. The author's sequestered childhood accounts for that. The reader can make no reliable inferences on how typical Claire Martin's family was. She herself sometimes makes remarks on how times have changed, implying that much of her experience was common, and at other times insists that she was never able to compare herself with the other girls at school. What they had in common was the detested institution, with its pettiness, its prudery, piety and persecution. But her special misfortune was that she dreaded going home even from that, whereas she imagined all the other girls had alternate spells of happiness. Consequently, the whole experience of conformist family and convent school was intense for her, while others may have found the convent education little worse than humdrum. Her portrait of it has been challenged by people with equal claims to knowledge of the original.

On the other hand, the lively French-Canadian reaction to the publication of these family secrets has also revealed a certain complicity. Other Quebeckers have claimed to recognize themselves in Claire Martin's mirror. Adrien Thério, rejecting the use of Queen Victoria as a convenient explanatory scape-goat, suggests that the father figure seen here is an extreme case but also an authentic prototype of the patriarchal society. Although the reader must beware of facile assumptions in placing this work in a social context, it does communicate something essentially characteristic.

Despite the limitations I have mentioned, and sometimes because of them, *In an Iron Glove* is a rich autobiography. We get to know Claire Martin to the point of sympathizing with the vestige of reticence which occasionally lies behind the wit and polish. It adds new meaning to the psychological games of her earlier

works, the ensemble creating a mystery which we feel impelled to explore. Even the narrowness of the vision offered enlarges our understanding of this important moment in Canadian life. Pascal's words may be twisted to meet the case: we were attracted by a stylist, and were delighted to meet a woman.

ACORN BLOOD

George Bowering

MILTON ACORN, *I've Tasted My Blood*. Poems 1956 to 1968, selected by Al Purdy. Ryerson. \$3.50.

AL PURDY and Milton Acorn have a lot in common, especially in the recent history of Canadian poetry. They both came to maturity at about the same time in the early sixties, not at an early age for either of them. They edited a magazine together in Montreal where Purdy was working in a mattress factory and Acorn was selling his carpenter's tools. Acorn was flopping at Purdy's flat, reading Purdy's library, and being introduced to Purdy's poet-influences, Layton, Dudek, *et al.* More than one reader thought at the time that Acorn was a pen-name for Purdy. That was all more than ten years ago. Now it is fitting, not to mention fortunate for Acorn, that Purdy edits the selected poems of his old pal.

One sometimes gets the idea that

Acorn doesn't edit himself with much taste. Purdy has put together this thick book of poems in such a way that even those among us who think Acorn can be very good will be pleasantly surprised by the quality through the whole work. Having so many good poems together in one book convinces me that Acorn is not only honest and exciting, as no one has ever doubted, but also very much accomplished as an artist, not so much the natural beast as he has often been envisioned:

so man's truest home is the wind
created of his breath
and he breathes deepest in mystery.

That kind of imagination has as much root in Acorn's earlier trade of carpentry (though Purdy tells me that when Acorn

was "helping" him erect his A-frame he proved not much of a carpenter) as does his celebrated socialism. He is still resolved to make his lines run true, to make the sounds render their finest possibilities lying in rime and punctuation, stress and juncture, all the joints fitted by a union man with pride in his craftsmanship. When he writes poems *about* carpenters the stanzas are filled with real men and tools and evidence that Acorn knows his materials as well as they do:

Since I'm Island-born home's as precise
as if a mumbly old carpenter,
shoulder straps crossed wrong,
laid it out,
refigured it to the last three-eighths
of shingle.

Acorn is an old union man, and he has in his poems as elsewhere a genuine sympathy for people, especially those who get pushed around by systems designed to perpetrate the various poverties capitalism feeds on. He calls himself a communist, but his communism is so pure and human that he would probably be sent away by any postrevolutionary politicians. His politics are as much a poet's communism as Shelley's were. He's a romantic radical, looking to awaken or "find outside the beauty inside me." He has the romantic sense of man's perfectability:

Knowing I live in a dark age before history,
I watch my wallet and
am less struck by gunfights in the avenues
than by a newsie with his dirty pink
chapped face
calling a shabby poet back for his change.

But he doesn't romanticize the poor in the way the bored bourgeoisie do. To be honest about the world (Acorn's intention and his strength) you have to in-

clude yourself in it. You don't go slumming. The poor people of the poems live in the next room and you can hear them through the walls. Sometimes Acorn carves his subject's name with a mining drill.

Speaking to the Daddy Warbuckses with their usurious power, he says, "When I shout love I mean your destruction." That's the last line of one of his famous poems, and when he read it in a Toronto park some years ago the fat cats sent down their mounted police to chase him away. Recently he read poems from this new book in an alley behind a complex of chi-chi stores in Toronto, and the cops were there again to close up the reading. (Purdy was reading too — Acorn introduced the two as the leaders in the realistic school of Canadian poetry:

Dear fine-eyebrowed poet
writing of "vengeful owls";
before we use up truth
our tongues'll slough off.
Why waste time telling lies?)

There are also two fables in prose in the collection. The better of the two is "The Legend of the Winged Dingus," a sweet tale of rising innocence and delight cut off by the suspicion and envy of a nation's old establishment folk.

Purdy's anecdotal introduction settles the historical details of Acorn's emergence on the scene, and wins the Great Canadian Describe Acorn sweepstakes by referring to him as "a red fire hydrant wearing blue denims."

It's a nice heavy book of Acorn's record, the first in six years, and the most accessible. Previously there had been *In Love and Anger* (1956) as bad as most early privately printed jobs, *Against a League of Liars* (1961), a small broad-

side, *The Brain's the Target* (1960), a chapbook, *Jawbreakers* (1963), his Contact Press book, and in the same year a special Acorn issue of *The Fiddlehead*. Purdy got himself out of communication with Acorn, and made the best selection possible from those sources. In addition we get our first look at a collection of the magazine verse since 1963.

As a whole, these later poems employ longer, looser lines, where the careful cutting has gone with the carpenter's tools. A kind of prosy abstraction emerges ("bubble on the universe in a conflagra-

tion of dimensions"). At first I was disappointed that the earlier exactitude had faded. But this book shows that Acorn has always known what he's making, and I'm willing to wait hopefully to see what his open-endedness will let free. He says that his eyes look in more than a simple outward direction now:

My arts are the impossible shades
 I see under closed eyelids, the attributes
 with which I caress my friends, not
 the amendments
 time makes as it passes, but the stillness
 sudden and lasting of a brainrooted flower.

YOUNG TORONTO POETS

T.O. Now. The Young Toronto Poets. ed.
Dennis Lee. House of Anansi, \$1.95.

DENNIS LEE's perceptive introduction to this anthology points out that there is a very small group of poetry readers who actively read what they know to be apprentice poetry. He admits that *T. O. Now* is a collection of such poetry, and he warns us:

Sooner or later you come back to the fact that there are poetry-readers and poetry-readers, and that any collection of new poems—especially by younger poets as varied as these—tests the reader's calibre as much as the writers'. To have a sense for what's at stake in their explorations, you need to be among the rugged discerning elite of poetry-readers.

I don't think that even this "discerning elite" would say that all thirteen poets in this anthology are good poets, or even show signs of becoming so. On the other hand, any number of discerning readers would probably disagree as to the choice of scapegoats. As an anthology it is well worth the entrance fee, I think, because there are a number of exciting signs of promise within. The poets you finally choose to look for again at your bookseller's will depend upon your own preconceived notions of what a poem should do.

Form, and the poet's concern for language (does he see the way words can be made to match and mate, the dancing

patterns of sound that can be found in an organic form?) are what interest me most. These interests have focussed my reactions to certain of the young poets in this book. Thus, I enjoyed reading Greg Hollingshead, Andre Scheinman (who, at 16, is the youngest contributor, and shows signs of going on very well), Ian Young, Robert Read, Peter Anson, Charles Douglas, Ted Plantos (because I have heard him give an extraordinary reading of one of his two poems here, "Visiting Roselynn Crystalle"), and Wayne Clifford. Of these eight, there are four who really get to me, and whose work I shall enjoy re-reading: Greg Hollingshead, Peter Anson, Charles Douglas, and Wayne Clifford.

Greg Hollingshead has an oblique imagination. The ingredients of his private world achieve a strange mixture in his poems, which are surrealist almost, but hold firm to reality throughout. Peter Anson calls himself a religious poet. Certainly he plays with religious concepts, tries to articulate The Name, and forces situations upon our consciousnesses which intrigue and tug the mind. Charles Douglas loves words and medieval studies. His sense of the ridiculous is refreshing. Wayne Clifford has already made himself known in his two small Coach House Press books. His presence in this anthology is a bit of a mystery, although I'm perfectly happy to find him here. He, too, loves language, I think. He works with words as a sculptor would, shaping and moulding them, playing them into the form he wants them to hold.

is entertained, entered
a phase, her face turned to
open hand's flight over
her, scrutable, in that

the shadow is as wing's
tiff
as bird flies
as quick
whose flicker does delight

As this poem indicates, he is something of a miniaturist. Certainly, I think he is a conscious craftsman, something I admire always.

This book is not for those who seek what is known and already given its place in "Canadian letters". But if you're interested in seeing what's happening at the periphery, then this will afford you a good glimpse of the new action there. A few of these writers will be around for some time. It's always interesting to be in on the discovery of new talent. *T. O. Now* affords you this opportunity.

DOUGLAS BARBOUR

CHANCE MET IN CANADA

New Canadian Writing 1968. Clarke Irwin.
\$2.95.

THE THREE WRITERS included in this anthology are represented in depth, David Lewis Stein and Clark Blaise by four stories each, Dave Godfrey by three. It goes without saying that the trio are better judged, separately and privately, by such exposure. One thing more: who edited this volume?

Stein's collection coincidentally provides us with a "history" of the short story in twentieth century North America in its movement from the understated, laconic "Charlie Chan and Number One Son," which is Morley Callaghanese, through the adolescent *rite de passage*

"The Huntsman," to the familiar Jewish family epic, "The Old Lady's Money," to the Herzogian "The Night of the Little Brown Men." However inadvertent this arrangement probably was, I found it useful and instructive. Mr. Stein seems willing and able to handle a variety of forms and traditions. I would like to focus on one story, "The Night of the Little Brown Men" which impresses me as unusually cogent.

The unnamed protagonist, the archetypal anti-hero, wages a terrible conflict in his mind between his own idealism and individualism and the hordes of desperate brown men who stand for Historical Necessity and Class Interest. Quite naturally for a young man reared in the mid-twentieth century, the struggle is imaged in terms of motion picture exploits, with the Hero of Heroes being John Wayne. In fact, John Wayne stands scowling as the protagonist signs the articles of surrender on board the U.S.S. Missouri. If the struggle is fantasy, it is none the less "real" for one can surrender to the inevitable impulses around him without ever venturing literally on to a battleground, without once leaving his bed.

The protagonist approaches his defeat with all the intense angst of a Herzog. The story is one long monologue interrupted only by bits and pieces of conversation with the wife. The lack of movement, the absence of externalized conflict, the traumatic examination of one's own basis for existence, the allusions to popular icons, even the surrender, place this story in a contemporary tradition of black humour in which the scrupulous study of a single animated and nerve-wrecked consciousness has become a principal subject.

Clark Blaise was raised in the United States, in Georgia. There is in his work a density and atmosphere which is, without question, the product of that experience. What is more, all four of his stories employ narrators, while only one of the other seven is so constructed. This may be only coincidence, but the intense chatter of narrators in American fiction has long struck me as a characteristic tactic as well as a thematic feature. In any case, it is impossible not to notice these elements of atmosphere, density and structure; their presence in this volume of Canadian stories may assist those readers who are interested in contrasting Canadian and American literary resources and traditions. Blaise is steeped in the values of American language and experience. And those values can be appraised not so much for their quality, although they will be, as for their historical and cultural relevance to the artist. While deploring the persistent complaint about Canadian identity, yet I would recommend Blais's work for what it implies Canada is *not*.

His story, "Notes Beyond a History," is developed around the American's quest after his past, after that elusive moment in his youth when the world ceased to glisten. In this case, the narrator-protagonist makes a journey into the mythic primordial condition and discovers there, in the Florida swamps, a clan (or race) of white negroes. At least, I *think* this is who he finds there. It is an experience that is no more comprehensible to the narrator for, a historian years after, he acknowledges Henry James' remark, "... the radiance of this broad fact had quenched the possible sidelights of reflection ..."

I too am a partisan of the broad sweep, of mystery that sweetens as its sources grow deep and dim. I live in the dark. . . .

Whatever the reason for my confusion about this story, I am still satisfied with it, believing that the mythic-racial complex in the American character continues to defy explication, continues to tantalize and terrify, compelling all Americans, like Blaise's narrator, to become historians but never to be very good at their work.

Godfrey's "Gossip: The Birds that Flew, the Birds that Fell" reveals a profound comic sensibility deployed here in his study of the loss of meaning and the encroachment of civilization upon nature and sanity. If these are not original themes, the author still approaches them with fresh compassion. I say "fresh" because no theme loses its meaning and vitality as long as an artist can come to it with independent judgement and understanding. The hero of this story is an angry middle-aged man, a happy reminder that the young aren't the only ones who have the right, not to say the audacity, to bitch about life. Mr. Courtney barely manages to hold his temper in front of his son and daughter-in-law, bright young superficial things who want only to be left alone to switch lovers, and before the onslaught of a building contractor who is digging up a fine grove of trees in order to erect two high rise apartment buildings. Familiar, but Godfrey brings off the piece by having Mr. Courtney finish off the disaster by shooting the bird population. I can't help thinking what Thoreau would have been compelled to do if he could see the picnic tables and used condoms littering the edge of Walden Pond.

I might add that Godfrey's "Kwame

Bird Lady Day" is the most original in form of all these stories in its incorporation of verse, medical log entries and a narrator who recites his own conversation in the third person. This is a piece about Africa, at that.

The very rationale for this collection invites inquiry into the Canadianness of it all. I'm forced to say that none of the pieces suggests to me some feature of structure or theme that is "Canadian." Stein, Blaise and Godfrey are writers writing, not writers - writing - about - or - from - Canada. Their common interest is in the human condition, as it should be. If anything, they have their windows open on the world, and that world is forthrightly engaged in the vigour of their prose and in the tough, demanding, yet sensitive perspective they bring to bear. These are new writers; they happen to come from Canada. But I suspect that they will insist that this last fact least of all concerns them.

VICTOR HOAR

IMPETUOUS ICONOCLASM

JAMES BURKE, *The Firefly Hunt*. Collins.
\$4.95.

HERE IS JAMES BURKE'S second novel, even funnier than his first, a topnotch contribution to the tradition of anti-heroes who stem in recent years from Gully Jimson. In its opening chapter, Timothy Badger grabs you like there's no tomorrow, demolishes a military tank with a flick of his cocked finger, then looks back long enough to flesh out his own unlikely history. In the process he raises eclectic Caine with a society going

soft in an Age of Masterbation, by gunning his eight cylinder wit to produce an exhaustive rush of informed detail.

A middle-aged car washer, social and marital dropout, he inherits from his eccentric uncle a neo-Gothic castle situated in the centre of a Canadian city, presumably Toronto. His first impulse is to unload this bastion of elite living — at least convert it into a home for unlucky children — in order to preserve himself from capitalistic pretentiousness against which he has so sedulously battled. But a clause in the will provides for the fatuous institutionalisation of resident collections of bugs, buttons, phony paintings, etc. Hence the castle is Badger's in trust only, and his reaction leads him to the discovery of his uncle's fortune which he dumps into a lake to keep his escaping balloon aloft. But as a confessed "Ishmaelite" he sinks anyway, and from his plunge he emerges at the shore of a nudist camp — not to languish in decadent idyll — instead to answer the hermitic call of the castle, from whence he resumes a relentless struggle against folly. End of fable?

Almost. To an advertising agency he rents space for an enormous neon sign which tangles the merits of Gardyloo mouthwash, then uses the rent money to defend himself in court against charges of desecrating and holding at bay a national monument.

For all the apparent plot, however, Burke doesn't tell a story so much as he innoculates it with ribaldry. The tank of the first chapter epitomizes the besieging forces of the last, and crammed between are fifteen other chapters that secrete intrigue, a nymphomaniacal landlady, black humour, and nimble digressions lambasting everything from the Dicken-

sian clutch of lawyers (Cutter, Mandrake & Swingle), to "Ginsberg celebrating his mother's grey-haired moribund vagina to the clash of Mickey Mouse cymbals."

Rather than a banging together of dispartes, Burke's style features a melding of iconoclastic observation that carries all his prose into a fusillade of irreverent artistry. In *The Firefly Hunt* the author juxtaposes images with a dexterity that picks up detail like a serge suit fetching lint. Modern youth, for example, has a justifiable right "to refuse to co-operate in the old Jekyll-Hyde transformation into the solid citizen who looks like the unbandaged mummy of a zombie dedicating himself to Science and the Genetic Warfare Branch of Acme International Pluperfect Peace Products Division, Inc. where he counts the radioactive turds of chromosomatically disoriented body lice in the interest of human betterment. On the moon." At his best Burke fobs off a fund of encyclopedic scraps to create an organic sense of picayune society. By timely allusions, moreover, his novel shows he's in cahoots with a good deal of tradition too.

In *Flee Seven Ways* these characteristics are less apparent. For one thing that first novel sticks closer to its story-line and pursues fewer tangents; for another, profiteering speculation occupies its narrator (who has a cameo appearance in *The Firefly Hunt*), making him part and parcel of the rat race. Badger's role, on the other hand, tends away from one-upmanship to concentrate on the monkeyshines of society watchmen: he mails off clocks that sound like bombs, "to remind the cannibalistic egomaniacs of this world of their forgotten mortality and humanity,"

and sends out good conduct medals to those who buck the bureaucrats.

Yet both of Burke's novels possess an impetuosity which makes them impossible to put down. If his first marks an occasional coincidence or flat character, his second improves with a riper insight that adumbrates his third as something to anticipate. While Timothy Badger fights desperately for his individuality from a position of individualism, he cauterizes his own frustrations with a sense of humanity through humour. Given the need for panacea it's one style that might catch on.

KEATH FRASER

ASCENT AND AGONY

MARGARET LAURENCE, *Long Drums and Cannons*. Macmillan. \$5.50.

MARGARET LAURENCE'S *Long Drums and Cannons* is a study of Nigerian dramatists and novelists from 1952 to 1966. It was planned and written to provide the kind of detailed handbook that those of us who have been interested in knowing, teaching, and enjoying West African literature have needed as guide and reference. Now, since the secession of Biafra, the madness of civil war is Nigeria's tragic reality. We are bound to read the book in search of another possibility in its dimensions — some increase in understanding of the destruction to which we stand confused and appalled witness.

Each of *Long Drums and Cannons'* six chapters is a comprehensive essay, five of them dealing with single writers — Sayinka, Clark, Achebe, Tutuola and Ekwensi — and the sixth grouping to-

gether a half-dozen significant, but, at the moment, less prolific authors — with the exception of Flora Nwapa, all male. The total achievement represents an astonishing flowering both in bulk and in excellence, since 1952, when Amas Tutuola's *The Palm-Wine Drinkard* became the first novel in English by a Nigerian to be published outside Nigeria and widely read. We have not been able to get the works of these authors easily. The interest and the value of this effort at complete coverage are, therefore, very great, abundantly justifying the plot summaries which might be considered overlengthy or expendable in more widely dispersed literatures.

Margaret Laurence's own fiction has already given evidence of her depth of knowledge, understanding and sympathy for the emergent African peoples. In this undertaking she puts off the fiction-writer, to put on most convincingly the plain, clear, expository style and the meticulous research of a careful scholar. The information she gives about tribal rituals which are the well-springs of Sanyinka's and Clark's dramas is, for instance, indispensable to their complete understanding; the non-specialist reader finds it difficult or impossible to assemble such information and its inclusion is very valuable here. Margaret Laurence holds her own flair for drama in language firmly in check as each Nigerian author and his works takes centre-stage. Only in her summary criticisms does she allow her preoccupations in theme and her own distinction in language to challenge her subject matter:

In Ibo villages, the men working on their farm plots in the midst of the rain forest often shout to one another — a reassurance, to make certain the other is still there, on

the next cultivated patch, on the other side of the thick undergrowth. The writing of Chinua Achebe is like this. It seeks to send human voices through the thickets of our separateness.

What beats through the book and the work of each author most consistently, of course, is the impression of men and women — and their nation — rushed into developments far faster than they can possibly assimilate the changes. Not only this — there is also the imperative need to resolve somehow a three-layered personality, rooted in the rituals of the tribal past, uneasy in the façade-overlay of the colonial - missionary period, and bewildered, brash and agonized in the demands of the present. Margaret Laurence speaks of Cyprian Ekwensi's latest novel *Iska*, in words which speak for them all — then, in the perilous days of hair's-breadth balance — and now, in the atrocious reality of the war:

The novel as a whole burns with the painful love of a country in which individuals are caught up in lunatic ferocities not of their own making, forced to make choices which no one should have to make — the cruel choices imposed by a situation.

It is, however, both the particular challenge and the measure of success of a book of this kind, to assemble and to remark on the differences and the variations within the frame of common background. To each his own *donnée*: Sanyinka's from the mask dramas of *Egungun*, the festivals, the drums, the Yoruba mythology and the folk-opera; Ekwensi's from the city streets, the beat of highlife music; Flora Nwapa's from the minds and the village tribal society of women; and Achebe's from background and foreground so intimately known and finely balanced by his art that his novels have

already taken their place internationally, among the accomplished fiction of the last decade.

Each writer uses the English language as his tool, sometimes achieving a moving effect with a translation as simple but as charged with the uncertainty of all things as Elechi Amadi's villagers greeting one another with "Let the day break." Sometimes a writer, Amas Tutuola for instance, plays variations on the norms of speech rhythms and diction with stunning effect: "Whisperly, the king spoke," or "so the whole of us left the hut and were singing and dancing along on the road to the town of the huntingprince."

Long Drums and Cannons is an important guidebook and commentary on Nigerian literature; more than that the themes and concerns of the works described are timeless — "the individual's effort to define himself . . . his perpetual battle to free himself from the fetters of the past and the compulsions of the present." And beyond all that, the book's title touches everything in it with tragic irony. It is a line from *Heavensgate* by Christopher Okigbo, now dead in the civil war:

I have visited, the prodigal . . .
in palm grove,
long drums and cannons:
the spirit in the ascent.

The cost of the ascent has always been great: now, literature cannot begin to measure its agony.

CLARA THOMAS

THE MUSE ACCLIMATIZED

GRAEME GIBSON, *Five Legs*. Anansi. \$2.50.

Five Legs is an exploration of the struggle for art, or for the freedom that art symbolizes, in a society that rewards men for their capacity to kill and accumulate rather than for their capacity to love and enjoy life. In the world of *Five Legs* art is a metaphor for the creative life — art is living fully; it represents a break with deadening hypocrisy and sentimentalism. Martin Baillie, whose funeral provides the focus for the action of the novel, represents the essential death-wish underlying the Protestant ethic of righteousness and work; his rejection of the possibility for sexual and spiritual freedom and his capitulation to

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the "safe" world of his sick parents and frigid girl-friend are suicidal by implication. His absurd death at the hands of a hit-and-run driver is merely a concrete manifestation of the inner death he has willed upon himself.

Lucan Crackell, whose inner landscape is laid bare in the first half of the novel, represents a variation on the same theme — that of death-in-life. He is a Martin who has survived his own self-betrayal, his failure to follow his instincts and passions, only to find himself in a living hell. He inhabits an atmosphere of guilt and regret, physically and emotionally constipated, and impotent as a man and as a husband. His career at the university is ultimately parasitic, based on exercise of the mind and severing of the balls. As Gibson's imagery suggests, Crackell is a frustrated Prufrock in an emotional wasteland.

These two lives do not represent the only alternatives in the novel. It is true that Baillie and Crackell are very much victimized by the values of a warped society, but Gibson is no simple determinist; he gives us, in the character of Felix Oswald (the consciousness rendered in the second half of *Five Legs*) an avenue of hope and escape. In many respects *Five Legs* is about Oswald, since he represents an as yet undefeated faith. Felix is a Canadian Holden Caulfield, a Graduate, trying to break through the layers of hypocrisy and indifference of upper middle-class life in Ontario. He struggles to escape a "fucking underworld" where "you're dead if you play the rules." Consequently, he is misunderstood, disliked, abused and resented. He is at odds with the world of computerized friendships and Boy Scout morality. At the conclusion of the novel Felix strikes out pre-

cariously towards freedom (perhaps only the freedom of insanity) like Huck Finn, or rather like Paul Morel in *Sons and Lovers*.

Gibson has had the courage and audacity to aim for the stars in this first novel. Not only is *Five Legs* conceived in grand terms, it also has as its models the works of Faulkner, Hesse, Joyce and Lowry. At times Gibson is too close to his models: for example, the novel begins with a situation which is perhaps too similar to the Bloom-Molly breakfast incident in *Ulysses*; and the events of Crackell's school career lose something by being too close to those of Stephen in Joyce's *Portrait*. The Spanish quotations and the image of the overturned car (which actually originated in *Heart of Darkness*) are the legacy of *Under the Volcano*. The final pages of the novel seem to have been inspired by the conclusion of *Steppenwolf*.

Of course Eliot is right about such things: poor artists imitate, good artists steal. And Gibson steals from the right places. *Five Legs* re-opens the doors Joyce closed firmly behind him and lets us back into the rich, confused garden of the mind. Gibson is especially talented in his simultaneous rendering of different levels of consciousness. Like Lowry and Faulkner, he understands that speech and action are a very small part of the fabric of man's conscious life, no more than the visible tip of the iceberg. In *Five Legs* Gibson renders not only speech and action, but also the myriad of feelings, impressions, sensations, memories and associations that constitute the intersection of internal and external worlds at any moment of an individual's life.

Five Legs is brilliant in its use of two first-person narrators, though "narrator" is hardly the right word since the effect

is that of having entered the minds of two persons who haven't the slightest notion of your presence. And yet the most interesting and original aspect of the book is the manner in which point of view is buttressed and rendered convincing by Gibson's peculiarities of prose. He rejects for the most part traditional grammar and syntax in favour of a seemingly disjointed, chaotic cascade of thoughts, feelings, impressions. Words pile up, sentences are broken up by periods, words are run together. All one can say is that this is how the mind works. We seldom think in complete sentences or paragraphs like those delivered to us in the first-person novels of the last 100 years. Sterne was closer to the workings of the mind than was Henry James. Gibson prefers to render his characters as characters in the swim or whirlpool of existence just at the moment of going under, rather than as old men reminiscing about their part in a fading drama.

There is danger in this method. An author may become either unselective or too clever. Occasionally one wonders about the inclusion of certain materials in the consciousness of a particular character. For example, is the caricature of academia a product of Lucan's mind or of the author's? Similarly, if he is upset about returning to Stratford, the scene of his early disgrace, will Lucan be conscious of the ease with which the toaster plug slips into the socket? The two following sentences seem to me to exemplify the two dangers I have suggested:

1. "The terrible noise this razor makes outside my head re-emphasizes the necessity of water."
2. "Her teeth tearing delicately worry loose a piece of toast."

In the first sentence the word "re-

emphasizes" and the phrase "necessity of water" sound too thought-out, too verbal to even resemble a disjointed impression or semi-conscious observation. The second sentence seems to be striving (rhythmically) too hard for the effect of the stock poetic line and is far too elaborate (and demanding) for the relatively insignificant action it is describing. It may be argued by die-hard surrealists that in this kind of book no one incident is more significant than another, but I think Gibson would agree that this argument is rubbish.

If his prose is occasionally too clever, it is often extremely beautiful and lyrical. In one spot Crackell goes into an Eliotish reverie that is quite moving:

Singing I have danced about a runty hydrant. Here we go round. Drunk with useless joy I have danced night from the open streets, from caves and branches, from between tomb homes at five o'clock in the morning. Here we go round and round.

And later, Felix Oswald:

Trees shiver with the leaf-loud wind as I walk and hear far-off engines: faint anonymous feet to the tree where I once saw, sudden raccoon away, I almost stepped on it, then heard the claws escape among those branches from me down below.

Few authors can sustain such rhythms for more than a few paragraphs, but somehow Gibson manages to keep them rolling page after page.

This is a brilliantly written novel; and it is important precisely because it is brilliantly written, not because it tells us about death or the dangers of waspishness. I believe with Ezra Pound that technique is the test of a man's sincerity. Every Canadian ought to read this book, especially young writers; *Five Legs* will help us move beyond the insipid naturalism that has stopped up the imagina-

tions of our novelists. I think that the emergence within two years of Gibson's *Five Legs* and Epp's *Pilgrimage to the Death* suggests that our fictional muse is finally becoming acclimatized. She may even take out citizenship.

GARY GEDDES

CAPRI PEDE

PATRICIA MERIVALE, *Pan the Goat-God His Myth in Modern Times*. Harvard University Press. \$10.00.

PATRICIA MERIVALE's thematic study of "the goatherd God" is the latest volume of the Harvard Studies in Comparative Literature. It is a powerful contribution to this distinguished series, not only for the success with which the author employs the methods of that recently acknowledged academic discipline, but for the way she surpasses them. The necessary apparatus of comparative literature is a tireless compendium of parallels, corollaries, and comparisons limited not by formal pattern but by the individual scholar's reading and perseverance. At its best this leads to astonishing insights into the evolution and metamorphoses of myth and idea; at its worst the reader is denied — or discouraged from — active participation in the process of aesthetic and literary judgment. We are shown in painstaking detail the historical and chronological occurrences of image, motif, or theme; we are told the critical conclusion. Dr. Merivale's book is an admirable example of the strengths of the discipline and an ingenious illustration of how to avoid the attendant pitfalls.

Her breadth of knowledge and variety of reading are so impressive that it would

be petty to grub about in search of the occasional Pan manifestation omitted from her literary catalogue. (The illustrations are interesting but unnecessary to her argument.) We are plunged headlong into the biographical details of this Arcadian god of woods and shepherds with the feet and legs of a goat. Chapter One begins with the classical sources (Plutarch's tale of the death of Pan, Ovid's Judgment of Midas and Pan and Syrinx, Apuleius' Pan and Psyche) and traces the origin of the concepts on which she will base her distinctions: the Orphic Pan of universality, the beneficent pastoral Pan of Theocritus; the satirical Pan of Lucian; the Eusebian-Rabelaisian Pan-demon and Pan-Christ. She then examines the development of these images from the Arcadian through the Renaissance, Spenserian and Miltonic to the Augustan. The allegorical, emblematic, ceremonial and intellectual uses of Pan are closely documented with a searching but regrettably limited glance at the related figures of faunus and satyr (there are aspects of the centaur figure for example which are intriguing in this context).

Chapter Two examines Romantic Pan in his two most frequent roles, the universal "Soul of all Things" found in Wordsworth, Keats and Shelley, and the Plutarchan dying god of Byron and Peacock, a frequent mingling of the two resulting in the nostalgic sense of loss which permeated the age. Victorian Pan is similarly generalized (and characterized) in Chapter Three, leading to the detailed analysis of the double cult, benevolent and sinister *fin de siècle* Pans, with which the remainder of her book is chiefly concerned. And here text and footnotes leave categories behind as Dr.

Merivale swings into her critical stride.

It is hardly surprising that Pan in modern times appears most frequently in prose fiction. Mrs. Browning's surfeit of lament ("Pan, Pan is dead!") and Aleister Crowley's pseudo-orgiastic chanting ("Io Pan Pan! Pan! Pan! Io Pan!") could never be fully redeemed by the superior efforts of Robert Browning and Ezra Pound or the more vehement announcements of Swinburne. And W. S. Gilbert effectively circumscribed the cliché in *Patience* (thereby dealing yet another blow to Oscar Wilde's artistic pretensions):

Let the merry cymbals sound,
Gaily pipe Pandæan pleasure,
With a Daphnephoric bound
Tread a gay but classic measure.

Nor would we expect Eliot's predilection for anatomizing the Christian ethic to lead him further than the furies; while Yeats, whose interests coincided with Crowley's on more elevated, hence more fruitful, ground, does not appear to have struck fire with Pan. (Although the benevolent little god peeped out from many of his London Friends, especially Sturge Moore and Charles Ricketts and Florence Farr's *Dancing Faun*, and the Dionysian Pan described in Chesterton's book on Blake offers a fascinating gloss on the final lines of "The Second Coming".) When one considers the significance of Pan to Emerson and Hawthorne, however, it is rather surprising that he did not surface in Edgar Allan Poe. And, although Whitman declared allegiance and Thoreau remarked on the physical resemblance, "All Walt is Pan, but all Pan is not Walt", as Lawrence shrewdly observed.

It is modern prose fiction, and the resulting mythic attitudes, therefore, to

which Dr. Merivale devotes the second half of her book (and here one cannot help but wish she had devoted more space to the one significant Pan in modern drama, O'Neill's). In the earlier century, Meredith had already indicated the pattern which would be followed, preserving "the paradox of Pan's dual nature and the concrete qualities of his essential form". Now she traces the development of this paradox through the benevolent Pans of Kenneth Grahame and James Stephens, whose ironic fable *The Crock of Gold* "foreshadows the best myth-making of the twentieth century", culminating, for the author, in the Pan cluster of D. H. Lawrence. Unfortunately, the greater the literary artist, the less help this kind of analysis is in pursuing the artist's meaning. A study of the Pan tradition in Lawrence, as Dr. Merivale admits, leads us to his worst novels and least successful short stories. An analysis of the "sinister Pan" of Machen, E. F. Benson, Saki (whose *Superbeast* returns us directly to Lucian and Longus), McKenna and Blackwood provides far more evidence of the state of mythology in the modern age. The dual vision of terror and ecstasy in the Panic experiences of E. M. Forster's early work proves far more conclusively Dr. Merivale's thesis concerning the Death of Pan in our age, with the additional chronological significance that Forster ceased to write fiction of any kind many years ago.

Dr. Merivale's admirable summary and conclusion closes with the distinction between Pan as "Nature" outside of man and as "the natural" within man, and her own critical conviction that "Pan is unlikely to become a literary fashion or a 'public myth' again — as such, he 'died'

in 1914." But when one considers the persuasive power of Milton's mighty "God half-goat, goat half-God", the substantial weight early supporters like Lyly and Heywood found in the perennial debate between "art" and "entertainment" (or in more contemporary terms, melody and rhythm), and the continual struggle between the god within and the world without, it is difficult to relinquish to classroom obscurity the claims of the mighty Pan. To quote yet again from Coleridge and Schiller,

But still the heart doth need a language,
still
Doth the old instinct bring back the old
names.

Meanwhile, Patricia Merivale has indeed provided matter "sufficient to furnish many landscapes". The goatherd God lives still in her keeping.

ANN SADDLEMYER

THE SYMBOLIC CANNIBALS

MARGARET ATWOOD, *The Edible Woman*.
McClelland & Stewart. \$5.95.

IF YOU IMAGINE that all our younger poets are addicts of trick typography or inarticulate, grunting imitators of William Carlos Williams, you have only to read Margaret Atwood's books — *The Circle Game* and *The Animals in that Country* — to be cured of the illusion. They are highly articulate, and continue the tradition of sophisticated utterance one associates with the poets who came into prominence in the Fifties, with Eli Mandel and Jay Macpherson and, in another way, with Phyllis Webb.

Now Margaret Atwood has published a novel, *The Edible Woman*. It is, again,

articulate, sophisticated, turning phrases and collating images in prose with the same assurance as Miss Atwood does in verse. All in all, let me say at the outset, it is an extremely good book, as pungently expressive of a tantalizingly defensive individuality as anything Miss Atwood has written in verse.

Some poets who turn novelists show a curiously divided literary personality. I say this with fresh experience in my mind, since I have just finished a study of the verse and novels of the English poet Roy Fuller, and have been astonished by the lack of capillary links between the two aspects of his work. But there is none of this kind of division in Miss Atwood's writing. Between her poetic and her fictional talents the relationship is at least that of Siamese twins whose nervous systems are inextricably connected.

The identity is, indeed, so close that when I try to think of a quick way of saying what *The Edible Woman* is about, a verse from one of her poems comes appropriately to my mind:

These days we keep
our weary distances:
sparring in the vacant spaces
of peeling rooms
and rented minutes, climbing
all the expected stairs, our voices
abraded with fatigue,
our bodies weary.

In one way at least, *The Edible Woman* is about the distance and defences between human beings. The distances and defences are necessary because fundamentally (in Miss Atwood's view) human beings are predatory. *The Edible Woman* is really a novel about emotional cannibalism.

Here we come to the significance of the title, which also names the central

image. The edible woman is a cake shaped like a woman and carefully iced for verisimilitude, which the heroine Marian McAlpin eats at the key point of the novel, when she is released from the doggedly normal life she has insisted on pursuing.

Having — cannibalistically — trapped a highly normal young man into a proposal of marriage, Marian has felt herself becoming the victim in turn of his emotional anthropophagy. Seeking escape with a graduate student she meets in a laundromat, she finds that he too, if not exactly a cannibal, is a more insidious kind of parasite, a lamprey perhaps, battering on her compassion to feed his monstrous self-pity.

Marian's recognition of her situation takes the form of a symbolic neurosis. She finds her throat closing first against meat, as she vividly associates a steak with the living steer. There comes the stage when she peels a carrot and imagines the soundless shriek as it is pulled from the earth. But this point when she seems doomed to starvation, coincides with the point of climax in her personal relationships, when she runs away from her engagement party to sleep with the man from the laundromat, and, having discovered that there is no external solution for her problem, returns and bakes the edible woman which, having offered it in vain to her outraged fiancé, she proceeds to eat. She has, of course, eaten herself, and in consuming the artificial "normal" being she tried to become, she is cured.

Such an account does far less than justice to a novel which is extraordinarily witty, and full of ironic observation of human motives. But it does suggest the extremely capable way in which Miss

Atwood has handled the element of fantasy which has become a key element in the New Fiction. She has made Marian's improbable condition extremely plausible; beside Miss Atwood's handling of the fantastic, that of the average novelist seems crude and uncraftsmanly. One has only to compare *The Edible Woman* with Mordecai Richler's *Cocksure* to realize this. But Margaret Atwood is a poet and Richler is not, and I am sure a training in the poetic handling of images and myths gives an enormous advantage to any writer who moves in the fashionable field of fantasy fiction.

The virtuosity of Miss Atwood's achievement becomes completely evident when one considers the other, more mundane aspect of the novel. For *The Edible Woman*, among many other things, is a social novel of high perceptiveness. Marian moves in a square world of, to quote the author as quoted on the dust jacket, "ordinary people who make the mistake of thinking they are ordinary." By her occupation as a market researcher, Marian is kept in constant contact with that vast world of unswingers (rarely celebrated in modern writing) who want nothing more than sheltered normality: the platinum blonde virgins, more numerous than sophisticates assume; the young men whose ambitions are bounded by suburban retirement; the casualties of the graduate school, obsessed with the detritus of scholarship; the inhabitants of the supermarket world. Miss Atwood has done, in her own way and for her own time and place, the same kind of thing as Jane Austen did for similar people a century ago. Not that she is another Jane Austen or, I imagine, would want to be.

The Edible Woman is the kind of tour

de force in prose which a poet often manages to perform with great skill, bringing to fiction a precision of language and a needle sharpness of the observant eye which the novelist trained merely in prose may lack. Poets' novels, when they are successful, usually shine with a particularly crystalline lucidity, and that lucidity Miss Atwood has achieved. I am not going to prophesy that she will achieve it again, for it is also one of the peculiarities of poets' feats in fiction, that they rarely repeat them. But if Miss Atwood does go on to write another novel as good as *The Edible Woman*, I shall be doubly delighted.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

UKRAINIANS IN CANADA

M. I. MANDRYKA, *History of Ukrainian Literature in Canada*. Ukrainian Free Academy of Sciences, Winnipeg. \$7.00.

IT HAS BEEN ESTABLISHED that the first literary work written in Ukrainian in Canada was Ivan Zbura's poem "Kana-dijski emigranty" ("The Canadian Immigrants"). It was dated "Beaver Creek, Alberta, December 30, 1898" and published on February 2, 1899 in *Svoboda*, at that time the only Ukrainian newspaper in the U.S.A. *The Canadian Farmer* (since 1903) and *The Ukrainian Voice* (since 1910), both still flourishing in Winnipeg, should also be credited for their great contribution to the early output of Ukrainian writing. Before World War I, some fifty pioneer authors published in these newspapers, their poems, short stories and plays.

In his history Mr. Mandryka divides Ukrainian literature in Canada into four main periods: (1) beginnings of Ukrainian letters and pioneer folklore; (2) late pioneer era and beginnings of literature; (3) new horizons and new achievements (since the early 1920's); and (4) influx of new intellectuals. It seems to this reviewer that it would have been more proper to unite the first and second periods. Sava Chernetskyj, who produced poetry and prose on Canadian themes in 1899-1900, is not worse than, for instance, Semen Kovbel who wrote twenty years later, and thus his work has the same right to be considered among the beginnings of genuine Ukrainian literature in Canada. With this exception, Mr. Mandryka's periodization truly reflects the reality of Ukrainian literature in this country.

Mr. Mandryka should be praised for his excellent treatment of Ivan Danylchuk (1901-1944), a Canadian-born author who broadened the horizons of the Ukrainian poetry, as well as of Elias Kiriak (Illia Kyriyak 1888-1955) and Oleksander Luhovjy (1904-1962), who greatly contributed during World War II with their novels on Ukrainian pioneer life in Western Canada. E. Kiriak's trilogy is translated into English as *Sons of the Soil* (1959).

I. Danylchuk, H. Ewach, E. Kiriak, O. Luhovjy, T. Shevchuk, M. Ichnianskyj, and M. Mandryka himself, author of four collections of poetry and five narrative poems, including *Canada*, have brought Ukrainian literature in Canada to a higher level. Newcomers, among them Ulas Samchuk, Levko Romen, and L. Murovych, have enriched it with various fresh themes and techniques. Important also are the scholars, L. Biletskyj,

J. B. Rudnyckyj, Metropolitan Ilarion, Watson Kirkconnell, C. A. Andrusyshen, G. Luckyj, C. Bida and others, who helped to make Ukrainian literature, abundant in its styles and significant in its ideas and artistic accomplishments, an integral part of Canadian culture as a whole.

Mandryka's *History of Ukrainian Literature in Canada* is well organized, and rich in factual material and in quotations from typical works. It has a few errors of fact: for example, I. Danylchuk's *Svitaje den* was published in 1929 (not in 1920 as stated in the book), and Honore Ewach's *Ukrainian Songs and Lyrics* appeared in 1933 (not in 1931). But these and similar shortcomings, do not lower the value of this important publication, a lasting contribution of literary scholarship to the cultural mosaic of Canada, which proves that national groups in this country have the opportunity to retain and develop the heritages they brought here from Europe.

The book has a "Selected Bibliography on Ukrainian Canadian History and Literature", and an index of Ukrainian authors who have lived and written in Canada, some 120 names in all. The foreword by J. B. Rudnyckyj and the 50 photographs add to the value of this book.

YAR SLAVUTYCH

MAKING THE SCENE

RAYMOND SPENCE. *Nothing Black But a Cadillac*. Longmans. \$5.75.

MR. SPENCE'S HERO, Joady, MA (Eng. Lit.), a Jamaican, whose father was negro and who has lived in Canada for six years, has decided as the novel opens,

"to make the San Francisco scene." Make it and several women of assorted sizes, shapes, colours, and nationalities, he well and truly does before the novel ends, in a series of outrageously comic scenes, described with close anatomical detail, that show him to be as proficient a sexual athlete as Fanny Hill (though more disinterested). He is clearly a man possessed — of what, we are assured, is the novelist's gift: the ability to involve himself completely in an experience while at the same time observing himself experiencing it with an objectivity that, given the fever of activity, is quite awe-inspiring.

For the first twelve chapters of the book the question of pornography hardly arises any more than do the kind of social issues suggested by the epigraph from Eldridge Cleaver on the title page. In fact a more suitable quotation for this part of the book might have been taken from Dylan Thomas's "Lament". The race of the mighty hero is minimally relevant in the scenes that show Mr. Spence's comic gift at its best, and the so-called narrative line that links them, as he moves from the back seat of a car to the luxury of a well-appointed yacht (mobile like all conventional picaresque heroes up the social scale), is trivial and poorly written. The language throughout will offend some and, for my own taste, I would not strongly recommend the novel to anyone of the sacred and enlightened generation under thirty. However if pornography is prurient, makes nastiness of what is innocent, provokes sniggers, and is apt to pervert and deprave, then I should not categorize this part of the novel as pornographic. Mr. Spence (in this first part of his novel) is anything but pretentious. As his hero re-

marks *in media res*: "this was no advertisement for stately living", but Joady gives and receives pleasure, is naked, innocent and unashamed, his lovemaking is not sadistic and one laughs with none of the degrading sense that man in this posture is inevitably absurd which, as Aldous Huxley felt, ruined the act of love for the civilized.

But from chapter twelve to the end of the novel one feels the deadly influence of William Burroughs at work. *Naked Lunch*, as Burroughs remarked in his own introduction, "is . . . brutal, obscene and disgusting." So, in my opinion are the last five chapters (but for the last few pages) of Mr. Spence's novel. He may be right, and his nightmare of lust ruled by a sadistic voyeur WASP, from which one can only escape through filth and corruption, may be a valid vision of American society. On balance I would think there is an appalling amount of evidence to support it. Unfortunately I think that Mr. Spence produces in this section the same sort of reaction as does William Burroughs in sections of *Naked Lunch*. One feels nauseated but not at the horrifying facts in the world one is aware of; rather at their vision and description of it. The satire boomerangs. Swift, whom Burroughs quotes as his master, was wiser than his disciples. On his journey through the capital of Brobdingnag Gulliver saw the enlarged hideousness he could avoid on his own scale in his native Bristol, but that was not *all* he saw.

There are passages of dialogue even in this last section that have a superb comic rhythm and some of the scenes on the yacht have a satiric bite. Mr. Spence may well (as the cliché has it) be on his way but if it's only to be (as this novel

ends) naked in his "undeniably black Cadillac filled with women", then I do not think too many people will be interested in another ride through the same landscape — no matter how bawdily entertaining the first part may be and serious of intention beyond the point of no return.

W. F. HALL

ON THE VERGE

***** HENRY J. MORGAN, *Bibliotheca Canadensis: or a Manual of Canadian Literature*. Gale Research Company, 1969. \$19.50. First published in 1867, long out of print, and now reissued in facsimile reproduction, *Bibliotheca Canadensis* is an invaluable record of Canadian writing in the century preceding Confederation. An alphabetical dictionary of writers, with notes on their lives and copious lists of works, it was compiled by a dedicated "Canada Firster" whose inclination to discover national achievement led him perhaps too far in seeking sermon-writers, amateur scientists and experts on cookery to fill out his impressive 411 pages. Nevertheless, a most useful reference work to have available again, and an extraordinary index to the vast background of scribbling out of which emerged the few writers we still read from the age of deep colonialism.

***** J. S. CONWAY, *The Nazi Persecution of the Churches, 1933-45*. Ryerson. \$14.00. This is a book with, up to now, no real competitors in the English language. There have been martyrologies of the Christian persecuted by Hitler, and apologies from the standpoints of the various German churches and their sympathizers outside Germany. This is something different: a thorough historical study which combines objectivity with sympathetic understanding and examines carefully the ineffectual and sometimes disgraceful records of most churchmen, unwilling to see the worst in Nazism, and the heroism of the few in the face of the unsystematic but formidable efforts of the Nazis to bend the Churches to their will.

**** EUGENE CLOUTIER, *No Passport: A Discovery of Canada*. Oxford. \$5.95. A French-Canadian writer explores Canada from Vancouver Island to Newfoundland, and finds, not only more friendship than he had expected, but sharp comments on public figures, sometimes

pected, but also the reality of a land which fascinates in its variety and complexity. An eye-opening book for Canadians of both heritages, showing the Anglophones how they seem — faults and virtues — to a man of that other Canada of Quebec, and revealing to separatist Francophones — and one hopes some at least will read it — the community they will lose if once they sever the hope of building a diverse and unified land.

**** MICHAEL BRECHER, *India and World Politics: Krishna Menon's View of the World*. Oxford. A fascinating non-book, to which Michael Brecher has contributed merely a preface and an analytical epilogue. The rest consists of a series of verbatim transcripts of conversations with Krishna Menon on many facets of Indian foreign policy. Important as a background work to the first twenty years of independent India's history, but revealing also for the insights it presents into one of India's most intelligent, complex and now neglected leaders.

*** RICHARD GWYN, *Smallwood: The Unlikely Revolutionary*. McClelland & Stewart. \$10.00. Smallwood is clearly one of the more important political figures of Canada in recent years, and one of the more intelligent. It is surprising that this should be the first study of him, and disappointing that it should not be better. Mr. Gwyn delves well; he is a good and serious journalist. But the great difficulty in writing of a politician is that of keeping the subject from being dwarfed by the background of events. Joey Smallwood was never so dwarfed in real life, but he is in Mr. Gwyn's book, and so we have an interesting but uneasy hybrid between biography and local history.

*** JUDY LA MARSH, *Memoirs of a Bird in a Gilded Cage*. McClelland & Stewart. \$7.95. Is it symptomatic of Canadian politics that our most dynamic minister of culture should have been the unashamed vulgarian Judy La Marsh reveals herself in this record of eight years in politics? Or is it symptomatic of culture in our time? One way to regard *Memoirs* is as an audacious work of pop literature, guying the whole custom of writing political memoirs, and this is how its designer has treated it. But that, evidently, was not the author's intention. For her it is a great catharsis, a long wail of grievance and anger, shot through with not unjustified pride at her own achievements, and embroidered with grossly unfair, sometimes accurate and deserved. Not her last kick, we may be sure.

*** *The Journals of Mary O'Brien, 1828-38*, edited by Audrey Saunders Miller. Macmillan. \$8.75. Mary O'Brien came to Canada in 1828 as Mary Gapper, a member of that class of genteel English which played so interesting a part in the opening of Upper Canada. She married an Irish ex-officer, and founded a distinguished Canadian family. Her narrative covers the decade that came to a climax with Mackenzie's Rebellion; her family was closely linked with the political life of Upper Canada. Written in letters to her relatives, her account lacks the self-conscious finesse of Mrs. Moodie and Mrs. Traill, but it is observant, touched with insight, and not without personal drama.

*** DOUG STUEBING, *Building the CPR*. CHARLES HUMPHRIES, *The Great Depression*. RICHARD HOWARD, *The North-west Passage*. RICHARD HOWARD, *Louisberg*. Clarke Irwin, \$2.50 each. The latest coloured pouches in the Jackdaw series, containing facsimiles of authentic documents of Canadian historical events, including maps and prints, and sometimes supplemented by miniature gramophone records: e.g. the voices of Aberhart and Woodsworth and of Diefenbaker acting as John A. Macdonald. Each packet is accompanied by a lucid introduction. History can never be instant, but these collections get as near to it as possible.

** JOHN UPTON TERRELL, *La Salle*. Clarke Irwin. \$5.95. It is not easy to see the justification for this book, except that the author wanted to write it. A year or so ago a good popular biography was published by E. B. Osler, of which, curiously, Mr. Terrell appears to be unaware, since he fails to mention it in his bibliography. Mr. Terrell adds little new of any significance, though there are times when he carries the imaginative reconstruction of history over the edge of conjecture into the field proper to the novelist rather than the historian. Some of his usages are odd. I have never before heard, for instance, of *couriers de bois*!

** FRANK RASKY, *The Taming of the Canadian West*. McClelland & Stewart. \$14.95. A picture book of the penetration of the Indian West by fur-traders and settlers. It is copiously visual, but since many of the illustrations were fabricated at the time by print-makers far from the scene of action, it often documents the mythology of the West rather than the reality. The text, too, appears to verge at times on the mythological. One is surprised, for example, to be told that the Coast Indians

of British Columbia poisoned their arrows with rattlesnake venom and that Carrier Indians were so called because they carried mail for the fur traders. Of a piece with such statements is the claim of the publishers that "This is the only book of its kind." Unfortunately for such pretensions, it appears after Douglas Hill's excellent *The Opening of the Canadian West*, which covers approximately the same ground, and more accurately.

NEW VERSE

LAZAR GARNA. *The Sing-song*. Canadian House Press. This is a fine little book of poetry, mainly sad in tone. The control of the images occasionally gets out of hand, but the poetry does flow easily. "The Weather Is Fine Here" is especially good. The book is third in a series, and nicely printed.

Introductions from an Island. Edited by Robin Skelton. University of Victoria. \$1.00. A selection of poems by students of the Creative Writing Programme of the University of Victoria. Mr. Skelton has compiled a good book of poems here, obviously showing his own taste and approach. The poems are more than exercises, and reveal a control rarely shown in younger poets. It is too bad there is not some humour here; they are, in fact, almost too serious.

BILL BISSETT. *Of the Land Devine Service*. Wind/Flower Press. \$1.75. A good example of Bissett and his interest in concrete poetry. Definitely worth looking at for its simple charm and careful execution of form.

Fifteen Winds. Edited by A. W. Purdy. Ryerson Press. \$2.75. An anthology designed for the schools. The range of poets represented is good, and the topics are boundless. Particularly striking are the notes by Purdy. They are all precise and would be of help to any student—old or young. Purdy should be commended for his selection, and his comments.

D. S.

WAR AMONG WASHERMEN

Sir:

In *Canadian Literature No. 40*, Mr. Louis Dudek is concerned with protecting us from errors committed by critics of high reputation. These he likens to "dirty collars" and refers us all to the

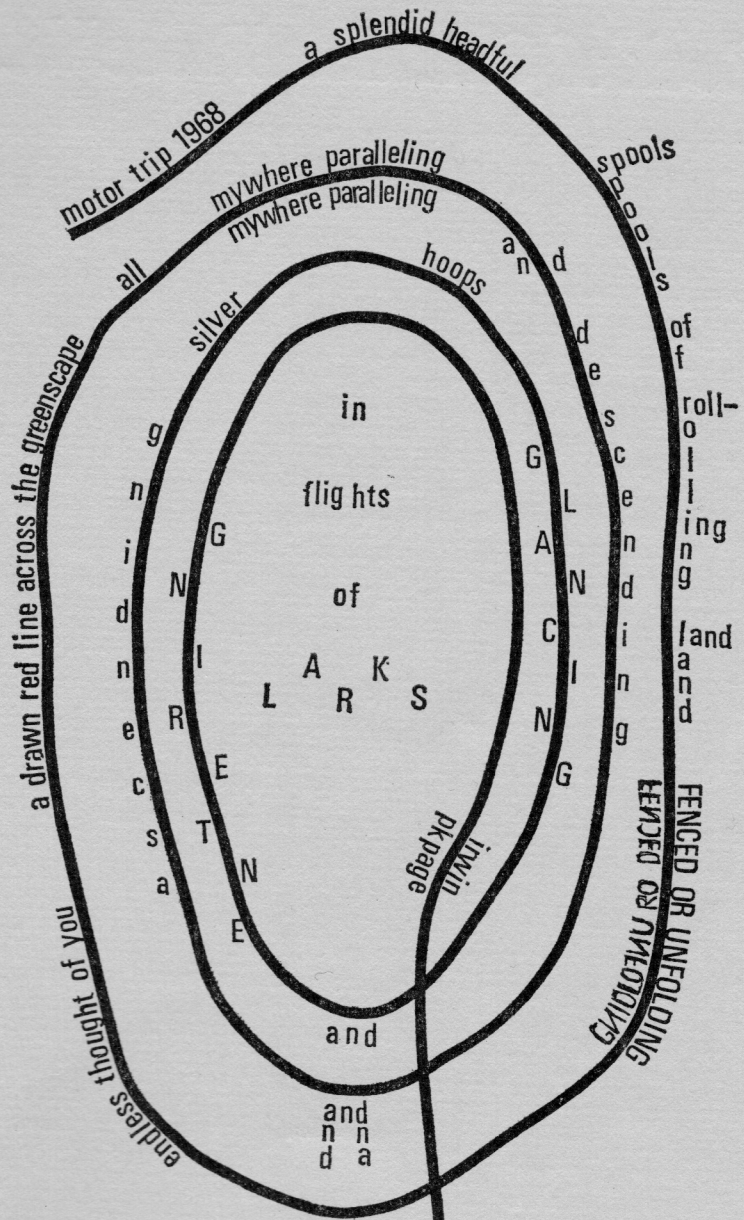
laundry of *The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada* run by himself and Mr. Michael Gnarowski. Their institution is a valuable collection of articles. "As a further aid to the serious reader or student, the editors (also) provide carefully edited explanatory notes which guide the reader."

I am not concerned with the distortion of "historical perspective" allegedly committed by A. J. M. Smith nor the number of times Irving Layton is to be found between covers. I am concerned with Messrs Dudek and Gnarowski's provincialism. Imagine presenting *The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada* without mentioning the *Anthology of Canadian Poetry (English)* published by Penguin Books in 1942, a book which ante-dates all compilations breaking through to Canadian poetic vitality; without mentioning *Canadian Accent* published in 1944 with a breathless index of critical articles; both books reprinting each of their authors 100,000 times; without mentioning *A Little Anthology of Canadian Poetry* published by New Directions in 1943, an introduction a quarter of a century ago to poets from W. W. E. Ross to Souster—all this, together with articles, reviews and editings of Canadian Issues of foreign periodicals, hung on the line by the present washboarder with misty-eyed trust that ignorance would be eliminated. It was (slightly), in Rio and Cairo. Mr. Dudek's Montreal laundromat chunks merrily on.

He unnecessarily inquires about the quality of Smith and Pacey's underwear. I hope this toot on my own horn alerts Messrs Dudek and Gnarowski to the inadequacy of their own critical briefs.

RALPH GUSTAFSON

(*The laundry is now closed. Ed.*)



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