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ARTS IN THE POLITICIAN'S EYE

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editorial

ARTS IN THE POLITICIAN'S EYE

THESE THOUGHTS were provoked by receiving a copy of an American magazine — *Cultural Affairs* — devoted surprisingly to the arts in Canada. *Cultural Affairs* is the organ of the Associated Councils of the Arts in the United States. The particular issue I am discussing was brought out to celebrate a seminar held in May last year at Ste. Adele in Quebec — a seminar to which, apparently, two hundred and fifty of the most distinguished cultural leaders from both sides of the border were invited. There was no provision in its agenda for the discussion of the creative process; far from it, the aim was specifically stated as to discuss "the political realities of government support of the arts."

The issue of *Cultural Affairs* was conceived as an adjunct to this seminar; its contributors were all Canadians, and all, in one way or another, non-creating members of the cultural establishment. Two were members of the government, Mr. Trudeau himself and the Secretary of State, Mr. Gérard Pelletier. Several were high officials of public bodies devoted to the organization of the arts. Only one was an independent — the journalist and editor Robert Fulford. And not a single one was a practicing artist. In other words, here was a composite official view of the directions public policies for fostering the arts should follow. It was a view some of whose implications I found no less than chilling.

It is true that the Prime Minister opened the issue by remarking that the arts are "an essential grace in the life of civilized people", and that he ended with what was clearly meant as a statement of reassurance.

> I do not think that modern society, or the artist as a member of that society, need fear a generous policy of subsidy to the arts from governments as long as these governments have the courage to permit free expression and experimentation — and, for that matter, to take it in good part if the mirror held up to their nature is not always a flattering one.

Fair enough. Yet Mr. Trudeau admits in an unguarded moment that the government "sets a general course for development" in its aid for the arts, and even so vague a policy can materially accept the situation of the artist. How, we can only estimate by gauging the attitudes of those who shape it.

Here, it seemed to me, two articles in *Cultural Affairs* were of special significance, partly because they were written by men who hold key posts in terms of public programmes for the arts, and partly because they display various aspects of what might be defined as an official approach. They were by Mr. Pelletier, and by Mr. Duncan Cameron, National Director of the Canadian Conference of the Arts. Mr. Pelletier speaks for public and state-supported intervention in the arts. The Canadian Conference of Arts, for which Mr. Cameron speaks, represents what in current jargon is called the private sector. It is a heterogenous federation of many organizations in various ways interested in the arts — some as practitioners, some as organizers, some as spectators. One at least of its main functions is to serve as a liaison between the government and the artists.

However, not all artists are represented in the Canadian Conference of the Arts. To my knowledge, few professional writers belong to any organization that is a member of the Canadian Conference, and the same may apply in other fields. I think it likely, in fact, that the performers are more heavily represented than the creating artists, while those whom Mr. Cameron calls "arts administrators" are also strongly present.

These preponderances doubtless influence the policies of the Conference, and they may well be reflected in Mr. Cameron's essay, whose tone is set by the first sentence, in which he tells us that "national organization of the arts . . . is a relatively new phenomenon in North American society," that it is "an experimental means of achieving the goals essential to the health of the arts and the flourishing of creative expression", and that it is the experiment of the moment. Note the last fashionable touch; the implication is that because it is the experiment of the moment we have to go through with it!

Now it is clear from the rest of his article that Mr. Cameron believes in the organization of the arts, and that he sees himself as a spokesman for the "total arts community, or arts industry, as it is more commonly now being called". Those are Mr. Cameron's words. Personally, I do not believe in the existence of a "total arts community". I find the word *total* itself a particularly ominous one; it suggests something monolithic, something on the edge of totalitarian. But a healthy arts community, if one can call it a community at all, is surely the

most anarchic community that could ever exist, based as it must be on the individuality of each creative artist.

Perhaps the other equally jarring phrase — "arts industry" — gives a clue to what Mr. Cameron may actually envisage. To talk of an *arts industry* means that one sees the products of art as primarily commodities; such a view, of course, reverses the true situation. Real works of art are commodities only in a secondary way. In order to continue creating, the artist must sell what he has produced so that he may buy materials and food. Once the work of art has left his hands, it survives as an object of contemplation, an icon, and only becomes a commodity again when it passes from hand to hand. This natural situation has in recent years been disturbed, especially in the visual arts, by the rise of dealers to positions of unprecedented prominence, and the deliberate creation and planned obsolescence (the art museum directors in this process acting as accomplices of the dealers) of fashions in painting and sculpture, some of them as ephemeral as fashions in feminine clothes, to feed what has become largely an investment market. Because of the different physical nature of the product of writing, books have become no more "industrialised" than they ever were, but the building and destruction of reputations on the poetry-reading circuit is analogous to that in painting. This situation — art taking on the outward shape of moderately big business — has actually led some of the organizers of the arts to conceive the possibility of a liaison in depth with the business world, and the author of a minor article in the magazine I am discussing goes a great deal farther than Mr. Cameron in remarking that "more and more business and the arts will come together to build a better society."

One has to grant that, in a country like Canada especially, some degree of organization may be necessary in *some* of the arts. The performing arts in particular depend on it. Urban areas are widely scattered, and where they exist the tradition of support for the theatre or the concert hall is even now not nearly so deeply established as in Continental Europe. While a European city of 100,000 inhabitants may support a theatre or an opera house, an urban complex like Vancouver, with nearly a million residents, finds it impossible to do so without federal patronage. Both the attendance at performances and the private patronage of theatres are growing impressively, but operas and symphony concerts and what we call serious drama can be made available to a large number of Canadians in the cities and smaller towns only by planned public subsidy. Where subsidies are given, the framework of a national organization of the arts obviously exists and, even in selecting the theatrical or musical groups that will be sub-

sidized, the state — or the corporation that represents it — will be establishing the criteria on which its support is to be based. Nothing so crude as an attempt at censorship need ever be tried. The power to influence the choice of what may be performed will be there, even if it is not exercised. "I fear the Greeks," said Virgil, "even when they offer gifts." The help of the state must be accepted only with the greatest vigilance.

The creative artist — with the possible exception of the musical composer and the obvious exception of the choreographer — is much less dependent on this kind of organization. He does not have to face the vast expense involved in putting on the most modest show on a professional level of excellence, and, unlike the performing artist who usually has to work full time in order to sustain a professional standard, the writer or the painter can survive by taking some job that will leave time and energy for artistic production. I can think immediately of two notable examples: the American poet Wallace Stevens and the English poet Roy Fuller, both of whom became major writers in their field while spending their working lives as corporate executives. I have yet to hear of a great actor, or a notable conductor, or even a good first violin, who doubled as a businessman. There is a clear division between the good professional and the good amateur in the performing arts; the boundary is much more nebulous in a field like writing, or even painting. This situation has two consequences. The performing artist is much more inclined to demand organization than the writer or the painter, who is a solitary worker. On a professional level this can be seen by comparing the power and solidity of organizations like the Musicians' Union and Equity, which embrace virtually all the artists in their respective fields, and the weakness of an organization like the Canadian Authors' Association, which professional writers are inclined to regard with lofty disdain. Secondly, the productions in which performing artists take part are much more vulnerable to the perils that come from lack of support, whereas the writer, with his typewriter and his pad of paper, is much better equipped to weather such conditions.

But even the writer is involved when the state decides to organize support for the arts. The actual sum of money devoted to writing in the Canada Council budget for 1968-69 was small in comparative terms; it totalled only one fifteenth of all grants to the arts and was less than a quarter of that devoted to the theatre, but even this relatively small sum of $600,000 meant help to a considerable number of writers in the form of awards to enable them to spend time on writing or subsidies to bring out books which publishers might not otherwise consider commercially practicable.

This means that creative artists, like performing artists, are likely to be affected by the philosophies that motivate those who control whatever programmes exist for what Mr. Cameron calls "the national organization of the arts". This is why Mr. Pelletier's article in *Cultural Affairs* is so crucially important; as Secretary of State he is responsible for all federal support for the arts, and his views may therefore be taken as an indication of the line likely to be followed by those who direct such support. I found his statement ominous, partly because it applied to cultural matters criteria that were essentially political, and partly because it subscribed to a modish and undoubtedly ephemeral inclination to equate with art the more mechanical ways of filling in leisure time.

One of the points Mr. Pelletier is particularly intent on emphasizing is the need to "democratize culture". He has already told us of the vast spread of active as well as spectator participation in cultural activities so that there are now more than 400 amateur theatrical companies performing regularly in Canada. He might have referred also to the proliferation of potters and Sunday painters, to the vast increase in private presses and in mimeographed little magazines publishing the work of a whole swarm of new poets. But this is evidently not enough for Mr. Pelletier. Perhaps with an eye to voter support, and certainly with a politician's literalist view of democracy, he does not merely want to make culture available to as many as may wish to partake of it; he also hopes to sell it to the unwilling.

> Many identify the uses of theatres, concert halls, museums, art galleries and libraries with the middle class and conclude that culture has nothing to do with them. The problem of winning over this non-audience is not merely financial. Above all, it is a question of ideas, of concepts. If we are to democratize culture, without debasing standards of quality, we must not only open the doors to much larger numbers of people, we must also induce them to enter.

One feels an initial reassurance, hearing that phrase, "without debasing standards", but this is dispelled immediately when one turns the page and finds embedded there an extract from a speech which the Secretary of State made last year in Lethbridge, Alberta.

> It may be necessary to transform completely the notion of culture, to replace the notion of a middle class culture with that of a mass culture. Why should the theatre and the opera have a monopoly on culture? Why should not movies, jazz, popular songs and psychedelic happenings also be a means of culture expression? . . . When culture has become a source of alienation — and this is

increasingly the case with middle-class culture — it is high time for us to re-examine it. The democratization of culture will not otherwise be achieved.

This statement, coming from the federal minister responsible for organizing aid to cultural activities, begs a whole series of questions. To begin, there is the use of the term *alienation*, the great crybaby word available to any group that cares to lay a claim to special attention. In this context I fail to see how alienation enters in at all. The arts are there for anyone who knocks at their doors; indeed, they are becoming increasingly available to those who are temperamentally inclined to respond. But there is no spectacular way in which one can — without debasing standards, create a sudden flood of that interest which in any case, at the present time, is growing with unspectacular steadiness. The number of amateurs and participants in all the high arts is several times greater than it was in Canada twenty years ago; it is especially obvious — despite Marshall McLuhan — that the paperback revolution in publishing, coupled with current educational trends, has brought about a phenomenal growth in the buying of the kind of books that half a generation ago only a tiny minority of Canadians would have wished to read, let alone possess.

I have used the term "high arts" because I do not accept Mr. Pelletier's term "middle class arts". There is nothing intrinsically middle class about the opera, which in Italy is an intensely popular art, or about ballet, which in Russia has exchanged an aristocratic for a working class following, or, for that matter, about any art. Such sociological labels have no relevance in cultural matters; Mozart wrote for a long-dead aristocracy, but today his appeal is classless, as is the appeal of all art that survives its immediate time. And political terms such as democracy are equally irrelevant, since democracy means the rule of all the people, and all the people never like the same thing. The high arts — and there is no reason to exclude good movies or good ceramics from among them — are those that display the potentialities of a civilization at its highest and most generous levels. For that reason they have special demands on our consideration, and on our support, and when we equate them with the trivialities of commercialized popular entertainment we are not only belittling our own humanity; we are also robbing the people who will live in a far more leisured and far less class-conscious world a generation ahead of some of the means to develop themselves spiritually, aesthetically and intellectually to the full.

Perhaps the most serious matter of speculation is how far the public bodies which, under the government, are responsible for aiding the arts in Canada have been infected by the philosophy which Mr. Pelletier projects and which his

fellows in the government presumably approve. Certainly there is no sign whatever that the Canada Council has been as yet in any way affected; its choices and its policies have been warped by no political motivations and by no vulgar seeking after popularity. The case of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, once so important as a patron of the literary, dramatic and musical arts in this country, is far different. During the past five years a steady turning away from its duty to foster the high arts has been evident in the programmes presented both on radio and television, and this year has seen a drastic commercialization and popularization of programming which makes one fear that, as a responsible cultural influence, the CBC will soon cease to exist. What the state gives to the arts with one hand, it appears to be taking away with the other.

PATRICK ANDERSON AND THE CRITICS

Christopher Xerxes Ringrose

A. J. M. SMITH'S REMARKS on Patrick Anderson in the Autumn 1968 *Canadian Literature* may serve as a timely reminder that Anderson not only earned his page in the literary histories of Canada as the editor of *Preview* during the war, but that he is himself a fine poet. This fact seems in need of reassertion in view of the treatment afforded him by Canadian criticism since his departure from Canada in 1949.

Anderson's critical reputation reached its zenith around 1947, with the publication of his second volume, *The White Centre,* by Ryerson. *A Tent for April* had been published in 1945, and *The Colour as Naked* was to follow in 1954. The fact that P. K. Page, who had also been a member of the *Preview* group in Montreal, published her two volumes *As Ten as Twenty* and *The Metal and the Flower* in 1946 and 1954 meant that the two poets were often reviewed simultaneously, and their similarities commented upon. In view of P. K. Page's continued high reputation throughout the 'fifties and 'sixties, the similarity of the adulation afforded both her and Anderson in 1947 is illuminating in retrospect. Both poets had published in *Poetry, Chicago* during the war (P. K. Page had been awarded a prize by the magazine in 1944), and the reviews of the two 1946 volumes in *Poetry* were most favourable. In February 1947, Jessica Nelson North's review[1] of *The White Centre* praised Anderson for his metaphorical vividness and arresting technique, as well as his original treatment of the Canadian winter scene. In the July issue of 1947 the title of William Meredith's review of *As Ten As Twenty* proclaimed his approval: "A Good Modern Poet and a Modern Tradition".[2] Miss Page, he thought, was one of a new generation of poets for whom the idiom forged by Eliot was completely natural; he refused

to apply the adjective "promising" — he felt Miss Page had already arrived. Like many first reviews, these were brief and not given to extensive critical analysis. But they were agreed that here were two good volumes of poetry by two poets whose names had been linked, and that their finest quality was their linguistic vitality.

A. J. M. Smith himself reviewed the same two volumes in *The Canadian Forum*, opening with the too-familiar claim that the poetry was as good as anything produced in England or the States, a literary line-up of sides that the *Poetry* reviews had avoided, and which Milton Wilson almost unconsciously imitates eleven years later in his article "*Other Canadians and After*":

> Since Anderson's Canadian interlude came to an end in 1960 and he has never returned (although he has continued to write and publish), our belief in the anticlimax of the younger writers in the *Preview* group will likely depend on what we think of the later poetry of P. K. Page.[3]

As if Canadian poetry were in competition with all other literature in English, and Anderson had been transferred from "our team" to another. In passing, this attitude may explain the strange neglect afforded *The Colour as Naked* in both anthologies and Anderson criticism. Nevertheless, Smith had great respect for the poetry: it is "serious, witty and intense" verse, with "a tightly controlled formal elegance", "bold, illuminating, convincing conceits" and "precise and dignified language".[4] He foreshadows later opinions by finding P. K. Page the more intense of the two, though he does not say that this makes her necessarily the better. He does however object to some aspects of *The White Centre*: the poems where the social implications rest uneasily alongside the more "purely poetic" lines, especially when the "moral" seems to be tacked arbitrarily on to the end of the poem. Later critics were to take Smith's cautious objection and apply it wholesale to Anderson's work. Even within Smith's review one can see reservations encroaching on unqualified praise of Anderson; both in person and in his poetic "voice", Anderson seems to have enraptured many of his poetic colleagues at first sight. On the first publication of *Poem in Canada*, A. J. M. Smith had written to *The Canadian Forum*:

> Here we have a serious and exuberant writer coming to grips with the fundamental task of the Canadian poet — the examination of our cultural traditions and the definition of our selfhood — and doing so with an intensity and an imaginative insight that is commensurate with the subject.

But on seeing it reprinted in *The White Centre*, reviewing it in 1947 with the

war over, and that particular Montreal wartime "exuberance" being replaced by something much less potentially revolutionary, Smith has doubts: he finds the conclusion of the "Cold Colloquy" section facile in its recommendations, and regrets its inclusion, believing that Anderson should have restricted himself to what he is capable of mastering — definition and diagnosis.

"Definition and diagnosis" — on a personal level this is what P. K. Page had been achieving in poems like "The Stenographers" and "Offices", where the wartime motifs end on a definite but unresolved note, and it is what gives the conclusion of Page's poems on wartime emotions and hopes a harder note than Anderson's, when he is drawn into abstract plans:

> Yet now the derricks race
> upon Glamorgan's hills
> and the wheel of our heads
> draw up the loaded veins
> of once blind power
> and dredge for the long dark
> and waiting monuments
> of the people's dead:
> firing these histories, we forge
> from shadows weapons.
>
> (*Miners*[5])

"Miners" was one of the 27 of the 40 poems Anderson first published in *Preview* that he never collected into any of his books. Of the rest, he put five in *A Tent for April,* seven in *The White Centre,* and one in *The Colour as Naked.* It is not difficult to see why he was not concerned to make it more public. The tone of the "we", as it joins mental activity to the work of the miners of Glamorgan in an extended conceit, is too much of an exhortation; and with the abstract concepts of "the people's dead" and "those histories" the immediacy of the identification with the miners seems to dissolve, and there is more hope than certainty in the last line.

But the difficulties of raising a passionate cry of expectation or affirmation in poetry are immense — how to avoid shrillness or glibness? And in Anderson's case doubly difficult: writing "Poem on Canada" when one is obviously English, and "Miners" and "Soldier" when one's every poetic utterance denies one's proletarianism and one's presence in Montreal ensures one's physical safety. He was too open to jibes like that from Wynne Francis: "Patrick Anderson, proletarian by choice, Canadian by desire, and poet aflame with purpose."[6]

Smith's phrase "description and diagnosis" could be applied more easily too to the poetry of F. R. Scott, who was associated with *Preview* throughout its existence. It seems strange to compare the two during this period and realize that it was Anderson who leapt most often from diagnosis to impassioned prefiguring of "cure", since Scott was the longer-established socialist, and certainly remained a socialist far longer than Anderson. By 1957 Anderson's memories of socialism were rather dim (self-consciously so, indeed):

> No, I do not want to go on much about politics. For one thing, I find it difficult to resurrect that particular world, although it is only fair to say that my friends in the Popular Party seemed to be completely sincere, if often neurotic, and my affiliation with them helped me to see more of the city than I should otherwise have done.[7]

But Scott was able to work with objective irony and a muted tone to diagnose social evils and imply the correct response without having to state it directly. Anderson too is capable of irony, but of a self-deprecating kind far removed from Scott's terse "Social Notes".

To some extent, while his satire is more ferocious, Scott is a safer poet emotionally than Anderson — he will not lead the reader into dangerously fraught emotional situations and personal depths as the latter is prone to do, and it was partly this tendency which evoked A. J. M. Smith's *cave* in the generally favourable review in the *Forum*. Nevertheless, this review, and Northrop Frye's review of *The Colour as Naked*[8], are virtually the last really complimentary critical studies of Patrick Anderson in Canada. P. K. Page's reputation has remained virtually intact through a long period of "silence" to her *Cry Ararat!* in 1967: a reputation sustained for thirteen years virtually by *The Metal and the Flower*, which Northrop Frye pronounced the most enjoyable book of poetry he had read in 1954.[9] An illustration of the way in which her poetry has "weathered" better in Canada is her inclusion by Milton Wilson in his 1964 "Canadian Library" anthology *Poetry of the Mid-Century 1940-60*, from which Louis Dudek was excluded, and in which one could by no stretch of the imagination expect to find Patrick Anderson.

SOMETHING HAPPENED to Anderson's reputation between 1947 and the present; or to be more precise, several things happened to affect the reception of his poetry in Canada. Firstly, he was no longer here when *The Colour as Naked* appeared, but back in England, so the book does not seem

to have got the recognition it deserved; certainly writers on Anderson in the late 'fifties and 'sixties treat his work as if it ended with *The White Centre.* Secondly, his departure in 1949 made him appear a rather bizarre, mysterious figure who had appeared in Canada at the start of the war, taken a leading part in a most exciting decade of poetry and magazine production in Montreal, been married and divorced, and had suddenly left for Singapore. In other words, he was ripe for type-casting, and in reviews of Canadian literature and studies of the 'forties he is seldom mentioned without the qualification of the magazine he ran for three years: "Patrick Anderson of *Preview*". And to make clear what being Patrick Anderson of *Preview* meant, two editorial sentences are usually extracted from the magazine:

> Two events of great importance to the writer have occurred in recent weeks. One is the Russian offensive, the other the conference at Casablanca.[10] All anti-fascists, we feel that the existence of a war between democratic culture and the paralysing forces of dictatorship only intensifies the writer's obligation to work.[11]

There is no denying the pomposity of these sentences, taken out of context, but it may be worth noting that while Desmond Pacey sees the first as cant; "one would have thought the whole Canadian war effort . . . depended on the continued existence of this little mimeographed monthly",[12] he omits to quote the previous sentence: ". . . we have lived long enough in Montreal to realise the frustrating and inhibiting effects of isolation." It is important to see *Preview* as a reaction to this sensation of isolation and socialist ambitions, and that when its tone became pompous or shrill it was not because it was absurdly sure of its own efficacy, but simply because that efficacy must have seemed dubious at times. Admittedly Desmond Pacey first published *Creative Writing in Canada* in 1952, before Anderson's third volume, but there is less excuse for Milton Wilson's brief passage on Anderson in *"Other Canadians and After"*, written in 1958, which is a compendium of clichés about the Anderson "type", and quotes from the inevitable skiing passage from "Winter in Montreal" which Wynne Francis too battens on in disapproval. Anderson is "a tea-drinking Dylan Thomas"; his "Winter Landscape" (as if he wrote of nothing else!) is "oppressive . . . white . . . anaesthetic". Wilson talks of Anderson's "Marxism . . . his self-conscious Canadianism", in a derogatory manner, as if these were the only ingredients of an Anderson poem. The "Canadianism" taunt seems wholly off the mark; "self-conscious non-Canadianism" is more appropriate, since it suggests the honesty with which Anderson accepts his non-Canadian sensibility

and applies it to Montreal and to the Canadian scene generally. In *Poem on Canada* he seems to see himself as the interpreter, the immigrant, close enough to Canada to observe it, and detached enough to see it as a unique land still in the process of being populated, rather than as a factual "My Country." His affection for Montreal is honest and understandable:

> There was so much to write about, so much that has never been written about before; one couldn't dislike a city which gave one so much, and which one had the sense of recreating.[13]

But in Wilson's article the myth has started to harden: Patrick Anderson of *Preview* is an anaesthetic white Marxist. From this portrait who could imagine the variety of his work, or recognize him as the author of the bitter little dialogue in "Sand"?

> It's not just that there's so much of it, he said,
> nor the bitter heat of it nor its blinding glare
> but it's the shiftlessness, that there's no
> purpose here
> nothing but a blanket warming a blanket, or a sum
> multiplying and dividing itself forever, a sum
> adding and subtracting itself for ever and ever.

There is of course another ingredient of the Anderson myth, which has served so efficiently in the 'sixties to prevent serious and objective study of his poetry, and that is the existence, alongside *Preview* and the *Preview* group, of *First Statement* and its supporters, notably John Sutherland, Louis Dudek and Irving Layton. Raymond Souster was also associated with *First Statement*, though he did publish in *Preview*. The contrast between these two groups is striking, and has been stressed often enough not to need emphasis at this point. It seems certain that John Sutherland conceived *First Statement* at least in part as a counterweight to *Preview* and the English background of P. K. Page, Anderson and James Wreford. Louis Dudek coined the phrases "meticulous moderns" and "lumpen intellectuals" to express the contrast he and Sutherland felt between the two magazines, and they wrote editorials which were obviously aimed at the other magazine, and which provoked one response in *Preview II* (February 1943).[14] Wynne Francis's article on "Montreal Poets of the Forties", published in 1962, and lavishly decked with reflections and recollections from Irving Layton, creates from the conflict between the two magazines a full-scale war, with *First Statement* as patriotic guerillas assaulting the establishment in the form of *Preview*:

> Their accomplishments, age, prestige, sophistication, and talent all combined to present an irresistable target for the raw impecunious parvenus of Stanley Street.

We shall see that this is a very misleading picture; and of course, the "loser" in this poetic and critical battle is Patrick Anderson: he was an exploiter of the Canadian landscape, says Wynne Francis:

> Exploited is the word. Anderson was not a nature poet. His Montreal mountain is a political symbol; snow is our chloroform and ice our state of social anaesthesia; skiers are capitalist entrepreneurs, or sometimes leftist propagandists.

"Winter in Montreal" again! Anderson might be forgiven for wondering whether anyone had read beyond Page 24 of *The White Centre*. The article completed the process of suggesting that Anderson is unreadable or not worth reading by suggesting that his role, and *Preview*'s, was to stimulate Irving Layton. Mr. Layton is quoted as saying that it did.

I am not concerned here to deprecate the achievements of Souster and Layton, or to deny that they seem to have emerged as the major figures who moved from the promising 'forties to the established 'fifties. It is rather the melodrama presented by Wynne Francis which deserves to be questioned, as well as the factual accuracy of her remarks about *Preview*.

F. R. Scott has confined himself to saying that *Preview* "stimulated and kept alive" *First Statement*[15]; P. K. Page is even less conscious of there having been any out-and-out rivalry between the two groups:

> I remember on one occasion a room was taken at the Ritz, for *Preview* and *First Statement* to argue out something . . . whether it was nationalism or internationalism, or what it was, I know it was a very emotion-fraught evening!
>
> My memory of it is that the groups were pretty well separate. One saw Layton occasionally, because Layton wasn't the sort of person you didn't see, and one saw Dudek occasionally, and I didn't have very much to do with them after the *First Statement* thing got going.[16]

Francis' statements about the respective ages and social standing of the two groups could be misleading too:

> Several of them were comfortably established professionally in the fields of teaching, law and medicine . . . the *Preview* elders in many cases represented father images. Several of them were McGill professors.

P K. Page has stressed that F. R. Scott had a life independent of *Preview* during the war; that he was not as completely absorbed in the group as were

Anderson, herself, Ruddick and Shaw, and that Klein joined the group quite late in the magazine's life. Bruce Ruddick was not at that time even a student in medicine, and so he was far from being "established professionally in medicine", though he was later to achieve this status. Patrick Anderson was teaching at a boys' school in Montreal, and P. K. Page was a stenographer. The ages of the members of the respective groups in 1942 were much more evenly matched than "Montreal Poets of the Forties" would suggest. F. R. Scott was 43 and Klein 33, but Layton himself was 30; though Dudek was 24, and Souster only 21, Anderson and Page were only 27 and 26 respectively.

BUT POETS CAN SURVIVE classification, even misrepresentation, if they are read and appreciated by reasonable numbers of people; and after pointing to the difficulty of obtaining copies of Anderson volumes, and the poor state of criticism, and to Anderson's departure from Canada, one must finally admit that there are qualities in the poetry itself which have left it washed up on the bank of the Canadian poetic tradition while the stream flowed on; we have P. K. Page's high reputation as proof that this cannot be blamed on to circumstance entirely. This is not to say that the poetry is poor, and deserves to be forgotten; on the contrary, a unique experience awaits anyone who is prepared to read through the three volumes of poetry, and if possible the uncollected poems in *Preview*. The poetry is *certainly* most un-American, but it differs from anything published in England this century both in its choice of subject matter (which seems Canadian) and in the peculiar isolated intensity of the tone, which manages somehow to convey also a faintly amused sense of irony at the frenzied attempt to communicate. It stands out in a Canadian anthology through its wordiness, and density of metaphor, and its debt to Dylan Thomas. But it is Dylan Thomas with a taste of irony; a taste, in fact, of T. S. Eliot.

T. S. Eliot, but not Pound. Perhaps here we can find some of the reasons at least for Anderson's decline in popularity in the 'fifties and 'sixties. It would not be too adventurous to claim that Imagism, along with several American poets directly or indirectly influenced by Pound, such as Cummings and Williams, has exerted a tremendous influence on Canadian poetry in the last twenty years. Anderson is not prepared to give you an object in the Imagist manner — he will process it, masticate it, turn it inside out and offer it to you with his fingerprints all over it. His complete antithesis to the Imagists not only separates

him from the laconics of Souster, and the cultivated directness of Layton, but is in complete contrast also to the low-keyed musings of the younger Margaret Atwood:

> Who can tell what clothes may suffer
> doomed to be hollow, to be thin,
> unable to speak except by the gestures
> of those who inhabit them.[17]

This is not itself an Imagist poem, but it does have that air of inviting the reader to fill out its spareness: imagining various "gestures", or the exact nature of the "suffering" involved, which one associates with that tradition. Beside it, Anderson's poems seem tyrannical — each image's effect has been calculated, and each image or adjective is startling or precise enough to direct the reader into the desired response. This is a far cry from Pound's vision of an "austere, direct poetry" and from most Canadian poetry of the 'fifties and 'sixties. It is interesting to note that Imagism as a movement never really exerted a profound influence on English poetry of the twentieth century: Kingsley Amis's poem "Against Romanticism", written in 1956, re-phrases much of what Hulme and Pound were saying forty years before, and Pound does not seem to have had as many disciples in England as in America. Certainly a poem like "Summer's Joe" stands out in a Canadian anthology for the self-conscious, almost intrusive, linguistic cleverness of its alliteration and epithets:

> Then sudden in the scope of sea
> with the delight of found
> he saw his treasure island,
> he saw his milkwhite fathom.

Desmond Pacey says in *Creative Writing in Canada* that though "Summer's Joe" is an attractive and evocative poem, there seems a lot of poem to a small amount of theme or thought. This is in fact true of much of Anderson's poetry — almost inevitable in view of his love of stunning phrases, figures and adjectives. But the way to read Anderson is not to hope for a final "knotting line" which will tie the whole poem together or supply a moral, something like Birney's "Can. Lit":

> It's only by our lack of ghosts we're haunted.

On the contrary, in Anderson, it seems that each local effect has a semi-autonomous importance — many of his poems have a kind of molecular struc-

ture, a conglomeration. He puts great stress on the shocking, immediate portrayal of single experiences, often attacking a scene or mood from all angles; his images are always packed with *emotion*, and his overall aim is emotional. Poems like "Bathroom", "Song of Intense Cold" and "The Self is Steep" seem intellectual in nature, but the intellectual cleverness always has some motivation on an emotional level — Anderson is doing intellectual allusive contortions to push the reader into sharing his emotions.

There are many such poems, as well as similarly intended lines in poems otherwise more intellectual, which conspire to demand the reader's compliance, to direct him to a reflective, despairing, lost (though not often excited) emotional state. It is particularly cleverly done in section three of the series *The Self is Steep*, in *A Tent for April*, where the poet's emotional state is described in physical terms: a collection of details about a depressing, claustrophobic room; he then puts the emotion to more intellectual uses. The emotion

> ... goes in rooms
> has buttons on it, or hairs. It is to touch
> self-hood or boredom or the furniture
> which fingers travel until they trench or snap.
> The litter of that dump is sourly lit
> by a great unmade bed — a place of tears
> and fingernails, or things kept in a box ...

We are convinced, and appropriate the mental state as we read. But Anderson quite brilliantly moves the stagnant room into visions of desperate action: a cripple hurling his crutches from the room's window at children in the sun; the window suggesting a sniper or assassin. But it is the concepts of the sniper's and murderer's motives which are psychologically acute, and which are built on the whole movement of the poem.

> The sniper knows it, shooting to be loved,
> and the murderer who hacks into a dream
> the opposite body which will not approve
>
> knows it, and the impacted bric-a-brac
> of Germany, like a third-rate sitting room
> grows dark and lonely with such love, such hate.

Anderson is at his best in this poem: the emotion generated is being put to use intellectually; there is none of that conscious "political verse" posing we saw in "Miners"; image is skilfully built on image, within the basic metaphor of the

room. The haunted atmosphere and the isolated feeling of Germany at the end of the war is presented with acuteness and integrity. Furthermore, this poem represents some of the best characteristics of *Preview*, its view of Europe is Canadian in its lack of hysteria, and can be read alongside F. R. Scott's "Enemies", from *Preview No. 16* (October 1943), to illustrate how the group at its best could cross-fertilize and treat its avowed subject matter with restraint and accuracy.

But is it not unfair to see emotion as the basis of Anderson's earlier work? One wonders how far this desire to convey emotional states corresponds to P. K. Page's picture of him as one who loved to be the centre of activity, and the leader of a group, an orator,[18] and one is reminded of Anderson's own confession in the first part of *The Self is Steep* that "Between these passionate acts I do not live — / shaping before me the declarant one, the orator . . ."

It would be a mistake, in view of this and other candid hints in the poems, to see Anderson as an egotist without insight into his own poetic extravagance or the emotional forces at work in his verse. In fact it is easy to see the blasé tone of his Canadian reminiscences in *Search Me* as a personal reaction to Canadian critical essays which cast him as a self-important, word-intoxicated, pomous, militant Marxist. In this connection, there is an interesting poem in *The Colour as Naked*, entitled "Ballad of the Young Man" which treats Anderson's particular poetic problem in an ironic and sophisticated manner and expresses a mature attitude towards the relationship between poet and poem. He did in fact place it as the last poem in the book, where it comments on much of his poetry of the previous decade.

"Ballad of the Young Man" is for most of its length a description in ballad metre of a young man walking in the October countryside, of his precocious sensitive nature feeding on images the countryside supplies, and of two visions, of love and death, that he sees in the waters of a stream. The presentation of the young man's vision is dramatic and colourful, and we can understand his emotions, self-absorbed as they are:

> The young man rose from his dreaming,
> he turned and he walked away:
> 'At last I have had my vision
> all this has happened to me.

Nevertheless, we are a little disturbed by the undisciplined emotional tone of these words. Then in the last four stanzas, Anderson produces a surprise. An unexpected sceptical voice expresses misgivings:

Oh, I have had my moment —
Love on his golden throne,
Death in his marble basement!'
'Yes, but you were alone.'

Intriguingly, Anderson uses this voice to question the usefulness and universal meaning of a moment of understanding and vision. How far is it possible to communicate such moments, and how can it be done? The voice seems to say that there must be some binding force of intellectual meaning to unify the "vision" and make it meaningful for others, that all the stunning detail remains locked in oneself: "Yes, but you were alone", without this,

O I shall write about it,
tell wife and friend of my walk',
'Do you think you're Proust — that they will trust
such vague aesthetic talk?'

This is a voice attacking descriptive verse — and so much of Anderson's verse is descriptive! But the intricacy of the poem does not end here.

I saw a young man walking,
he talked to himself by the way —
the great red sun was sinking,
rooks collapsed the sky.

So the voice represented an inward dialogue in the poet's mind, and we share in his disappointment through that final strong verbal metaphor, as the rooks collapse the sky. But in doing so, we are jerked into the realization that we *have* already shared, dramatically, simultaneously, in the young man's experience, and can share his delight, and opposition to the sceptical voice. So in attacking the idea of the primacy of emotion and description in poetry, Anderson has vindicated it in an interesting way. But the poem depends for its effect on an infusion of intellect: it is not purely descriptive, and in this it seems to me superior to the much anthologized "Drinker".

Anderson wrote in *Preview* of his poem "Winter in Montreal":

> In this poem I have tried to express a social statement about Canada in terms that allow my essentially emotional and romantic nature free play...[19]

This is reminiscent of the *Preview* manifesto's aims of fusing "the lyric and didactic elements in modern verse",[20] and using it as a yardstick one can divide

Anderson's verse into three main groups. The first group contains poems which exercise the descriptive, "emotional and romantic" nature of Anderson, whether seriously as in "Children", or in a deliberately "precious" manner as in "Bathroom". There are many such poems in *Preview* and *A Tent for April.* The second category comprises those poems of the "traditional *Preview* Anderson" which approach social or political themes through description and definition. *Poem on Canada* falls into this category, as does "Winter in Montreal" and many other poems from *The White Centre.* This is the form most fraught with dangers, and there are several uncollected poems in *Preview* which link emotion and description to specific events of the war in a way which must seem sentimental, since the "humanity" is yoked to the "comment" in a facile manner which suggests a manipulation of feeling for its own sake. The last lines of "Death of an Animal Man", which conclude the celebration of the joyous senses of an anonymous man — his breathing, loving, running, dancing, whistling and laughing, read:

> the precipice hand
> gives back no more the rose as a soft echo
> nor does the arm defend the cottage brain
> nor shoulders wear the massive past as muslin
> for all, all, all
> lies now dissected on the battlefield.[21]

Because the death in war has no integral significance in the poem — the man as described could have lost his life in any time or place — the poem comes close to obtaining cheap "significance" from the mere mentioning of the battlefield.

But this was not Anderson's only approach to social subject-matter. The third category, which is found most often in *The Colour as Naked*, holds the "emotional and romantic nature" in a productive tension against more intellectual considerations. We have seen how this technique works in "Ballad of the Young Man", and how it is used to present an image of Germany, guilt, and the nature of violence in *The Self is Steep* from the early volume *A Tent For April. The Colour as Naked* is full of such verse, where the meaning is not diffuse or tacked on arbitrarily, but welded to the emotional content: "Houses Burning: Quebec" balances the physical fascination of fire with its revolutionary and slum-cleansing implications; "Leaving Canada" measures feelings of achievement against concrete memories of Montreal; "Eden Town" contrasts the sense of belonging to a city and wanting to change it to the isolation of bringing a new

mentality into it. In this work one feels a deeper involvement in the materials of the poems, a greater sense of responsibility towards the imagery and its effects. There is, in fact, a capacity to be *hurt* which the easy facility of some of the earlier work lacks.

But these poems are not well known, either in England, where Anderson is hardly known except for his travel books, or in Canada, where all manner of difficulties prevent them getting the hearing they deserve. Indeed, the pattern of criticism here has been misleading: praising the earlier work and ignoring the mature; ignoring much of what is mature in that early work; pouncing on over-emphasised aspects of his work, and on a handful of lines from half a dozen poems; even misrepresenting the facts of his career. If Patrick Anderson ever does return to Canada, he would be justified in demanding a reassessment of his poetry, or at least that we abandon the current clichés about his work.

FOOTNOTES

[1] Jessica Nelson North, "Mercurial": *Poetry* (Chicago) 69; 284-6 (February 1947).
[2] William Meredith, "A Good Modern Poet and a Modern Tradition", *Poetry* (Chicago) 70:208-211 (July 1947).
[3] Milton Wilson, "*Other Canadians* and After" in *Masks of Poetry*, ed. A. J. M. Smith (Toronto 1968).
[4] A. J. M. Smith "New Canadian Poetry" *Can. Forum* 26:252 (February 1947).
[5] Printed in *Preview 14* (July 1943) Never collected.
[6] Wynne Francis, "Montreal Poets of the Forties", *Can Lit*: 14 (Autumn 1962).
[7] Patrick Anderson, *Search Me. Autobiography — The Black Country and Spain.* (London: Chatto & Windus, 1957), p. 152.
[8] In *UTQ* 23, April 1954.
[9] In "Letters in Canada 1954" *UTQ* 24 (April 1955).
[10] *Preview 11* (February 1943). Quoted by Desmond Pacey in his *Creative Writing in Canada* and by Wynne Francis in "Montreal Poets of the Forties."
[11] *Preview 1* (March 1942) quoted in *A Literary History of Canada*, ed. Carl F. Klink (University of Toronto Press, 1966), p. 489.
[12] *Creative Writing in Canada*, p. 155.
[13] *Search Me*, p. 149.
[14] "What is the writer going to do? [about attempts to discredit the Labour movement]. Is he, like the First Statement group, going to content himself with study circles to ponder the platitudes of Lampman and Carman?"
[15] In his review of *Search Me* in *Tamarack Review* (Winter 1958).
[16] P. K. Page in a recorded conversation with Dorothy Livesay, December 1968.
[17] Margaret Atwood, "Closet", *Pluck 3* (Fall 1968).
[18] "Patrick liked disciples, and liked to be a centre, and it would have been difficult for him to play the role necessary in a merger [with *First Statement*] ... Patrick loved the role of poet. He adores it." With D. L. December 1968.
[19] *Preview 21* (September 1944).
[20] *Preview 1* (March 1942).
[21] "Death of an Animal Man", *Preview 8*, (October 1942).

PURDY: MAN AND POET

George Bowering

IN HIS INTRODUCTION to another poet's book,[1] Al Purdy speaks of some possible superficial descriptions of Canadian writers. He says that he himself might be thought of in that mode as "a cynical Canadian nationalist, a lyrical Farley Mowat maybe." It's a disarming suggestion, and a useful one. We should always remember that any single tack we take on a large writer is going to be at least somewhat superficial, and we should especially remember such a thing in Purdy's case, because he makes a habit of surprising a reader or critic with unexpected resources or interests. So I ask you to be careful, too, with my superficialities, such as this one I'll have to begin with:

Al Purdy is the world's most Canadian poet. Doug Fetherling, a young American refugee who has written that "Al Purdy knows more about writing poetry than anyone else I have ever met, heard or read about,"[2] goes on to remark on something I once told him in conversation: "Purdy cannot help but take a lot of Canada with him. He is even so typical looking, as George Bowering points out, that everybody in the interior of British Columbia looks exactly like Purdy." I would like to tell you what Purdy looks like, at least the way this B.C. boy first saw him, but I'll have to begin with an event a half-year before I pressed flesh with him the first time.

It was a day or two before Christmas 1962. Along with another young poet I was visiting the fine old bookstore of Doug and Hannah Kaye, across the street from the Vancouver Public Library, when the mailman arrived. Among the letters and packages of books there was a long cardboard box with the words "Books" written all over it. But when it was opened (and it was opened before anything else) it was seen not to contain books but rather, in a Seagram's 83 bottle, some dark purple fluid with heavy sediment swaying at the bottom. We

novices were informed that this was a famous Canadian literary libation, Alfred W. Purdy's home-made wild grape wine. With perhaps assumed alacrity, the Kayes drank some, and with some trepidation the novices did too. The taste was our first of Prince Edward County, and the purple-stained mouth lasted for a couple of days.

The following summer I somehow convinced the University of British Columbia English department to invite Purdy to give a reading, and I was finally to meet the robust poet I had been reading for a few years. Once again I was with the Kayes. Purdy stepped out of Doug's funny little car, all height and elbows, hand extended for mighty grip. There he was, the small-town Canadian, about six feet two inches, hair shaved up the sides, slightly grey and combed straight back by fingers, or sticking out to the sides, sleeves of an unstarched white shirt rolled up above the elbows, an old tie in a tight four-in-hand, but loosened and bent to one side, and funny old-fashioned sunglasses, in the days before funny old sunglasses were fashionable.

With him he had two ramshackle suitcases. One contained a few bottles of home-made Purdy wine (it had been full when he got on the train in Ontario), and the other was stuffed with underwear, socks, a portable typewriter, an electric frying pan, and five hundred sheets of paper with unknown letterhead. He was planning to stay in a tiny house he had title to east of the city along the railroad tracks, and write a novel about his days in Montreal among the poets and mattress-makers of the Fifties.

During the train ride across the country, he had experienced one of those Purdy experiences, half-alarming, half-humourous, that ineluctably find their way into his poems. He had been surprised by a woman who sat beside him, her mouth chewing on nothing, and asked him over and over again whether he took drugs. It turned out that she was a madwoman being taken to Vancouver against her will, and frantically attended by her sister, who also tried to take care of the madwoman's frightened children. The most meaningful miles passed while the woman slept with her head on the poet's large shoulder, and he slept too, but

> the madwoman
> shakes me softly awake again and, "Yes, I do take drugs,"
> I say to her and myself. "I get high on hemp and peyote biting
> at scraps of existence I've lost all the smoky limitless marbles
> I found in my life once lost long before Vancouver —"
>
> I've forgotten that child, his frantic scratching and biting

for something he wanted and lost — but it wasn't marbles.
I remember the Mountie waiting, then the conductor's
"Vancouver next! Vancouver!"
(*The Cariboo Horses*)

That afternoon was much taken up with the drinking and spilling of wine, and talk about the poetry scene. Purdy's first full-size volume of poems had come out in 1962, and my review in *Tish* would be among its generally hospitable welcomes. It was the first of many meetings with the man, all of them characterized by the presence of booze and cheap cigars, and lots of loud raillery.

He was born forty-five years earlier, in 1918, in the village of Wooler, Ont. It is hard to find the village now, though there is a sign on the 401 highway indicating the Wooler Road, the settlement having nearly disappeared as so many little Canadian birthplaces do, as Ameliasburgh, where the Purdys now live, is trying to. He was born on December 30th, which sees him a son of Capricorn, the half-goat, half-fish, four days after the rebirth of the sun, *Sol invictus*, a fertile influence. He was also the son of Alfred Purdy and Eleanor Louise Purdy, descended from United Empire Loyalists, those American refugees who became the most Canadian of Canadians.

He went to school at Dufferin Public School in Trenton, Albert Collegiate in Belleville, and Trenton Collegiate Institute. He says that he has been writing poems since he was thirteen, and on the dust jacket of *Poems for all the Annettes* (1962) he is quoted as remembering "Wilson MacDonald coming to the Trenton Collegiate to read poetry and being solemnly conducted into his presence as the school poet."

Like several other Canadian poets he spent some time in the R.C.A.F., and while in the service wrote lots of poems. It was while stationed in Vancouver that he got together $200 and had five hundred copies of his first book, *The Enchanted Echo* (1944) printed for him by the Clarke-Stuart printing company. Three hundred and fifty of them were later destroyed by a company warehouseman, and Purdy has said that he hopes the other one hundred and fifty will be lost eventually. Unfortunately there are some copies in Canadian university libraries. In an interview by Raymond Fraser published in the latter's mimeographed magazine,[3] Purdy refers to his verse of the Forties as "crap." He says further, "I thought it was a combination of Shakespeare and Francis Bacon and Christopher Marlowe." The same interview presents the largest view we have yet of Purdy during his twenties. It is a picture of the non-com being busted periodically for his recurrent misadventures with women. However it is during

this time that he married one of the strongest subjects of his poetry, Eurithe Mary Jane Parkhurst. They were married in the home country, Belleville, Ont., on November 1, 1941. They have one son, Alfred.

In Vancouver the young poet was working in a vacuum as far as the craft went. He tried out the Canadian Authors' Association, but then as now that organization had precious few real authors in it. He got a dollar each for more than forty poems published on the poetry page of the Vancouver *Sun*, edited by Joan Buckley. Also during these years of war, when a married airman received no great stipend from the government, he earned movie tickets by winning advertising jingle contests in the Vancouver *Province*. But he was still a decade away from his first real poetry.

THE TEN YEARS between the end of the war and Purdy's second book, *Pressed on Sand*, were the stuff literary legends and much of Purdy's later poetry are made of. There are many references to periods when the man rode freights across the country, ran a little taxi business (and presumably bootlegging) in Belleville, and worked in mattress factories on the Coast and in the garment district of Montreal:

> The days fled into smoky weeks
> and he learned to operate
> one machine after another
> learned them all
> how to gauge
> the "spock" of a needle plunging
> hard thru cloth beside his hand
> adjusting the varied rhythms of flesh
> with the balanced shifting stance of
> a boxer anticipating
> his steel opponent
> (*The Cariboo Horses*)

The poems that deal with the mattress factories reveal the main "politics" in Purdy's poetry. One story goes that he was bounced from the factory in Vancouver because he was involved in trying to introduce a union, the Vancouver Upholsterers Union, there. One of his best-known poems, "Percy Lawson," deals with that scene in 1954, and makes the connection between Lawson the honest

fighting man of the gold-toothed grin, and Purdy, the man who wants to make poems with the same honest tenacity:

> And what's the contract news from Watt who
> if I said what I thought he was would
> sue me for damn near everything
> would sue me right now in a poem and
> get a judgement for one lying lyric
> I can't write
> (I'll be damned if I write)
> in praise of Watt
> in praise of
> practically nothing
> (*The Cariboo Horses*)

Purdy is not a "labour poet," and he is not sentimental in the bourgeois sense about the working class. (He is listed as politically connected with the NDP in *The Canadian Who's Who* of 1964-1966.) He is deeply and habitually allied with the underdogs in a country and a world that allows bosses to ignore or suppress the underdogs. So Purdy is seen with the mattress workers, with the Tsimshian Indians of the B.C. interior, with the Sons of Freedom on their freedom march to Agassiz prison, with the Eskimo hunters of Baffin Island. Along with Milton Acorn he has kept at least some of the nation's poetry at the service of the working man and in the lists against middleclass meatballism. While Purdy has supplied the robust humour without which the prole would be unrecognized as the authentic Canadian item.

But Canadian as he may be, Purdy does not go along with the idea that mindless work in itself builds strong character or a godly nation. All during the postwar time he was looking for a way to get away from hiring his muscles out, and a chance to be first of all a writer. After a long litigation he received a disappointingly small inheritance from his mother's estate. He built his own A-frame house from scrap lumber, and he set to work, writing words for money. He wrote radio and television plays (and read other people's plays for the fees from the CBC), short stories, articles for magazines such as *North* and *The Beaver*. Since his acclaim of recent years, appearances in the Canadian edition of *Time* and the rotogravures, he has had poems commissioned for the popular magazines, a rareity in this country. A recent example is his "Lament for Robert Kennedy" in the *Star Weekly*. Today Purdy describes himself as writer, without any self-consciousness. He hasn't done any physical work for pay since the end of the Fifties.

Meanwhile his reputation has grown steadily since the middle of the Fifties, so that he is generally considered top man in the popular or public areas of Canadian (read Toronto) writing circles, having taken over that position from Irving Layton, who held it from *Red Carpet for the Sun* till just a few years ago. The reviews of his three thin books of the Fifties were generally favourable, and most of them welcomed a new talent to the scene. This was the time when Raymond Souster in Toronto and Louis Dudek in Montreal were bringing about great changes in Canadian poetry, principally through their publications that let the readers in the rest of the country know that there were poets here listening to each other and to voices from the United States.

In 1960 Purdy received his first Canada Council fellowship, and typically he decided not to live off the money in Spain or France, but rather to head for the Cariboo, which he had visited while he was in the air force. He had all kinds of grandiose ideas about his project, such as writing an opera about the life of the Indians, and it was around that time that he was often reported to be writing an epic based on Haida myths as described in the works of Marius Barbeau published by the Canadian government. Very Canadian stuff. All that has surfaced from that time are Purdy's poems about the northern interior of British Columbia, but they are enough to pay off the Canada Council investment.

After that he returned to Montreal, which by this time was crawling with poets of every persuasion. A long line of magazines, mainly mimeographed, introduced such newcomers as Milton Acorn, Seymour Mayne, Henry Moscovitch and dozens of younger bards, to a city that already had to make room for Layton, Dudek, Scott, and many others who had already come to the attention of readers in other parts of the country. Dudek had started a series of books by young Montreal poets, the first of whom was a McGill student from Westmount, Leonard Cohen. Poets were even reading from greasy pages in bars and coffee shops.

Purdy himself is a little confused about his various sojourns in Montreal, maybe because of the heady atmosphere full of poets. In his introduction to Acorn's selected poems, he says that he first met Acorn in 1958 in Montreal, and three paragraphs later says that they talked and partied together all through the winter of 1956-1957. In any case the two poets, brought together by Layton, hit it off, and spent a lot of time arguing, sometimes in poems such as Purdy's "House Guest." In 1959 they used some of Purdy's wages from the mattress factory, and a mimeo machine that Acorn rescued from anonymity somewhere, to produce the first issue of a soon-to-be-forgotten poetry magazine called *Moment*. Soon

thereafter Acorn took the magazine to Toronto with him, and began editing it with the young Toronto poet, Gwendolyn MacEwen.

In 1962 Purdy published two books of poetry. The first was *Poems for all the Annettes*, published by the Contact Press, the most important publisher of poetry in Canada at that time. The Contact Press, which died a couple years ago, did not print books in great numbers of copies, but it produced the largest early collections of such poets as its founders, Layton, Dudek, and Souster, and others such as D. G. Jones, Milton Acorn, Margaret Atwood, Gwendolyn MacEwen, John Newlove, and Alden Nowlan. The list is too long to do it credit here, but Canadian university libraries that did not sign up for a complete run are now kicking themselves in the PR8000 stacks. Being added to the Contact list did nothing for Purdy's plans to live off his writing, but it did signify that he would be among the poets given serious attention in this country.

The other 1962 book was perhaps not as significant, not as interesting, and certainly not as successful. One suspects that the poems, at least some of them, may be pieces left after paring of the Contact book. *The Blur in Between* was set by hand, illustrated with cuts by R. V. Rosewarne, and published by Jay Macpherson's short-lived Emblem Books of Toronto. Emblem Books printed eight titles, Purdy's being the eighth. The only other spoken of much these days is number seven, Alden Nowlan's *Wind in a Rocky Country.*

But *Poems for all the Annettes* had done its job. If Purdy was not now a household word it is only because poetry is not spoken of enough in most households. His poems were now being heard often on radio shows such as "CBC Wednesday Night." In 1963 he won the President's Medal of the University of Western Ontario for the best poem by a Canadian printed in a Canadian magazine the previous year. That in itself was a kind of breakthrough because it is seldom that the medal goes to any poet outside the academic tradition beloved of the three old Ontario universities. Not that Purdy had ever been an "underground" poet. But he had been unusually, bullheadedly individualistic — he knows just about every poet and every poet's work in the country, but he would hesitate about getting too close to one other writer, for fear of starting a coterie. He was a long way from his days in Vancouver when he went to the CAA to try to find another ear. Now he was, as the wide open verses in his new poetry say, his own man. He began to read poems in front of university audiences, and he still wore his sleeves rolled up above his elbows.

Those years of the early Sixties were fertile ones for Purdy; he was publishing widely and the poems were taking on a quality that is necessary for public suc-

cess — a reader familiar with the Canadian poetry scene could recognize a Purdy poem as surely as he could a Layton poem or a Souster poem. It was almost as if some uncanny principle were in operation, providing a sunburst in the poet's energies to make up for the late and sometimes false start he had made.

In any case, 1965 saw the publication of *The Cariboo Horses* by McClelland & Stewart. This was Purdy's first professionally published book, and a sure sign that he had arrived. At this time M&S was the only big house in Canada distributing books of poems widely. Ryerson Press was between early and later poetry policies, and Oxford and Macmillan didn't have very exciting lists. Alfred Purdy was now pretty sure of a major place in Canadian literature, and would now be one of McClelland & Stewart's big four, Leonard Cohen having been entered into the lists. As a kind of confirmation of this idea, the Governor-General's award went to *The Cariboo Horses.*

In *The Canadian Who's Who* Purdy lists his recreation as "travelling," and while that has always been true, it now became highly operative in the poems. *The Cariboo Horses* contains poems set in such Canadian locales as 100-Mile House, Agassiz, Stanley Park, Roblin Lake, Sioux Lookout, Piapot, and Crow's Nest. When asked in an interview[4] if he traveled for his poems because it is "easier to control the elements of a newer, smaller area," Purdy replied, "unless one is a stone one doesn't sit still. And perhaps new areas of landscape awake old areas of one's self. One has seen the familiar landscape (perhaps) so many times that one ceases to really see it. Maybe it's like the expatriate writers, Joyce and so on, who went to foreign countries in order to see their own."

That is surely what happened in Purdy's poems in the summer of 1965. He received his second Canada Council fellowship, and once again characteristically turned away from the traditional European holiday to spend his time among the Eskimos of Baffin Island, collecting the lyrics that make up his most successful book, *North of Summer.* Purdy had always been interested in the Canadian Arctic as something like an emblem of the whole particular Canadian ethos, or of his ideal for the particulars of the Canadian experience, much in the way that the painters of the Group of Seven went north to find visual experiences that would make images for a Canadian art and Canadian character different from the European springs. In fact, *North of Summer* also contains colour reproductions of eight A. Y. Jackson oil sketches of the eastern Arctic made in that summer of 1965.

So Purdy rummaged through his library of Canadiana, one of the most interesting collections of books in the shelves of any Canadian writer, reading all

about his territory before jumping into bush plane and fishing boat with portable typewriter, to make poems filled with the details of a Canadian life usually lost in the vague notions of long afternoons over barren and unmarked land beyond the imaginations of readers in a Toronto dining room. Purdy says in his postscript to the book: "Queerly enough I didn't have the sense of vast and lonely barren distance in the Arctic, even tho it certainly is vast and lonely. Why didn't I? I'm not sure. Perhaps because I looked at things close up, flowers, rivers and people: above all, people. Besides, you'd have a helluva time shoving vast lonely distance into poems."

That is one of the sources of strength for the book, the close-up detail that offers some confluence of imagination between the poet and the reader who hasn't been there. The other source is the book's structure. It is made up only of the Arctic poems, and not all the poems Purdy wrote about the Arctic, either. It is in all ways a book, not just a collection of recent poems.

But the poet does write recent poems, occasional lyrics, and if they are any good they should be collected into a volume. So in 1968 Purdy's third McClelland & Stewart book in four years, *Wild Grape Wine*. Once again the image of the poet on the move is important to the collection. In this case there are signs that *North of Summer* offered to the poet the best kind of design for marshalling the power of his imagination. In the new book we find smaller "books" of poems wherein the poet may be seen alighting in some corner of the land or elsewhere, and joining detailed observations to lyrical reflections in order to provide longer looks at the places and people that make up our land and imaginations. So there are series about Purdy's visits to Cuba, Newfoundland, and the Ottawa parliament, as well as the inevitable lyrics about history and present family drama in his home territory by Roblin Lake.

The domestic scene, if it may be called that in this instance, has always been a counterpoint to the traveling in Purdy's poems. Prince Edward County must be one of the least "progressive" counties in Ontario, or in the whole country. It reminds me of certain half-abandoned farm valleys of eastern British Columbia. I like those places with their crumpled old gray barns, and I think I see why Purdy likes the country around Ameliasburgh. You get there by going through Belleville, the closest city, an ugly little place whose only grace seems to be that it contains liquor and beer stores. You drive over narrow roads of crumbled pavement or rutted dirt, flanked by ancient split-rail fences bordering fields of no great agricultural promise, and none of this time are you aware that you're

on what the map shows to be a sloppy kind of peninsula poking out at the edge of Lake Ontario.

> Old fences drift vaguely among the trees
> a pile of moss-covered stones
> gathered for some ghost purpose
> has lost meaning under the meaningless sky
> — they are like cities under water and
> the undulating green waves of time are
> laid on them —
> (*The Cariboo Horses*)

If you are not delayed by wandering cows, you get to Ameliasburgh in about fifteen minutes, but the burgh is not a grand monument to Amelia, whoever she was. It is perhaps a block and a half long, but most of the buildings appear to be unused, save to support the tin signs that advertise the products of an earlier age. There is a wooden general store that seems to be a post office as well, and that's where you buy a licorice pipe and ask where the Purdys live. You are told about a road up the way that is entirely unmarked because everyone here who can read is already relevant. The last dirt road rides up on a hill overlooking an outsize pond that you suspect is Roblin Lake, and below you is a pair of mud-formed ruts descending to what could be a home-made A-frame. Checking around, you decide this is it when the materials of the Roblin Lake poems settle into their proper places:

> Across Roblin Lake, two shores away,
> they are sheathing the church spire
> with new metal. Someone hangs in the sky
> over there from a piece of rope,
> hammering and fitting God's belly-scratcher.
> (*Wild Grape Wine*)

Yes, there's the spire, reflecting the dull Ontario sun, and if you have the nerve you nose your car down the hill and park it next to the amateurish wooden privy half-obscured by a bush.

There is an expanse of uncut grass and very tall dandelions leading down to the shallow water, and there seem to be objects such as picnic tables or pieces of wharf. It's an emblem of Purdy's disdain for the *House & Garden* Canadian way of life, you might be tempted to say. You remember the rolled-up sleeves and the five-cent cigar, and you just can't help getting comfortable, at least not

if you're a Canadian of enough age to have been brought up rural before getting into the city poetry embroglio.

So you know that inside the slapping screen door the house will be like that, comfortable, and made with straightened nails, a stove that takes up its share of visible space and consumes a woodpile topped with snow during the winter. Purdy taught himself to build as he taught himself to make poems, and the effects are similar — lots of inexpert finishings made up for by the sense of talent and energy, and honest usefulness. The shack, as he calls it, gets more storied visits from other poets than most poets' homes. Inside it, Purdy looks exactly like the pictures in his poems or the pictures in *Time* magazine, or the picture on the dust jacket of *North of Summer* — he is typing with forefingers at a small home-made table of visible nails, hair sticking outward in every direction, wearing nothing but bush-pants with the cuffs turned down, and unlaced canvas shoes, surrounded by a disorder of little objects including snap-on sunglasses, cigarette papers, empty glass lying on the floor, and a Toronto telephone book.

In 1968, Purdy became a very busy man of letters around the country. While *Wild Grape Wine* was published by M&S, across town the House of Anansi printed a new version of *Poems for all the Annettes*, but for this edition the poet revised most of the poems, added some, dropped some, and applied his later rules of punctuation. He also had a number of broadsheets produced, and engaged in a large number of typically robust and anecdotal book reviews. Further, he entered into a busy career as editor. Starting with a selection of West Coast poetry for *Tamarack Review*, he went on to supplying advice and introductions to poets such as young Doug Fetherling, and edited (with introduction) the selected poems of Milton Acorn for the Ryerson Press. He edited one of the most newsworthy books of the year, *The New Romans*, a collection of writings by forty-nine Canadians expressing their views on the United States. In connection with that anthology he made personal appearances all over the country and in the U.S., traveling in better style than he had in the Thirties. At the same time he was editing another anthology of poems, this time for high schools, called *Fifteen Winds*. He is also still providing scripts, dramatic and otherwise, for the CBC.

At the end of the year he and Eurithe locked up the shack and went off to Europe, Purdy's first trip over there since 1955. While there he was of course filling his small looseleaf notebook with poems to fill the travel sections of future volumes. He was also beginning to write a book about Earle Birney, and as soon as he arrived home in Eastern Ontario the news came that he was collecting

poems for a special Dominion Day radio programme. Any book on Purdy is going to be in some way obsolete because he is not a man to wait while you catch up.

> And I walk home thru the night
> invisible to them now
> following damp furrows
> across someone's cornfield
> holding in my head
> a small bright area
> that speaks man
> along with a voice that says
> "so what?"
> while the dead underfoot whisper
> and the land stirs to life
> and nothing is impossible
>
> (*Wild Grape Wine*)

NOTES

[1] Milton Acorn, *I've Tasted my Blood* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1969), *xi.*

[2] Doug Fetherling, "Al Purdy's Recent Poetry," *Quarry, XVIII*, 2 (Winter 1969), 42-43.

[3] "Purdy at 25," *Intercourse*, 9 (October 1968), 9-11. Interview with Raymond Fraser.

[4] Gary Geddes, "An Interview with Alfred Purdy," in *Twentieth Century Poetry and Poetics*, ed. Gary Geddes (Toronto: Oxford, 1969).

DEUX LITTÉRATURES

Antoine Sirois

DEUX ROMANS PAYSANS relatifs à la vie de la seconde moitié du dix-neuvième siècle ont connu, entre autres, une grande popularité: *Jean Rivard*, d'Antoine Gérin-Lajoie, paru d'abord dans les "Soirées canadiennes" en 1862 et 1864, et *The Man from Glengarry*, de Ralph Connor (Charles Gordon), paru en 1901.

Ces deux récits sur la vie des défricheurs recouvrent relativement la même époque. Connor naît lui-même à Glengarry, comté qui s'ouvre à l'est de l'Ontario, en 1860, et il y demeure pendant dix ans. La première partie de l'histoire rappelle son enfance. Gérin-Lajoie, né en 1824, raconte l'histoire de Jean Rivard qui vient coloniser les Cantons de l'Est en 1844, et en 1860, moment où l'auteur dit faire connaissance de son héros, celui-ci est dans la force de l'âge. Le temps des deux romans se recoupe. Historiquement nous nous trouvons à l'époque où deux régions s'ouvrent à la colonisation, Glengarry en Ontario et les Cantons de l'Est au Québec, à des dates qui correspondent globalement à celles des récits fictifs. Même si les années de publication sont éloignées de trente-neuf ans, la distance "littéraire" elle-même est restreinte. Les deux littératures à cette époque sont encore enfermées dans la gangue paysanne et les mutations sont peu sensibles.

Ces deux oeuvres typiques de leur genre, fruits de deux littératures différentes, décrivant une vie paysanne qui se déroule dans deux régions éloignées, reflétant des milieux religieux et ethniques distincts, expriment-elles des valeurs littéraires et morales étrangères les unes aux autres, ou se ressentent-elles de l'influence d'un même pays, à une époque donnée, qui les englobe toutes deux?

Les caractéristiques suivantes se retrouvent dans le roman paysan canadien d'expression française: but para-littéraire de l'auteur, étude sociologique agrémentée d'éléments fictifs, description des moeurs rurales, glorification du passé,

plaidoyer pour la vie paysanne opposée à la vie citadine, peinture de héros sans densité psychologique qui sont des types plutôt que des êtres individualisés. Les deux oeuvres précitées sont-elles marquées par ces caractéristiques?

Un texte liminaire de *Jean Rivard* nous avertit que l'auteur n'a pas l'intention d'écrire un roman mais de rédiger un plaidoyer pour encourager les jeunes Canadiens français à poursuivre une carrière agricole dans un intérêt national. Ralph Connor, dans sa préface, affiche son désir de nous remémorer les héros-défricheurs, offerts en exemple à tous, et de nous rappeler qu'on ne peut bâtir le pays qu'avec des hommes qui ont la crainte de Dieu. Dans les deux oeuvres, des remarques, de caractère purement didactique, moins nombreuses cependant dans la seconde, viennent encourager le lecteur à poursuivre l'idéal national et religieux proposé.

Les deux livres, en plus de chanter les beautés de la région où évoluent les héros, s'attachent à décrire minutieusement les us et coutumes des ruraux de l'époque dans une série de tableaux, souvent les mêmes, que vient relier la trame plus ou moins lâche de l'histoire; certains titres de chapitres comme: Seed-time, The Sugaring-off, The Logging Bee dans Connor s'apparentent bien à ceux trouvés dans Gérin-Lajoie: Les semailles, La sucrerie, La corvée. Connor accorde cependant plus d'importance à la fiction qui intègre mieux ces tableaux.

Si les références explicites au passé sont limitées dans *Jean Rivard*, il ne fait pas de doute que les défricheurs sont appelés à transmettre intactes "aux générations à venir, la langue et les institutions qu'ils ont reçues de leurs pères".[1] "Les fils de nobles guerriers" sont invités à ne pas fuir le sol de leurs pères.[2] Jean Rivard est proposé d'ailleurs comme l'archétype aux jeunes gens. Les Ecossais dans *The Man from Glengarry* sont les fils de courageux pionniers venus des "Highlands" d'Ecosse et ils sont invités à être "worthy of their ancestry and worthy of their heritage".[3] Et Ranald Macdonald, le héros principal, devient à son tour "le" modèle de vertus à imiter. Les deux héros sont des chaînons dans l'histoire de leur race.

Dans *The Man from Glengarry*, où la morale est plus intégrée à l'histoire, on ne trouve pas de références aussi explicites que dans *Jean Rivard* aux valeurs supérieures de la vie paysanne, telles celle-ci: "...la carrière que vous allez parcourir est plus propre qu'aucune autre pour assurer le bonheur de l'homme".[4] Mais l'auteur associe les joies les plus pures à la vie rurale. Et quand Ranald Macdonald doit affronter les tentations de la ville, il est appelé à se souvenir du pays de son enfance. C'est dans la tristesse qu'il quitte son milieu, parce qu'il ne se sent pas la vocation de défricheur. Il est évident, par l'exposé que l'auteur

fait des dangers moraux de la ville, que la campagne est le lieu choisi de la pratique vertueuse. Le sermon que Ranald reçoit de son oncle: "against the dangers of the city",[5] est un abrégé des longues dissertations de Gérin-Lajoie sur les périls de l'alcool, des femmes, de l'argent, des affaires. "La vie des villes expose à toutes sortes de dangers"[6] dit le curé à Jean Rivard. "It is a wicked place and the pitfalls are many"[7] dit l'oncle à Ranald.

Le héros dans les deux oeuvres est le type idéal produit par la paysannerie. Il est ou devient le paradigme de toutes les vertus physiques et morales. Ses difficultés intérieures sont résolues par la force de sa volonté. Sa densité psychologique est cependant très mince et ses problèmes ne sont pas individualisés. Dans un but didactique les auteurs schématisent le personnage qui servira de modèle aux lecteurs.

Quand Desmond Pacey décrit le genre de l'"idylle régionaliste"[8] dans les romans d'expression anglaise, il rejoint les caractéristiques exposées ci-haut à la suite de Robidoux-Renaud[9] pour les romans d'expression française. Ce genre est volontairement didactique; il tend à perpétuer les vertus rurales; il éveille la fierté du passé; il donne l'amour de la région décrite; il oppose les valeurs paysannes aux valeurs nouvelles nées de la nouvelle société industrielle.

SUR UN PLAN plus universel, ces deux oeuvres se rattachent à une veine idéaliste où l'"art" est moyen d'exposer ses sentiments, idées ou thèses, où l'auteur tend à idéaliser ses personnages, à embellir la réalité. Les héros sont pleins de sentiments nobles et leur volonté sait triompher des passions. Cet idéalisme est cependant situé ici de façon bien spécifique avec des valeurs propres à un pays qui s'ouvre. Quoique ces romans appartiennent à deux littératures, ils se rejoignent étroitement dans le but poursuivi, dans l'idéal proposé, dans la matière décrite, dans la technique utilisée, dans la conception du héros. Ne pourraient-ils pas aussi être le fruit d'une culture, au sens sociologique assez caractérisée, qui répond à une société donnée, dans un pays déterminè, à un temps précis de l'histoire.

En d'autres termes, les éléments composants de cette société, malgré les différences ethniques et religieuses, ne se rejoignent-ils pas dans un système de valeurs relativement semblables?

Les circonstances historiques qui ont déclanché l'écriture de l'oeuvre ne sont pas les mêmes: Gérin-Lajoie voulait combattre l'exode de ses compatriotes vers

les Etats-Unis. Connor désirait, autour de la Confédération, glorifier les bâtisseurs d'"Empire" qui, après avoir investi Glengarry, ouvriront la Colombie.

Mais tous deux expriment un système de valeurs qui paraissent profondément liées à la société rurale sur laquelle ils promènent leur miroir. Gérin-Lajoie entend décrire un milieu paysan et l'avertissement dans l'édition de 1935 nous montre qu'il ne voulait rien dire "qui ne fût strictement conforme à la réalité".[10] Le préfacier de l'édition du New Canadian Library rapporte que Connor déclarait lui-même que le livre "grew out of Glengarry soil, out of Glengarry humanity". L'auteur rappelle en fait des souvenirs d'enfance.[11]

Autant que ces avertissements explicites, un examen interne des oeuvres nous révèle quant à l'espace et au temps des analogies profondes.

Le temps est celui de la nature, cyclique, marqué par le retour des saisons, la répétition annuelle des gestes rituels du monde paysan, semailles, récoltes, particularisés par des opérations typiques comme le défrichement et la production du sucre d'érable. "Les travaux de la ferme se succèdent régulièrement comme les quatre saisons de l'année".[12]

La vie, forcément subordonnée à la nature et à une nature américaine, déterminée ici par l'ensemencement de terres arrachées à la forêt que l'on conquiert soit à Glengarry ou dans les Cantons de l'Est, obéira à l'éternel retour. Elle est aussi, dans les deux groupes, scandée par des normes d'un autre ordre, religieuses. Comme nous le verrons ci-après, la vie religieuse des deux groupes, l'un presbytérien, l'autre catholique, est intense: les dimanches et les fêtes annuelles viennent eux aussi par leur importance aux yeux de tous marquer profondément le retour des choses. Les 2 groupes, en définitive, se soumettent à un temps cyclique, rythmés par des gestes saisonniers quasi-identiques et des célébrations religieuses hebdomadaires ou annuelles quasi-identiques propres au monde chrétien.

L'espace aussi offre de grandes ressemblances. Dans les 2 romans, il est créé à même la forêt qui enveloppe les défricheurs. Par leur travail il font reculer ses limites. Une fois la petite société constituée dans *Jean Rivard*, la paroisse devient le cercle vital. On parle peu de village, c'est la paroisse qui polarise. Au coeur de la paroisse c'est l'église, dont les clochers dominent, et le presbytère. Le curé joue un rôle dominant dans cette société, totalement pratiquante: il préside aux cérémonies, il conseille et juge dans les importantes affaires de la famille et de la paroisse.[13] Celle-ci est une grande famille où se déroulent une vie sociale pratiquement sans classes et une vie autonome, autosuffisante. "Chaque paroisse peut former une petite république où non seulement les ressources naturelles et maté-

rielles, mais aussi les ressources morales du pays seront exploitées dans l'intérêt de notre future existence comme peuple. La paroisse sera notre château fort. Quant même toute autre ressource nous ferait défaut, il me semble que nous trouverions là un rempart inexpugnable contre les agressions du dehors.[14] Ce milieu retourné sur lui-même est donc clos et opposé aux agressions du dehors, i.e. de la ville.

Que trouve-t-on au centre de Glengarry? L'église, le presbytère (the manse), le ministre et son épouse, plus instruits que les autres, qui jouent le rôle à la fois de chefs spirituels et temporels.[15] Ils connaissent aussi l'histoire de chaque famille de leur communauté. Tous se rendent à l'église le dimanche et le sermon est l'événement central non seulement du jour mais de la semaine. Si les pionniers montent dans les chantiers l'hiver, ou descendent leur bois à Québec, ils reviennent — et c'est la fête — à leur point de départ. Là encore c'est également la grande famille sans classes, méfiante elle aussi des dangers de la ville. Le milieu se referme sur lui-même.

Si les 2 groupes veulent développer les richesses naturelles du pays, s'ils veulent s'implanter dans le pays pour perpétuer la race, ils veulent aussi se perpétuer religieusement. La famille Rivard se réjouit d'avoir des prêtres et des religieuses, l'épouse du ministre annonce fièrement que Glengarry a produit "seven preachers".

Les romans nous présentent donc deux groupes, différents au point de vue ethnique et religieux, mais dont la vie se déroule dans un même pays, à une même époque, face à une même nature et qui, finalement, vivent à un même rythme, désireux de s'enraciner dans le sol, soucieux de se perpétuer, très sensibles aux valeurs ethniques et religieuses, soumis, dans le cadre restreint auto-suffisant de leur vie quotidienne, à un même gouvernement temporel et religieux.

Et les deux groupes, marqués des valeurs de même ordre, offrent un produit littéraire analogue.

L'échantillonnage des oeuvres qui fondent cet article est très restreint. Celui-ci pourrait servir d'hypothèse de travail. La connaissance d'un certain nombre de romans de la terre dans les deux langues nous amène à soupçonner sérieusement que le Canada nous a imposé peut-être plus de valeurs communes que nous l'avons supposé, si nous croyons que la littérature reflète la société.

FOOTNOTES

[1] A. Gérin-Lajoie, *Jean Rivard*, Beauchemin (Montréal, 1924), p. 247.
[2] *Ibid.*

[8] R. Connor, *The Man from Glengarry*, McClelland & Stewart, N.C.L. (Toronto, 1967), p. 78.
[4] A. Gérin-Lajoie, *Jean Rivard*, p. 141.
[5] R. Connor, *The Man from Glengarry*, p. 195.
[6] A. Gérin-Lajoie, *Jean Rivard*, p. 20.
[7] R. Connor, *The Man from Glengarry*, p. 195.
[8] D. Pacey, *Creative Writing in Canada*, The Ryerson Press (Toronto, 1961) pp. 102-103.
[9] R. Robidoux et A. Renaud, *Le Roman canadien-français du vingtième siécle*, Editions de l'Université d'Ottawa (Ottawa, 1966), pp. 26-29.
[10] A. Gérin-Lajoie, *Jean Richard*, p. 10.
[11] R. Connor, *The Man from Glengarry*, p. IX.
[12] A. Gérin-Lajoie, *Jean Rivard*, p. 10.
[13] *Ibid.*, pp. 14-17-166.
[14] A. Gérin-Lajoie, *Jean Rivard*, p. 286.
[15] R. Connor, *The Man from Glengarry*, pp. 23-25.

A. M. KLEIN'S FORGOTTEN PLAY

G. K. Fischer

A. M. KLEIN has always been a writer with a mission; and students of his work know that one of its salient features is found in his effort to wake in the Canadian reader a sympathetic understanding of the world of the *Shtetl* of Eastern Europe which lives on in the memory and basic attitudes of Yiddish immigrants. His writings attest to his desire to transmit, to recreate, to interpret the traditions which his parents brought from the provincial towns of Poland, traditions which he views with scholarly and compassionate eyes, with the intellect of an educated Canadian, and with the insight of a Jew who recognizes in fading customs and half-forgotten legends the eternal verities which once gave rise to them.

Among the works which show most clearly Klein's determination to instil new vitality into Yiddish folklore is a short verse play, *Hershel of Ostropol.* It is an interesting play but, at present, quite unknown, unlisted in most bibliographies, unmentioned in critical essays on Klein's work, completely forgotten, it seems, even by his most devoted readers. There are at least two reasons for this neglect. First, there is the date of publication. The play was printed in *The Canadian Jewish Chronicle* in March and in September 1939, at a time when Canadians, particularly Jewish Canadians, had more pressing problems on their minds. Secondly, the manner of publication almost guaranteed that any impact the play might have made should be lost. Act One appeared in March; Acts Two and Three appeared more than five months later.[1] To my knowledge, there has been no performance of the play. It is not of the kind that might fit easily into the repertoire of a modern stage, even in an *avant garde* coffee house. In character it is reminiscent of the drama of John Heywood and Nicholas Udall.

There is about it some of the naïveté of these early sixteenth-century writers, but there appears to be more depth in its ultimate intent.

The metre used by Klein is, in part, strongly Chaucerian and was chosen, probably, because the theme contains elements of a marriage debate. Like Chaucer, Klein also makes use in his verse of the proverb, the familiar saying.[2] Klein has a formidable knowledge of English literature, but most of it was acquired through independent study, and it may be of interest here to note that one of the two formal courses in English he took as an undergraduate at McGill was on Chaucer, given by Professor G. W. Latham.[3] We find echoes of Chaucer in other of Klein's early writings, for instance, in the short story "The Parliament of Fowls";[4] but it is here, in some of the dialogue of *Hershel of Ostropol*, that Chaucer's influence seems to have had its most fructifying effect.

The technique of the play is rooted in early English literature, but the setting and theme are those of the Yiddish *Shtetl* and, more particularly, of the Chassidic world. As the play opens, we find ourselves in a house of worship. It belongs to a famous Tsaddik, the Rabbi Boruch of Miedzboz. A considerable literature concerned with Chassidic philosophy and sociology is available in English, and much has been written about the rôle of the Chassidic leaders, the Tsaddiks, many of whom were descendants of the Baal Shem Tov, the founder of the Chassidic movement, and of his disciples.[5] The Tsaddik's task was to hear the complaints of the people, to offer them advice and comfort. Through meditation and prayer and love of God and man he was to reach the "level" of an intermediary between God and ordinary human beings. He did not perform miracles, but his followers believed that he could, and, in any case, that his blessings had special powers. There were Tsaddikim who were learned and honest and wise, and whose reputation reached far beyond the *Shtetl* in which they lived. There were many who were ignoramuses, pompous and parasitical.

The historical Rabbi Boruch was a Tsaddik of indifferent reputation. According to Nathan Ausubel,[6] he reigned as the hereditary Tsaddik of Miedziboz between 1770 and 1810, a vain, self-indulgent nonentity, given to melancholia. Trying to ape the Polish nobility, he decided to acquire a jester and engaged for this purpose the down-at-the-heels Hershel from Balta in the Ukraine, a man who, having had no opportunity to learn a trade, had learned to live by his wits. Ausubel describes him as "endowed with an unusual capacity for self-irony, a rueful comicality in facing disaster, and a philosophy of disenchantment unmarred by a shred of defeatism. . . . He was an impish, likable *schimazl* whose misfortunes did not, by any means, arise from his own personal character weak-

nesses but rather from the topsy-turvy world he lived in."[7] Hershel Ostropoljer used to tell droll stories about himself, and became the Tyl Eulenspiegel, the Nasreddin of Yiddish folklore. As such he is both the prankster who will outwit his host and get away with a free drink, and the wise fool who, according to tradition, can boast greater learning than his pretentious employer. Such is the historical and folkloric background of Klein's play.

In 1927, a tragi-comedy, *Hershele Ostropoljer* by Iacob Botoschansky, was published in Yiddish prose. In Botoschansky's play, the character of Hershel follows closely the traditional pattern. The *schlimazl* aspect is strongly emphasized. In his preface, Botoschansky describes Hershele as a man who never attains: when he reaches for bread, it never reaches his mouth. His Hershele meets his end when he says something so outrageous to his employer, Reb Baruch'l (what it is we never find out), that Baruch'l's followers push him down a flight of stairs. Hershele reflects bitterly: he has never reached the summit, and yet he dies from falling down. But the *schlimazl* motif does not eliminate that of the imperturbable jester, and here Botoschansky's Hershele has retained all the earthy, naïve humour of the folktale. In the end, though mortally injured, he continues in his usual vein, and in his last moments looks forward to being a jester in Heaven, where he hopes to eat wild ox and Leviathan and to drink wine.

KLEIN'S PLAY broadly follows the tradition. The emphasis on the *schlimazl* motif is retained, and so are some of the traditional, naïve jokes. But Klein's Hershel emerges much refined. His wit, upon occasion, is more subtle than in earlier versions. He is endowed with a more sparkling personality. But most of all, Klein's Hershel appears ennobled because Klein is able to convey more clearly the philosophical essence that underlies Hershel's familiar traits.

As the curtain rises, we find the followers of Reb Baruch'l engrossed in conversation. It is night. The candles flicker. The atmosphere is one of mystery. We have entered a place of learning and piety, of worship and study. This is the house of Reb Baruch'l. His Gabbai (warden) admonishes the Chassidim not to disturb their rabbi who has retired to his chamber to meditate. Needless to say, Klein's Reb Baruch'l differs greatly from his historical antecedent. He too is a wealthy man and plagued by melancholia. But while the historical Boruch, according to Ausubel, was ignorant and pretentious, Reb Baruch'l in *Hershel of Ostropol* is a man who studies day and night, reads Kabala, reaches out toward

the spirits of angels and the Baal Shem Tov, and obviously enjoys great love and respect among his employees and his guests. This is how he is described:

Shamash: The whole world knows
He lacks not worldly goods. His coach is drawn
By chargers champing golden bits. Upon
His throne he sits, and at his thumb's behest
Servants trot forth in most obsequious haste
To bring him delicates, or hot or cold.
His spoon is silver and his plate is gold.
His shtreimel is of samite, trimmed with fur;
And for his caftan, pious silkworms were
Industrious in the sun; and sheep were fleeced[9]
To make a girdle for God's worthiest priest.
(Lyrical) White are his stockings, and his slippers red,
Broidered and buckled: flowers near his bed!
The rebbe's holy slippers, holy beyond surmise —
Chassid 2: They could themselves mount up to Paradise!
Chassid 1: Yet on his brow, beneath phylacteries
Sits sorrow in a wrinkle, gloom in a crease!

The unfortunate Reb Baruch'l has fallen into deep despondency. We hear that Hershel from Ostropol,[10] a famous man reputed to be a doctor, has been summoned to help him. Hershel, it is rumoured, uses "most curious therapeutics." He makes people laugh. He can

With jokes, pranks, larks, puns, riddles cure
The constipated rich and starving poor.

The Chassidim, worried as they are about the health of their Tsaddik, are yet full of hope. Hershel is a "gift from Heaven" or, as one Chassid puts it, a "pill apothecaried by the Lord." Suddenly, while they are still debating the "bright spell" Hershel is likely to cast upon the rabbi, Hershel himself appears. He comes in, climbing through the window.

Cantor: Whence did you come?
Hershel: The window!
Cantor: *Wherefore?*
Hershel: Cantor
The same way I depart, I always enter.

This remark concerning his manner of entry is noteworthy. It gives us a clue to Hershel's nature. One may recall a scene in Goethe's *Faust.* Mephistopheles, who, in the shape of a poodle, has entered Faust's study, cannot leave it because

of a magic sign that is drawn in front of the door. Faust asks him why he doesn't use the window. Mephistopheles answers:

> . . . 't is a law of devils and phantoms
> Where they slipped in, there they have to leave.[11]

Hershel, in his reply to the cantor, reverses the old superstition concerning demons and phantoms. This may merely be an example of his wit; it proves him a rather sophisticated joker. But it may also suggest much more. This, perhaps, is Klein's way to indicate that Hershel is not to be considered an ordinary human being, that he is, indeed, an essence, a spirit. There is a good deal of impishness in the lines immediately following his entry. He takes acid pleasure in baiting the Cantor for not having recognized him at once and flaunts a stick which, he declares, is a magic wand that discloses every foible of those whom his soul spurns. Again, this may be just a jester's way to amuse his audience. But it could also be the words of a spirit revealing his character. Klein did not insist on this interpretation of Hershel. There are no more references to the supernatural. But the suggestion, ambiguous as it is, remains in our consciousness, and when we look at the play as a whole, it seems to strengthen the impression that Hershel's main significance is to be found on the symbolist level, that Klein's Hershel is a personification rather than a person. He is, by the way, by no means a Mephistopheles. He has all but lost his traditional propensity to playing tricks on people. He may brag of his tricks,[12] but we don't witness them. Whatever influence he attempts to wield over others, for all his impish talk, is entirely benevolent, and over his own destiny he holds no sway at all. While Mephisto (in Marlowe as well as in Goethe) is able to conjure various goodies, Hershel, in the traditional folktale, has to use his wits to scrounge food and wine, and in Klein's play he is content to rummage for bread, herring, and liquor.

Hershel's politics are those of the oppressed Jew, his philosophy that of the Chassid *par excellence.* He enumerates wrongs that have been done to Israel and catalogues various oppressors. He can be bitter:

> Sport have we been for them, lugubrious sport,
> Jesters who had a continent for court. . . .
> Performing sorry antics for the scum
> That giggled at the gags of martyrdom . . .

But Hershel reproaches the Chassidim for their despondency: "Too long has Israel been three-quarters tears." Moaning is no remedy:

An end! No more! Never let melancholy
Again perch on our brows, and caw our folly!
Never let tears again give solace to
The heathen gloating over the glum Jew....
The cantor, there, well may he look askance,
Clutching his tallis,[13] hitching up his pants,
Preparing to show off his well-combed voice,
Fearing that my song be the Jewry's choice,
For singing is my livelihood; my song
Gathers the jubilant and jocund throng.

What Hershel is preaching is Chassidic doctrine. To experience joy, to be grateful for life, for consciousness, is the duty of human beings. "Through joy the spirit becomes settled, but through sadness it goes into exile," is a saying of the great Chassidic teacher, Rabbi Nachman.[14] According to the Baal Shem Tov, "Joy alone is true service of God."[15]

The Chassidim's enthusiasm is soon kindled by Hershel's speech. Their gloom gradually evaporates. They begin to sing. They are looking forward now to the days of the Messiah when the Tsarist conscription will cease, when all foes and apostates will perish, including the hated Reb Shneyer Zalman, a rival of their beloved Reb Baruch'l. Zalman, we already heard in previous conversation, is an ignoramus, a son of Belial who would "Barter the law / for goatskin on which it is written" and who has the audacity to come into Reb Baruch'l's domain to preach his false doctrine. The Gabbai's hatred of Reb Shneyer Zalman is profound and unyielding. But Hershel checks him:

No!
Even to him, to that wretch, we will throw
Not meat from the wild ox, nor heavenly bran
But maybe a fishbone of leviathan.
Then when Messiah will come
On holy land we'll pray,
And all our foes, their tails between
Their legs, will slink away.

He is without malice; he doesn't want to see anyone perish; and the Chassidim remark to each other how Hershel has already changed the atmosphere.

In the following passage, more is revealed of Hershel's character. His clothes are elegant in front where he must see them, but the back of his coat is patched. He brags of his many exploits and successes. As the greatest of jesters, he was

made mayor of Chelm (a city proverbially inhabited by fools — the Jewish Abdera). He has seen the world. Once he came to a country so cold

> Even the sun was frozen and the stars
> Were frost upon God's window panes, . . .

But trust Hershel: one "good breathless swig" out of his bottle, and he was warmed.

A new character arrives: Reb Chaikal Chakran who, according to the Shamash,

> . . . . . grows fat
> On metaphysics, gets a double chin
> From skim-philosophy, and pads his skin
> With *ologies* interred and *isms* dead.
> Science — is herring that he eats with bread,
> And for dessert, truisms . . . . .

The conversation, very brisk and amusing at this point, turns to marriage. Hershel has no wife; but oh! his eyes once apprized the most perfect of maidens:

> Hershel: . . . Her brilliance spoiled my eyes for others; she
> Proved sweet Queen Esther a monstrosity;
> Judith a hag; Bathsheba ugly bones;
> The Shumanite cold meat, and Solomon's
> Nine hundred concubines, nine hundred witches.
> Chassid: You saw her in a dream.
> Hershel: This full palm itches
> To wake you out of yours! A dream!
> Chassid: It was
> Indeed a maid with arms, legs, bosom, face
> And other items feminine?
> Hershel: Indeed,
> For her a rabbi would abjure his creed,
> She was so beautiful! Her lips are two
> Rose petals upon cream. Her eyes were blue,
> Blue as the sky upon a clear cool day
> And down her neck and on her shoulders lay
> Two flaxen braids making the fair more fair.
> O bind me, bind me halter of such hair! . . .
> Had God
> Created man from flowers, and not from sod
> She would be as she is; lilies each cheek,
> Her mouth a rose that sings when it should speak,
> Her eyes forget-me-nots.

Thus he proceeds. The girl is a paragon among women; but, alas, she does not care for him. When he spoke to her, she turned her head away.

> Coy as a bird, as pure as a white flower,
> As fresh as dewdrops at the sunrise hour
> Modest as violets.

Hershel's audience gets more and more animated until Reb Baruch'l issues from his study, furious at the disturbance; but Hershel soon succeeds in dispelling the thunder clouds and the Chassidim bless him for making their rabbi smile.

Meanwhile, someone has arrived to speak with Rabbi Baruch'l on business. It is Reb Sendor, a wealthy man, with his daughter, Naomi. Apparently, one of the hated Shneyer Zalman's men wishes to marry the girl, and it is rumoured that Zalman himself is behind the scheme. He hopes that a marriage between children from these rival factions will restore peace among the Chassidim. Reb Baruch'l's permission is sought so that the wedding may take place. As might be expected, the beautiful Naomi is none other than the girl with whom Hershel is in love.

Nothing can be done to avert the impending catastrophe. Reb Baruch'l gives his consent for the sake of peace and looks forward to the ceremony. He himself will intone the liturgy and Rabbi Shneyer Zalman will bless the bridegroom and the bride. Hershel is in despair:

> Give
> This gem some uncouth fool? Some unweaned calf
> This flower to lip? Indeed, it is to laugh!
> The Rebbe calls it triumph. Ignominy
> Were a much better word.

But Hershel knows that there is no help, and, true to his essential self, he decides to be a jester at Naomi's wedding. As Act One closes, Hershel reminds one of Pagliacci, the laughing clown who performs his antics while his heart is breaking; but this resemblance is temporary and superficial. There are, as one realizes in the end, fundamental differences between Pagliacci and Hershel of Ostropol.

The second act begins amidst great bustle: the Chassidim are preparing for the wedding. The musicians are trying out their instruments; guests, in their finery, are already arriving, and beggars mingle with the crowd. Hershel prepares to get drunk and, waxing lyrical about the food, makes himself a nuisance to the cooks. But the Gabbai, gloomy as ever, has a secret word with Reb

Baruch'l. Something in the air speaks no good. All sorts of omens have predicted disaster: a prayer-book fell from his hand; the cat washed his chest although no guests were expected at his home.[16] The rabbi rebukes him for his heathenry. But a few minutes later, while the guests are listening to Hershel's drolleries, a messenger arrives and announces that fire has swept away Reb Sendor's mill. Naomi's dowry is destroyed. Not long after, amidst general lamentations, the Cantor discovers that the bridegroom is missing; seeing the dowry gone, he decided to bolt. Zalman's men, the groom's relatives, cough and rise and sneak away; the bride faints; Reb Baruch'l, his melancholy darkening, threatens to die of the disgrace. Chaikal finds him in such distress and so confused: "One would think him the bride so cheaply used." There is great outcry. What is to be done? How can this humiliation ever be washed away? Well, the remedy is, of course, at hand. The Chassidim adjourn to discuss how another bridegroom is to be found for Naomi. Hershel, jubilant, orders the musicians to play the wedding march, and while the others are still worrying and debating, he walks toward the bride, admonishing her to dry her tears lest they should spoil the starch in her veil.

The third act has two scenes. The first is pure farce. When the curtain rises, Hershel staggers onto the stage and sings vigorously. He is horribly drunk, and with good reason too. His beautiful Naomi, this paragon among women whom he so chivalrously wedded, has turned out to be a dragon, an unmitigated shrew. Klein here follows the folktale in which Hershel's wife, scarcely less illustrious than her husband, is known as a woman with a shrewish disposition. Botoschansky too followed this tradition, but in his play, Hershele and his spouse, Gnendel, are already married at the beginning.

Hershel's boon-companion, Chaikal, has accompanied him home. While they are talking in front of the house, Naomi appears on the balcony.

Chaikal: Quit verse. You're home!
Hershel: And now no crescent, no slim moon! Behold
Over the balcony a full moon. Cold
And wan it stares at me. It gloats. It walks
Across the sky. It stops.
Naomi: Hershel!
Chaikal: It talks!
Hershel: My spouse, my dove. The moon has soured.
Naomi: Sot!
Hershel: Alas, precisely that which I am not!
I shall not answer.

Naomi: Husband, drunken scum
Are you below? Speak, or God strike you dumb!
Hershel: I'm here!
Naomi: You're there! You need not tell
Me that as long as beer stinks and I smell.

She chases Chaikal away offering to throw a flower pot at him and then continues to berate poor Hershel who, in vain, tries to humour her. He pleads, he cajoles:

And as for our six brats, why fret and foam?
Do they not prove that I am sometimes home?

He promises to be a good husband, to teach the children, to give her all the money he earns. But it is no use. His overtures are answered with derision. All he wants is peace, to drown his sorrow with a flask. He is weary. He would like to rest a while. Naomi accuses him of always raising contention and orders him upstairs. When he does not obey, she pours a pail of cold water over him.

In Scene 2 we find Hershel in bed surrounded with a veritable apothecary's store of boxes, bottles and flasks. The cold shower has done him no good; he has caught a cold. Naomi, now miraculously transformed and much to the astonishment of her son, speaks softly to him and tells the rest of the children to be quiet. The Cantor and the Gabbai, who have always been rather inimical to Hershel, now come to his bedside. Hershel, who expects to die, indulges in macabre jokes. Here, Klein keeps quite close to tradition. We find some of the familiar witticisms. Hershel, for instance, asks the Gabbai to see to it that, when they wash his corpse, no one touches his arm pits. He is ticklish there. This anecdote is included in Ausubel's *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore*. When Naomi comes to Hershel's bedside, he asks her to dress in Sabbath clothes so that the Angel of Death, finding her handsomer than himself, may take her. This joke, somewhat more elaborated, occurs also in Botoschansky's play. When all are gathered around his bed, Hershel bequeathes his belongings, still joking. At last, his mood changes, and, as in a delirium, he imagines himself once more a bridegroom. In his greatest extremity, he remembers the happiest day of his life, the wine, the music, the dance, and all the guests wishing him well. And as his thoughts turn to heaven, he is confident that there too he will continue, a jester.

THUS ENDS Klein's *Hershel of Ostropol*. I Pagliacci goes on laughing while his heart breaks; but Hershel's heart is not breaking. He is not

showing the world a mask which hides secret suffering. Hershel is the man who, within himself, genuinely overcomes disaster. Even within his most secret self, he is able to smile at adversity. He directs his eyes toward the bright side; he enjoys what is enjoyable; he wrests from life whatever good it has to offer. He is the eternal optimist whose confidence is unshakeable. His last thoughts, as they appear in Klein's play, reflect an attitude which is deeply anchored in Jewish thinking, particularly in Chassidic philosophy.

But the spirit which is capable of focusing its attention on happy circumstances, no matter how remote, and capable of indomitable trust in a future Good, no matter how bitter the present, is not confined to Judaism. It is a universal human trait, part of the sustaining power of the Life-force itself. It can manifest itself anywhere. It appeared, in especially pronounced form, in pioneering North America and later remained part of the magnetism of its rough and ugly towns. *Hershel of Ostropol* crystallizes ingredients that are very much part of the culture of this continent. Without this zest and trust, the prairies of Canada would not have been turned into the "rug of thick and golden thread" of which Klein speaks in his poem "Grain Elevator." There is a passage in Sinclair Ross's novel, *As for Me and My House*, where the heroine describes the "poor tumbledown, shabby little towns" that sprang up across the width of the land, parched settlements where year after year the crops withered in the drought. She remembers a town "where once it rained all June, and that fall the grain lay in piles outside full granaries. It's an old town now," she says, "shabby and decrepit like the others, but it too persists. It knows only two years: the year it rained all June, and next year." [17] This town's way is the way of life, of survival. It will overcome. It is in places like this that the essential Hershel of Ostropol is at home.

FOOTNOTES

[1] A. M. Klein, *Hershel of Ostropol, Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, XXVI (March 31, 1939), 19-27; XXVII (September 13, 1939), 19-26.

[2] *E.g.*, "... never show a fool unfinished work." *Hershel of Ostropol*, (March), p. 21. This is a saying widely used in Central Europe. *Cf.* German: Einem Narren darf man kein ungebautes Haus zeigen. (One must not show a fool a house before it is built.)

[3] Eliah Ezekiel Palnick, *A. M. Klein; a Biographical Study* (Thesis), Hebrew Union College (Cincinnati, Ohio), 1959, I.

[4] A. M. Klein, "The Parliament of Fowls," *McGilliad*, II (November 1930), 9-11.

[5] An excellent brief survey may be found in Mark Zborowski and Elizabeth Herzog, *Life is With People; the Jewish Little-Town of Eastern Europe*, pref. Margaret Mead (New York, 1952).

[6] Nathan Ausubel, ed., *A Treasury of Jewish Folklore*, (New York), 1948), pp. 286-7.

[7] *Ibid.*

[8] Iacob Botoschansky, *Hershele Ostropoljer* (Buenos Aires, 1927). I am indebted to Mrs. Miriam Nichols, who, with summaries and translations, made the content of this play accessible to me.

[9] Shamash is a synogogue sexton. A *shtreimel* is a hat and, in accordance with Chassidic custom, usually trimmed with fur.

[10] Ostropol apparently, means only "an eastern city." I have not discovered a real city of this name.

[11] Faust: Doch warum gehst du nicht durch's Fenster?
Mephisto: 's ist ein Gesetz der Teufel und Gespenster:
Wo sie hereingeschlüpft, da müssen sie hinaus.
Faust, I, Studierzimmer (study), lines 1407-1411.

[12] *Hershel of Ostropol*, (March 31, 1939), p. 20.

[13] Prayer shawl.

[14] Martin Buber, *The Tales of Rabbi Nachman* (1956), (Bloomington, Indiana, 1962), p. 38.

[15] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[16] Klein here refers to a popular saying of the Yiddish *Shtetl*: when the cat washes himself, guests will shortly arrive at the house. A reference to this may be found also in Klein's short story, "Kapusitchka," *Canadian Jewish Chronicle*, XXXVI (October 1948), 4; and in Sholom Aleichem's "Schprintze," *Tevye's Daughters*; *Collected Stories* (New York, 1949), p. 150.

[17] Sinclair Ross, *As for Me and My House* (1941) (Toronto, 1957), p. 97.

E. J. PRATT

Apostle of Corporate Man

Frank Davey

THE VISION of E. J. Pratt has so far provided the major area of dispute for his critics. To early commentators, John Sutherland,[1] Desmond Pacey,[2] and Northrop Frye,[3] Pratt was a Christian humanist; to Vincent Sharman in 1964 he seems to have been an atheist;[4] and to Peter Buitenhuis, editor of the recent *Selected Poems*, both of these views represent misreadings of Pratt's work. In Buitenhuis's mind Pratt is a man drawn "toward relativism and agnosticism."[5] In the general concern for Pratt's religious views the importance of Frye's observation that Pratt is a "spokesman rather than a critic of public opinion and generally accepted social reactions"[6] has been mostly overlooked. True, it was reiterated by Fred Cogswell in 1964, but hardly as pointing the direction to the key aspects of Pratt's world-view. "The conception of heroism in Pratt is of the kind that belongs to our age, to an industrial democracy," said Frye.[7] Continued Cogswell, "he [Pratt] is the poet . . . of mass action over individual action."[8]

Stated bluntly, the problems which have so far bewildered Pratt critics are two: the first, what is his poetry about, and the second, what world-view does this poetry project? The convolutions of some of the early critics, notably John Sutherland, to get the "right" answer to the first question have been adequately exposed and documented by Earle Birney.[9] But even Peter Buitenhuis shies from the obvious answers that Pratt's subject matter may be no more than the stories he tells and that his vision may be no more than the values which his protagonists embody. A careful reading of Pratt's work, in fact, suggests very strongly that Pratt was much more straightforward as an artist than most of his sophisticated critics would care to admit. He seems seldom to have been concerned with such profound questions as can easily be raised by too analytical an approach to his

work. Is a whale ("The Cachalot") more to be admired than Pratt's brave fellow Newfoundlanders who die pursuing it? Is "the great Panjandrum" ("The Truant") also the god that awaits Pratt's mother behind *The Iron Door*? Can the ship *Titanic* be an instance of *hubris* when the locomotive "The 6000" is not? Are the priest of the *Roosevelt* and the saintly Brebeuf both "truants"? Can the K-148 ("The Submarine") be eulogized for its "mechanic power" while German armoured vehicles are declared "crueller than the hordes of Tamburlaine"?[10]

Although these and other ambiguities in Pratt's work can be easily resolved if considered as peripheral to one simple and pervasive idea in Pratt, his critics have been thrown by them into great confusion. Not only are such ambiguities responsible for the Christian humanist-atheist-agnostic controversy, but for his "Tyrannosaurus Rex" ("The Great Feud") being Christ to Sutherland and "mere instinctive physical courage" to Desmond Pacey, for his cachalot being "heroic energy"[11] to Pacey but thoroughly a whale to Earle Birney,[12] and for *The Iron Door* being pessimistic to Vincent Sharman[13] but optimistic to Peter Buitenhuis.[14] And while Frye can call Pratt a defender of "generally accepted social reactions"[15] Pacey can state, "Pratt obviously believes that all worthwhile human achievement rests not on conformity but on non-conformity."[16] No wonder Pacey is led to declare, "I suspect that a good deal of the ambiguity in Pratt is not deliberate but involuntary, and that there is not only confusion among critics but also confusion in the poet."[17]

Once one gets past the confusions of the critics, from John Sutherland's fantastic system-building to Vincent Sharman's humourously perverse interpretation of *Brebeuf and his Brethren*,[18] and begins an open-minded reading of Pratt's poems, one can see that Pacey was indeed correct in terming these poems "deceptively simple."[19] But, unfortunately for Mr. Pacey and his brethren, this simplicity is deceptive not in masking something more complex but merely in being disappointingly no more than itself. Pratt's shark ("The Shark") is only a shark, admirable for its latent and impersonal power. Pratt's cachalot is an aggressive and virile whale, stunning in its inherited energy and strength, but referential to no symbolic meaning outside itself. His Brebeuf is not remarkable either as a Christian or as a Christ-figure, but only as an instance of the power to be gained by an individual through allegiance to the ideals of a human group. The Jesuits are more impressive to Pratt as power-figures than are the Indians because the odds are higher against them and thus more demanding of power. Similarly, in *Dunkirk* the strength of the British infantry is more admirable than

that of the German Panzers, and in *Behind the Log* the strength of the beleagured convoy is more admirable than that of the relatively secure U-boats.

POWER, *then*, is one of the keys to Pratt's uncomplicated vision. He is fascinated by power much the way the teenager can be fascinated by a powerful automobile and be tempted to identify vicariously with it. Further, Pratt displays our culture's love of the underdog, believing along with this culture that the underdog somehow marshals more impressive power in either victory or defeat than any favourite can. Thus Pratt's sympathy for the dying cachalot, for the tortured Brebeuf and Lalement, for the battered sailors of the *Roosevelt* and the *Antinoe*, for the *Orillia* in *Behind the Log*, for the harrassed John A. Macdonald in *Towards the Last Spike*, for "the truant," or again, for the British rear-guard at Dunkirk. And thus too Pratt's scorn for the crew and passengers of the *Titanic*, who would, had they managed themselves properly, have had all in their favor, and conversely his reverent awe for that "grey shape with the palaeolithic face".

Unlike the vision of Brebeuf, Pratt's vision is unashamedly worldly. The power he respects and eulogizes is nearly always power wielded or shared in the here and now by material inhabitants of this world. Divine power is contrastingly unimpressive to Pratt. He has only the vaguest sense of what stretches beyond "the iron door"; he sees the power of the *Roosevelt*'s priest as completely overshadowed by that of her sailors, the power of "the great Panjandrum" as completely overshadowed by that audacious and worldly "traunt". Only in the very moving opening pages of *Brebeuf and his Brethren* does the Protestant Pratt exhibit any sensitivity to the mysteries of the divine, and here only because his common sense attitudes have been forced to yield before the artistic necessity of identifying with the Catholic hero.

Werner Sombart[20] and R. H. Tawney[21] have convincingly documented how modern capitalism had its birth in medieval scholasticism and Protestant secularization of the scholastic method. Tawney, in particular, has demonstrated how Protestantism has in Western culture been the prerequisite for a common sense handling of reality, a respect for worldly power, and a high valuation of the ability to manipulate material objects. It is this complex of characteristics that we see in the attitudes of E. J. Pratt: a respect for raw material power ("The Shark," "The Submarine," "The 6000"), a complete and disciplined attention

to things of this world (*Behind the Log, Toward the Last Spike*), and, except briefly, in *Brebeuf*, a blind eye for mystery and eternity. From the Renaissance through the eighteenth century such a world-view energized the mercantilist sensibility so well recorded by Defoe. In the nineteenth century it allied itself with Spencer's distortions of Darwinian theory and secured prolonged life for *laissez faire* economics. In the twentieth century it seeks yet more worldly power for the "truant" human race through the mechanical excesses of corporate enterprise. As Marshall McLuhan reported in *The Mechanical Bride*,

> The puritan both retained the scholastic method in theology and gave it expression in the precision and austerity of his secular existence. So that it is scarcely fantastic to say that a great modern business is a secular adaptation of the most striking features of medieval scholastic culture. Confronted with the clockwork precision of scholastic method, Lewis Mumford could think only of the mechanical parallel of a smoothly working textile plant. The object of this systematic process is now production and finance rather than God.[22]

And with corporate enterprise we have entered deeply into the world of E. J. Pratt. What are the gods of this world but organization, planning, efficiency, regimentation, discipline, and order? To Pratt nature has this order and efficiency. Such is implicit in the fish analogy of "The Submarine," in his account of the architecture of the cachalot, in the "metallic teeth" of "The Shark," in the very waves which "crashed down in volleys flush against the hull" of the *Roosevelt*; such, in fact, is inscribed deep within the iceberg's "palaeolithic face." Men, in Pratt's view, can acquire such order and efficiency not as individuals but as members of corporate groups. Such, as we shall see, is the message of *The Titanic, Brebeuf and his Brethren, Toward the Last Spike*, and many others of the poet's works.

Pratt seems to have the unique distinction among modern poets of being an enemy of individual action. One of the few characters in Pratt who happens to act not as an agent of society or member of a social order is the seaman Uno Wertanen of the *Roosevelt*. Granted, this momentary action is both unwitting and unwanted.

> The crew could see him grab and plunge and cling,
> Using his legs as a rudder so to swing
> Her head around to the wreck and with sheer
> Abandon of his youth to try to steer
> His open, wilful, single-handed craft . . .

Markedly isolated, even exiled, by storm and accident from his social group, Wertanen drowns. Other individualists in Pratt are the seal-hunters of *The Eagle* who are cut off from their social order by a blizzard which catches them out upon the ice. Here, deprived of the structure and power of society, the individual human being is incapable of surviving.

> . . . . like sheep we huddled and broke
> Here one would fall as hunger took hold
> Of his step; here one would sleep as the cold
> Crept into his blood, and another would kneel
> Athwart the body of some dead seal,
> And with knife and nails would tear it apart
> To flesh his teeth in its frozen heart,
> And another dreamed that the storm was past
> And raved of his bunk and brandy and food, . . .
>
> (*The Ice-Floes*)

The most blatant individualist in all of Pratt's work is, of course, "The Brawler in Who's Who." Acknowledged for individual heroism by "two DSO's," the brawler has come to this achievement through murdering his infant brother and his mother, through making "a Bedlam" of his schools, and through fighting in war like the Tyrannosaurus Rex of "The Great Feud." In this poem Pratt clearly links individual heroism both with seriously anti-social behavior and, once again, with diminished chances for survival. The brawler, who has dissociated himself from the protection of the social order, dies in the middle of life, murdered.

In contrast to the people above, individual men in Pratt who act as loyal members of a group can acquire the possibility not only of survival but also of participating in great and laudable deeds. To the modern reader, schooled to resent all oppression of the individual by "bureaucracies" or "establishments" of any sort, Pratt's quotation from the seamen's contract at the opening of *The Roosevelt and the Antinoe* is both humourous and quaint.

> . . . they, the crew,
> Should pledge themselves to conduct, *faithful, true,*
> *And orderly, in honest, sober manner;*
> *At all times in their duties diligent;*
> *To the master's lawful word obedient,*
> *In everything relating to the vessel —*
> *Safety of passengers, cargo, and store,*
> *Whether on board, in boats, or on the shore.*

Yet to Pratt this passage underlines a cast of mind essential to the heroism which is later to be displayed by the crew. In this poem even the radio stations have an almost sentimentalized social responsibility.

> Thousands of dials in studio and station
> Were "off the air" by an ungrudged consent —
> That the six-hundred-metre wave might keep
> Upon the sea that night its high command.

Throughout Pratt's work there is a pervasive theme of collective action, of strength to be gained by identification with a group or cause. In "The Great Feud" disaster befalls the land dwellers when they ignore the ape's command,

> But as their allies, ye shall spend,
> In one grand consummating blow
> Of death against the common foe,
> Your strength to a triumphant end,

and fall into lethal internecine struggle. This calamity is precipitated by another of Pratt's unfortunate individualists, Tyrannosaurus Rex, whose folly is that he will affiliate with neither side but instead battles both groups on his own. In "The Cachalot" all of the individuals involved in the final struggle can identify with an order larger than themselves. The whalers, of course, form a traditional sea-going social unit, and the cachalot, Pratt is eager to tell us, can trace back his ancestry "a thousand years." The whale's particular greatness is informed by ancestors that had followed Lief Ericsson, Marco Polo, Columbus, da Gama, "Cortez, Cavendish, and Drake," that had sunk a Dutch battleship in the English Channel and a British one at Trafalgar. *Dunkirk* is similarly a poem not about individuals but also a social group, a nation, extending both in numbers like the whaler's crew and in history like the cachalot's ancestors.

> Milleniums it has taken to make their stock.
> Piltdown hung on the frontals of their fathers.
> They had lain as sacrifices
> Upon the mortuary slabs of Stonehenge. . . .
> They had signed up with Frobisher,
> Had stifled cries in the cockpits of Trafalgar.
> They had emptied their veins into the Marne.

In *Behind the Log* and *Toward the Last Spike* Pratt's emphasis on the collective nature of the great successes of man is already well known, being noted by

both Frye[23] and Buitenhuis.[24] From the Commodore's warning that in the convoy "there is but little room / For rugged individualists" to the poet's observation that the battle was fought by "men with surnames blotted by their jobs / into a scrawl of anonymity", *Behind the Log* is a story of ships rather than of men, of corporate heroism rather than of individual bravery. The Commodore himself does little more than co-operate in the general flow of events. In *Toward the Last Spike* Pratt celebrates another instance of collective action. Here, in a superficial reading, either Macdonald or Van Horne can appear as a hero. Yet once again Pratt makes the network of interaction and interdependency abundantly clear. Van Horne supports Macdonald, and Macdonald reciprocates. Both men are further supported by Tupper, Stephen, and Smith, and all five are in turn reliant on the loyalty, sweat, and ingenuity of the thousands of workers who, in dedication to their task,

> lost their identity; as groups,
> As gangs, they massed, divided, subdivided,
> Like numerals only —

Even *Brebeuf and his Brethren* loses much of the complexity which has puzzled critics from John Sutherland to Vincent Sharman when it is regarded as merely another Prattian eulogy of the power gained by men when they unite in a common belief to a common purpose. The Christianity and the Catholicism of Brebeuf and his brothers are both essentially peripheral to the central meaning of the poem. These are merely parts of the vision which binds the participants to their tasks, and, as such, are parallel to the goal of the sea-to-sea railway in *Toward the Last Spike* or the goal of convoy survival in *Behind the Log.* Thus both Sharman's questioning of Pratt's attitude to Christianity in the poem and Sutherland's desire to show the poem as optimistically Christian are relatively unimportant. What is important in considering *Brebeuf and his Brethren* is the fact that Pratt admires any kind of heroic collective action against long odds, whether it be against the sea, the Nazis, the mountains, or the heathen — or even, as in "The Truant," against "the great Panjandrum" himself.

Throughout *Brebeuf and his Brethren* what seems most striking to Pratt is that Brebeuf does not act as an individual. He is before all else a member of a corporate body, the Jesuit order, and as such is informed by "the winds of God" which are blowing into the hearts of any men at this time all over Europe. Further, he is directly informed by divine presence, a "Real Presence" — by his vision of "a bleeding form / Falling beneath the instrument of death". Thus

he is more than the agent of a holy order; he is the agent of divine will as well. Knowing that he may face martyrdom in the New World, Brebeuf studies the temptations that such a fate can offer. What is the chief temptation? — that of "the brawler," individual glory. Here Brebeuf learns the lesson of Eliot's Becket, that martyrdom must not be sought for its own sake but only encountered through performing "the will of God".

The theme of "French imperialism in North America" noted by Buitenhuis[25] seems to be present in the poem only to heighten the impression that Brebeuf is no more than a participant in a complex of events much larger than himself. Note how his name here is only one on a list of makers in a great enterprise.

> New France restored! Champlain, Masse, Brebeuf
> Were in Quebec, hopes riding high as ever.
> Davost and Daniel soon arrived to join
> The expedition west. Midsummer tide,
> The busiest the Colony had ever known,
> Was over: forty-three canoes to meet
> The hazards of return; . . .

And as Brebeuf is carried by these events he is admired by Pratt largely because he is worthy of them, because he is loyal to the vast movements which are giving to his life its significance. As the Commodore and the sailors serve the convoy, and as Macdonald and the navvies serve the building of the CPR, Brebeuf serves the tide of French Christianity to which he has pledged himself. He suffers in smoky hovels, he tricks the Indians with predictions of eclipses and rainfall, he faces death at the hands of the Neutrals, eats the filthy food of the Hurons, all for the enlargement of the Catholic community. Says Pratt,

> But never could the Indians infer
> Self-gain or anything but simple courage
> Inspired by a zeal beyond reproof, . . .

This is the loyalty which Pratt admires in men, the loyalty of "simple" courage, the submission of individual will to group projects significantly greater than oneself. And the glory that Pratt admires is not that of the defiant individual but that of the defiant group (his "truant," after all, is generic) which can be vicariously enjoyed by the individual either in a sacrificial death or a participatory triumph. The cachalot fights and dies for the glory of his race; Brebeuf fights and dies for the glory of his faith; the weekend sailors at Dunkirk fight and win for the glory of England. Today this kind of glory is the kind offered

by large corporations to their loyal employees. Again Marshall McLuhan can describe the process:

> Great physical and industrial power rests on a multitude of powerless individuals, many of whom are deeply resentful of their condition. The smaller and meaner the man, the more he craves to possess not limited human powers, with all the effort of cultivation and all the responsibility that implies, but superhuman power. (That is the meaning of the Squinky comic books, and of "Superman.") The sadistic craving for enormous physical powers to revenge or compensate for human futility will always drive such people to link themselves to vast impersonal enterprises. They will follow automatically any road which promises to bring them to that goal. So that to be a switch thrower in a *big* plant looks better to them than any lonely task, however human. Such is also the attraction of bureaucratic jobs, whether in great corporations or in government. It is by fantasy identification with the very big power unit that the very small man obtains his self-realization as a superman. The key to Superman is Clark Kent the useless. Therefore the more we create and centralize physical power, the more we suppress our human nature; and then that human nature queues up all the more to support the big physical power that crushes it.

This is the fate of Brebeuf, of the nameless sailors of Convoy SC42, of the masses who built the CPR, even of the cachalot: to be great only as agents of oppressively vast powers, forces, traditions. It is a fate based on a way of thought very similar to that "old lie" of Wilfrid Owen's "Dulce at Decorum Est." It is a fate which McLuhan terms "a nightmare dream"[26] but which Pratt extols.

Pratt's story of the *Titanic* is the story of the consequences of man's failing to live up to tradition and duty, of his failing to exhibit Conradian restraint and solidarity upon the sea. Machinery requires for its management in Pratt the utmost in disciplined civilized values. Men welded together as a unit operate the successful K-148 ("The Submarine"), row the *Roosevelt*'s lifeboats to the *Antinoe*, lay the rails of the CPR, and save convoy SC42. On the *Titanic* men have become so dazzled by the qualities of the machine with which they have been entrusted that they fail to be worthy of this trust. They over-estimate this machine's capabilities much as Ulysses' men over-estimated human capabilities when they "would have slain the cattle of the sun." Thus the *Titanic*'s crew believe that "caution was absurd" and disregard the disciplined and efficient management necessary for any ship's safety.

Throughout the poem the *Titanic*'s crew's aloofness and difference from the crews of other ships are clearly developed. While the *Caronia*, *Mesaba*, *Amerika*, *Baltic*, *Touraine*, and *Californian* pick their ways gingerly through the ice-field,

the *Titanic* increases speed as it approaches. And while these ships, particularly the *Californian*, fulfill their social duties by warning all other ships at sea, the *Titanic* declares itself superciliously above this moral solidarity of all good sailors.

> *Say, "Californian," shut up, keep out,*
> *You're jamming all my signals with Cape Race.*

The *Titanic*'s passengers share in this divorce between human responsibility and the demands of machine and sea. The tread of the passenger's feet, we are told, is "rivalling the engines." The diners approach the ship's dining room "like storm troops before a citadel". So remote are the passengers from the requirements of discipline, attention, and duty at sea that some of them suggest the crew to be superfluous.

> *For all the hard work there's to do*
> *Aboard this liner up on deck, the crew*
> *Might just as well have stopped ashore.*

Even less concern for solidarity and for human action in a co-operating, corporate body is shown by the passengers in their relationships with fellow humans. Physical violence is latent in the wrestling and boxing displays in the ship's gymnasium. Animosity and rapaciousness only just below the level of physical violence are continually evident in Cabin D's poker game. Meanwhile the "grey-templed Caesars of the world's Exchange" have gathered in the lounge to use their collective wisdom not for social good but to "rock / the pillared dollars of a railroad stock". Representative of this general non-observance of obligation to the social order is the Egyptian mummy in the hold. Stolen from a tomb in the Valley of the Kings in direct contravention not only of respect for the human dead but also of the mores of another civilization, this mummy may well carry with it "an ancient curse" on all violators of the necessary mores which bind men together and make possible their survival on earth. It is noteworthy that Pratt does not ridicule the very vulnerable credulity of the passengers who discuss this mummy, but presents their dialogue with the same profound fascination as he presents the other events of the poem.

Once the iceberg has punctured the illusion of the crew and passengers that social irresponsibility is a condition possible for man, there is a marked return among these people to the old loyalties. Captain Smith regains a captain's wisdom in his managing of the ship's abandonment so that panic and violence do

not interfere with the orderly evacuation of women and children. In playing until the sea silences their instruments, the seven musicians exhibit a fidelity which, in the ship's officers, could earlier have saved the entire ship. Among the passengers also a selfless heroism takes hold, not only among those anonymous masses "of unknown name / and race" so respected by Pratt in *Behind the Log* and *Toward the Last Spike*, but also among those tyrants of the stock exchange, Guggenheim and Astor. Thus the story of the *Titanic* is, like Pratt's other major narrative poems, a story of the necessity of social responsibility, of group action and group heroism, of men uniting in a common cause and gaining strength and inspiration from their own communality.

This theme of *The Titanic* is clearly the single most powerful constant of Pratt's poetry. It surpasses in importance both his theme of power and his intermittent theme of Christian love in that it subsumes both of these. It is through corporate action that power, both effective power and individual power, is realized. Christianity itself, especially in *Brebeuf and his Brethren*, is merely one more means of binding men together and giving to the individual totemistic or institutional support.

The question of whether this philosophy of Pratt's was felt by him to be relevant only to crisis situations or to all of human life has been raised by Northrop Frye, who, in suggesting the former, observed that Pratt "is almost always dealing with a society in a state of emergency."[27] This observation seems both insufficient for the conclusion and an over-statement of the case. The everyday building of the CPR certainly did not constitute a "crisis" to the ordinary labourer, and yet Pratt definitely expects a continuing loyalty and efficiency from him. In the case of the *Titanic*, the time period in which communality is lacking is that immediately preceding the crisis. Here Pratt's implication would seem to be that society-oriented or corporate action in everyday life is necessary to prevent states of emergency as much as to cope with them. Further, Pratt sometimes pointedly neglects to compartmentalize crisis behaviour from ordinary duties, and thus writes as if society-centred behaviour were no more than should be expected at any time from any man. Such is clearly the message of the concluding passage of *The Roosevelt and the Antinoe*, where both the mundane and the heroic are merely parts of the "day's work."

> The nation gave its thanks on board; and she [the *Roosevelt*],
> Soon ready for completion of her run,
> Swung out the sound, with her day's work well done,
> And in an hour was on the Channel sea.

One might easily conclude from Pratt's selection and treatment of subjects that to him society always lives under threat of imminent crisis.

In E. J. Pratt we quite plainly have a committed and somewhat uncritical spokesman for the values of industrial man. He has frequently been acknowledged as a humanist. To be more specific, Pratt is actually a Pelagian liberal, not only casting original sin out on a torrent of words from his "truant" but continually presenting both the machinery of technology and the machinery of social organization as man's best way to salvation. Just as human muscle successfully supplants the Priest's prayers in *The Roosevelt and the Antinoe*, submarines, locomotives, and convoys supplant the early mystery behind "the iron door," and the truant's brash optimism supplants the poet's early but frail humility. Pratt's own frequent use of the personal pronoun *we* by itself spells out his position. Like the brain-washed D-503 of Zamiatin's anti-utopia *We*, Pratt typically cannot help but present himself as the voice of his society rather than as an individual man. The world of E. J. Pratt is a world where the individual voice, the lyric voice, is obligated to be silent, where gangs, crews, religions, and nations succeed, and private men die. It is a world where ships outlive successive crews, where the CPR outlives the individuals who participated in its building. It is a world where the *Victory*, the *Constellation*, the *Arizona*, the *Missouri* rest in veneration while the names of their crewmen are inevitably forgotten. It is a world where it is *dulce et decorum* to die for one's faith, *patria*, ship, or family of whales. Pratt may be a contemporary of Owen, Zamiatin, Orwell, and Huxley, but his poetry reads strangely like a celebration of the possibility of a "brave new world."

FOOTNOTES

[1] *The Poetry of E. J. Pratt: A New Interpretation* (Toronto, 1956).
[2] *Ten Canadian Poets* (Toronto, 1958).
[3] "Editor's Introduction," *The Collected Poems of E. J. Pratt*, 2nd. ed. (Toronto, 1958).
[4] "E. J. Pratt and Christianity," *Canadian Literature* 19 (1964), 21-32.
[5] "Introduction," *Selected Poems by E. J. Pratt* (Toronto, 1968), p. xvi.
[6] "Editor's Introduction," p. xvii.
[7] p. xviii.
[8] "E. J. Pratt's Literary Reputation," *Canadian Literature* 19 (1964), p. 9.
[9] "E. J. Pratt and his Critics," in R. L. McDougall (ed.), *Our Living Tradition* (Toronto, 1959), pp. 123-147.
[10] "Dunkirk," in Northrop Frye (ed.), *The Collected Poems of E. J. Pratt*, 2nd. ed. (Toronto, 1958).

[11] *Ten Canadian Poets,* p. 177.
[12] "E. J. Pratt and his Critics," p. 136.
[13] "E. J. Pratt and Christianity," p. 24.
[14] "Introduction," *Selected Poems of E. J. Pratt,* p. xv.
[15] "Editor's Introduction," p. xvii.
[16] *Ten Canadian Poets,* p. 169.
[17] p. 167.
[18] "E. J. Pratt and Christianity," pp. 26-29.
[19] *Ten Canadian Poets,* p. 166.
[20] *Quintessence of Capitalism,* tr. M. Epstein (New York, 1967 [1915]).
[21] *Religion and the Rise of Capitalism* (New York, 1926).
[22] (New York, 1951), p. 33.
[23] "Editor's Introduction," p. xx.
[24] "Introduction," p. xxiv.
[25] "Introduction," p. xix.
[26] *The Mechanical Bride,* p. 128.
[27] "Editor's Introduction," p. xvii.

GROVE AND EXISTENTIALISM

Frank Birbalsingh

Born in 1871 of mixed parents (Swedish father and Scottish mother), Frederick Philip Grove spent some of his early, most impressionable years in Paris, Rome and Munich where he acquired interests and attitudes that influenced him throughout his life; but in 1892 he came to North America where, except for brief absences, he remained until his death in 1948. His published work, consisting of eight novels, three volumes of essays, sketches and addresses, some short stories and an autobiography, has been regarded as predominantly of Canadian interest. In spite of their author's long residence in North America, however, and their predominantly Canadian settings, Grove's writings suggest that his preoccupations are primarily European. The treatment of his principal themes, free-will and humanism, reveals insights that are similar in kind, though neither in cogency nor intensity, to those of well known European writers.

The theme of free-will is introduced in the first published novel, *Settlers of the Marsh*, which describes the everyday routine of pioneer Canadian prairie homesteaders during the early years of this century. The Swedish immigrant hero, Niels Lindstedt, is puzzled by the apparently ineffectual nature of his own wishes and desires, and is consequently drawn into frequent speculation about God. The sudden death of a fellow immigrant homesteader prompts Niels to question the significance of events around him:

> What was life anyway? A dumb shifting of forces. Grass grew and was trodden down; and it knew not why. He himself — this very afternoon there had been in him the joy of grass growing, twigs budding, blossoms opening to the air of spring. The grass had been stepped on; the twig had been broken; the blossoms nipped by frost...
>
> He, Niels, a workman in God's garden? Who was God anyway?

Such questions come instinctively and with special urgency to the lonely pioneers of Grove's four novels set in the Canadian West. So often is patient toil on the land made fruitless by natural disaster, or careful plans ruined by misfortune, that they feel an acute sense of mortality and show a morbid curiosity in the unseen agency which treats their most determined efforts with neutral indifference.

A similar curiosity is evinced by urban characters in *The Master of the Mill*, in which the mill owned by the Clark family makes persistent mechanical demands on its workers and is just as indifferent to their wishes as God is to the plans and labours of Niels Lindstedt and other homesteaders. Yet the exact nature of God or of the mill remains mysterious: all that the homesteaders or the mill workers can glean is the inexorable logic by which God, at least, functions; they are vouchsafed no really satisfactory explanation. Their common ignorance, with which all the author's characters perforce play the game of life, is expressed by Samuel Clark's son, Edmund:

> We are sitting at a table playing a game of chance the laws of which we don't understand and somewhere around the board sits an invisible player whom nobody knows and who takes all the tricks; that player is destiny, or God if you like, or the future.

But Grove's characters do not respond passively. Although they acknowledge domination by mysterious and hostile forces, they summon up all possible inner resources in a show of fierce resistance, even when they realize that resistance is futile. John Elliott of *Our Daily Bread*, Abe Spalding of *Fruits of the Earth* and Len Sterner of *The Yoke of Life* all succumb, or are likely to succumb to dominant extra-human influences; but not without, initially, waging valiant and resolute struggle. John Elliott's whole life is dedicated to settling his children on farms around him, each doggedly ploughing a successful living out of the reluctant soil; while Spalding, exercising enormous strength of will and body, strives unavailingly to dominate the land that can yield him sustenance, wealth even; and Len Sterner tries persistently to acquire education in circumstances that scarcely permit him to subsist, much less to read. Ralph Patterson of *Two Generations* (a novel set in Ontario), although more successful than his Western counterparts, is equally prepared to subdue the recalcitrance either of his land or family. Not in one instance does the author counsel supine fatalism or facile optimism; for, while his characters acknowledge the ultimate futility of human aspirations, they nevertheless enjoin unremitting struggle, not instant submission.

Since they are capable of independent decision these characters cannot be correctly regarded as mere pawns or as impersonal beings responding mechanically to external stimuli. Implicitly they exercise a certain measure of free-will even if its exact degree and moral implication remain vague. At the same time their actions lack adequate self-consciousness and appear automatic: defiance is so instinctive as to be almost reflex, which has led to the belief that Grove's characters are, in fact, mechanically determined by local factors.

Yet Grove was no naturalist. His characters are anything but impersonal beings reacting mechanically to outside influences, nor do they transmit inherited traits and behaviour patterns from one generation to the next like the Rougon-Macquarts in Zola's great twenty-novel sequence. More often than not younger characters are at loggerheads with their elders precisely because they wish to assert contrasting individual concerns and interests. If their rather quick, retaliatory actions lack sufficient premeditation and due self-consciousness, it is not because they represent a consciously naturalistic outlook, but because the author fails to provide his characters with a satisfactory intellectual framework to define the moral significance of their actions.

The stress on the distinctive individuality of each character is in fact incorporated in a separate theme — humanism. Humanism in Grove's novels is concerned with the sanctity of human personality and with respect for the homely virtues of a Wordsworthian life close to Nature; it emphasizes the pre-eminence of fundamental human values over artificial, technologically-inspired ones. In the prairie novels the simplicities of rural, family life are reverenced, and patient tilling of the soil for one's daily bread is regarded as sufficient for complete satisfaction. On the other hand, urban industrialism denies satisfaction by inducing servility, as in the following illustration given by Bruce Rogers, foreman of the Clark mill:

> Suppose a new hand starts work with us. He's an ordinary human being: he laughs and jokes as he goes to work. But within less than a year something comes over him. Whatever he does, he seems to do automatically; in reality, the pace forces him to be constantly on the watch; it isn't that he becomes a machine; that would be tolerable if undesirable. What he becomes is the slave of a machine which punishes him whenever he is at fault.

Rogers asserts a belief that the influence of machines can be evil, that their uncontrolled power can dehumanize, and what he implies is that true value resides in the farmer, the lone individual who makes life with his own heart and hands.

In stressing the pre-eminence of personal values, Grove's novels in fact counteract the naturalistic overtones which some have found in his writing. His characters stoutly defend their basic humanity from threatened domination either by natural adversaries or by artificial ones present in industrial connurbations. Instinctively they reject the mechanical determination of their lives by any agency, and their motives are not narrowly social or political like those of the author's American contemporaries; for example, Sherwood Anderson and Theodore Dreiser, who also warn against the sacrifice of human rights and liberties to the God of industrial Mammon. The Americans speak mostly from Marxist or quasi-Marxist convictions, whereas Grove's view is certainly non-Marxist. As will be shown later, his chief characters may often be taken as spokesmen for the author himself and it is the author's view that Edmund Clark expresses when he tells his father: "Let all men be equal in an economic sense and one incitement to live is gone." Grove's anti-industrialism is not narrowly political. Passionate support for individual integrity and unyielding belief in the sovereignty of fundamental spiritual values derive from a wider if not deeper philosophical outlook that is neither socialist nor naturalistic but existentialist.

EXISTENTIALISM not only contradicts naturalism; it belies the fatalism and determinism which are sometimes attributed to Grove. Fatalism signifies weak-kneed acceptance, an abdication of human responsibility; determinism, likewise, implies that all our actions even those involving moral judgements, are wholly determined by previously existing causes. Existentialism, by stressing the value of independent, personal choice in defiant action, both acknowledges human responsibility and affirms man's ability to live without panic or hysteria in a world of growing uncertainty and seeming hopelessness. Grove's protagonists voluntarily oppose cosmic odds whether in the form of inexorable Fate or of suffocating industrial organization, and although they fail in the end, they never flinch from the struggle or give way to despair. Theirs is an enforced, sisyphean way of life that is resigned without being defeatist, combative but not aggressive. To them neither despair nor hope, pessimism nor optimism, are practical alternatives. Samuel Clark sums up their approach when he says with impassive finality: "Life is a concatenation of events beyond praise or blame."

However diffuse it may be as a systematic philosophy, existentialism usually advocates vigorous protest against policies of action in which human beings are

regarded as helpless pawns or as wholly determined by the regular operation of natural processes: as already shown, all Grove's heroes vividly demonstrate this type of protest. These heroes are caught in situations similar to those in the plays and novels of Jean-Paul Sartre and Albert Camus, who usually portray ostensibly helpless people trapped by ordinary and natural processes. Indeed, the characters of Sartre and Camus feel a more intense and pervasive awareness of human inadequacy than Grove's protagonists. Circumscribed by hostile forces which all but annihilate him, Roquentin, the hero of Sartre's *La Nausée*, faces a predicament familar to all Grove's heroes; only he experiences such an intense form of spiritual impotence that for much of the time he is incapable of either protest or defiance; certainly he does not react quickly or instinctively. Unlike Grove's heroes, whose sole interest is to get out of their predicament, Roquentin is as much concerned with investigating his as with getting out of it. He therefore gains a fuller understanding of his predicament; and so does the reader.

Camus also writes about people with a strong, almost hypnotic sense of crippling limitation and total helplessness; nor do they always achieve that defiant act of will that comes so readily to Grove's characters. Although he goes through distressing experiences, Meursault, hero of Camus's *l'Etranger*, manages no more positive emotional reaction than a sort of dazed bafflement: he commits murder and is condemned and his most visible reaction is listless detachment. Roquentin and Meursault desire "engagement" — the existentialist term for defiant act of will — more desperately than Grove's heroes, but they encounter greater difficulty in achieving it. Instead they transcend their pressing need for "engagement" by finding salvation in thorough analysis and understanding of their problems. Mathieu Delarue, hero of Sartre's three-volume *Les Chemis de la Liberté*, fails to commit himself to any positive action until the end of the third volume, but during his lengthy period of indecision he searchingly probes the apparently absurd circumstances of his concrete situation, thus laying bare its precise moral characteristics. Since self-knowledge is gained during the time that he is perplexed and undecided, indecision itself proves as much a part of his salvation as the positive commitment he finally makes. In existentialist terms salvation is the fulness of being which he gains by self-conscious probing of his whole experience.

The basic assertion of Sartre and Camus, as well as Grove, is that in an absurd or irrationally organized world men have liberty of personal choice to make what they want of their lives. All three writers present characters in roughly the same predicament and all three prescribe roughly the same remedy — the achievement of salvation by a self-conscious act of will (which may or may not

be defiant in Camus). Where the comparison breaks down is in the process of achieving salvation: Roquentin, Meursault and Delarue take a long time investigating the moral imperatives open to them and in so doing they clarify and illuminate their predicament, while Grove's heroes are instantly defiant and so achieve the required act of will almost automatically, thus avoiding the introspective probing and analysis which might have illuminated their actions and given them moral significance. The result is that the reader comes to see the existentialist situations in the French writers more clearly and to understand their perceptions and intuitions with greater intelligence, whereas Grove's situations remain largely obscure and his existentialist insights appear inchoate and stunted.

Parallels between Sartre and Camus on one hand and Grove on the other come from their common ideological background — the ferment in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century. Two major influences at this time were Kierkegaard and Nietzsche. Kierkegaardian futility within a Christian universe jostled with an insatiable Nietzschean will to live and the intellectual flux thus produced contained the essential elements out of which existentialism was to emerge. Under the influence of Jaspers, Heidegger and others existentialist ideas gradually took coherent shape in the early decade of the twentieth century until they were moulded into a more or less consistent system of thought principally by Sartre in the World War II era. One reason why the intellectual framework of Grove's novels is fragmented is that he was not open, in Canada, to the direct cultural associations of constructive comment, analysis and discussion available to Europeans like Sartre and Camus. The philosophical ideas which he brought from Europe in 1892 and which remained largely stagnant in his mind more accurately represent an earlier nascent existentialism out of which the coherent theories of Sartre and Camus later evolved.

The influence of this earlier, unstable existentialism is to be found in the work of Europeans such as Ibsen, Strindberg, and even — earlier — Dostoevsky. Like Grove, these writers portray tormented and strong-willed protagonists opposed to either a moral or a social order which is contradictory if not incomprehensible. Yet the struggles of Ibsen's heroes and heroines against a stifling bourgeois social order are carefully analysed, the sexual conflicts in Strindberg's characters are brilliantly illuminated, and the crises encountered by Dostoevsky's heroes are searchingly investigated so as to bring out and clarify the moral problems involved. Ibsen, Strindberg and Dostoevsky may offer different solutions to their underlying problem of reconciling harsh human reality with the dominion of a

supposedly loving Christian God, but they explore the problem comprehensively and their reputation rests on this inspired exploration rather than on the solutions they offer. Ibsen and Strindberg lean towards Nietzsche in asserting a powerful will to survive, while Dostoevsky tends towards Kierkegaard in stressing human fulfilment by deeds of love and compassion; together these three writers may be said to anticipate twentieth-century existentialism. Their philosophical sources were also volatile and unstable, but they were able to marshal them into sustained, whole and original perceptions.

GROVE'S WORK suffers by comparison either with his successors, the mature existentialists, or with his immediate European predecessors whose plays and novels anticipate existentialism. The immature or stunted quality of his thought cannot therefore be wholly attributed to deficient historical or cultural influences. Since they do not enlarge the reader's perceptions, the arbitrary constraints and harassments visited upon his protagonists appear gratuitous, and the gratuitous presentation of a whole series of characters who are physically persecuted and spiritually tortured only to be destroyed conveys a strong flavour of sado-masochism. When the unmistakably masochistic overtones of his novels are set against the author's own extremely harsh experiences in North America, it becomes clear that his art does not serve simply as a vehicle of objective views and judgements, but also vicariously as a means of projecting subjective dissatisfactions that are exclusively of personal interest. The ragged intellectual framework of his novels comes out of the unstable contact between his mixed European inheritance and his unhappy life in Canada. This contact engendered irrepressible tensions in Grove, and fiction provided him with a convenient means of release. This explains why he re-states identical themes in seven novels without ever probing them, for constant re-statement satisfies urgent psychological need; that it ignores purely aesthetic criteria was apparently of less moment.

From his arrival in North America, Grove endured poverty, illness, bereavement and what he, at any rate, thought was shameful neglect. In his treatment of free-will, the dogged but vain resistance of his heroes partly registers self-pitying disappointment with his own untiring but largely unsuccessful literary efforts. His attitude to failure is clearly stated in his autobiography *In Search of Myself*:

> Perhaps, very likely even, I was foredoomed to failure in my [literary] endeavour; in fact, I seemed to see even then, that I was bound to fail; but the attempt had to be made.

Unwavering dedication to literature sublimates what really is an intolerable disappointment in himself as a writer, and it is partly to stabilize himself psychologically for renewed efforts that he wishfully projects a dedicated but assumed fighting spirit in all his chief characters.

Similarly limiting personal motives enter into his representation of humanism as well. Concern for the mill workers in *The Master of the Mill* is not closely integrated into the novel's unwieldly plot; it is prompted, it would seem, by strong prejudice rather than by artistic considerations. The suspicion of prejudice is reinforced when we discover the author's expressed animus against American industrial social organization. In *In Search of Myself* he deplores the ascendancy of purely acquisitive instincts over more genuinely creative ones in America, and American subservience to a morality based on credit elicits contempt:

> It is the peculiarly American philosophy of life that to have is more important than to be or to do; in fact, that to be is dependent on to have. America's chief contribution to the so-called civilization of mankind, so far, consists in the instalment plan; and that plan imposes a slavery vastly more galling, vastly more wasteful than any autocracy, any tyranny has ever imposed. A free life is impossible under its rule except for the rich who can dispense with it.

These obviously exaggerated feelings become especially significant when we realize that it was principally his anti-Americanism that drove the author to a miserable existence on a bleak and inhospitable Canadian prairie. Like dogged resistance in his treatment of free-will, Grove's humanistic belief in individual integrity largely expresses a narrowly idiosyncratic resentment. In the former case resentment is directed against the failure of his writing while in the latter it is pointed at American social values.

The sexual attitudes revealed in Grove's novels also underline the undue subjectivity of his art. In *The Yoke of Life* Len Sterner plainly states his expectations of Lydia Hausmann:

> He saw Lydia etherealised, de-carnalised . . . She stood before his mental vision, untouched, all the more desirable for having been tempted, white in immaculate innocence. In order to justify his condemnation of the world, he needed to idealise her; and he did so with the facility of youth.

When Lydia, without convincing psychological pretext, suddenly turns from virgin innocence to besmirching promiscuity, Sterner's ethereal illusions are

shattered and he "cursed the world and all the facts of life." He then endures prolonged self-torture which is finally relieved only by suicide. Grove's own sexual attitudes are not much different; he writes in his autobiography:

> Woman as such remained a mystery to me. Even the prostitute whom I had seen through the open door of the brothel seemed a superior being to me, something almost divine because it was different from myself.

Although we may not know for certain that Grove experienced consequent frustration similar to Sterner's, we can be reasonably certain that his rather innocent idealization of women was contradicted by actual experience, and if the passion he shows in his reaction to literary failure and American society is genuine, he is likely to have responded to sexual frustration with the same intensity as he shows in his main themes. This would explain why there are scarcely any happy sexual relationships in the novels or why his women are drawn without subtlety, either as wicked and promiscuous like Clara Vogel and Lydia Hausmann, or as saintly and virginal like Ellen Amundsen and Alice Patterson; for, as in his main themes, Grove is not so much giving an objective portrait of credible human relations as expressing unbalanced, unstable and probably uncontrollable retaliatory feelings born of his own frustrations.

Sterner's reaction when disillusioned by Lydia is revealing, because it clearly illustrates the masochistic, self-pitying spirit of grievance common to all Grove's heroes. Their pathological outlook makes them retaliate blindly and irrationally against life itself, not simply against specific sources of irritation or dissatisfaction. In psychological terms Grove's themes are undeveloped because his heroes are too overcome by emotion to keep the bare minimum of moral equipoise necessary to any successful character in fiction. Sterner and his spiritual kindred in the other novels are not ultimately convincing as human beings in whom both emotional and cerebral impulses co-operate to maintain some form of equilibrium as in normal experience. All that they do is either to inflict or to endure punishment, and in the end their sadomasochistic activities are too non-cerebral and therefore too unbalanced to sustain moral examination. Their real value is not artistic but psychological — in providing the author with a means of airing strong grievances or prejudices and thus relieving powerful inner tensions.

No assessment of Grove's novels that ignores either his existentialism or his psychological dependence on his writing can arrive at a fair estimate of his achievement as a novelist, for these two are essential factors of his art. The evidence already presented suggests that his purely artistic intention, namely to

represent a view of life that is basically existentialist, is corrupted by an extra-literary motive, that of fulfilling wholly personal psychological needs and expectations. The aesthetic content of his work is thus undermined and his novels are of inconsiderable value as art; their most successful feature is patient documentation of pioneer homestead routine which is both solid and authentic. The best of Grove's writings are, in fact, not the novels, but the autobiography, the sketches and essays, in which compelling, idiosyncratic dissatisfactions can be freely expressed without much regard for aesthetic form or objectivity. On the whole we do not much admire the man's writing, but we do not fail to admire the man himself — his astonishing singlemindedness, his tenacity and his courage in the face of great adversity.

chronicle

DOUZE NOUVELLES

Naim Kattan

LA REVUE *Liberté* consacre son numéro 62 (mars-avril 1969) à douze nouvelles que la Société Radio-Canada commanda en 1967 à douze écrivains canadiens, six de langue anglaise et six de langue française. On a choisit des écrivains reconnus. Dans ce choix la Société Radio-Canada n'a opté ni pour l'aventure, ni pour la découverte. Elle a préféré faire connaître à un vaste public des noms déjà consacrés dans les milieux littéraires. L'on ne souhaite point que l'un ou l'autre des écrivains qui figurent sur cette liste ne le fût pas, bien que l'on aurait aimé y avoir d'autres noms.

La première remarque que la lecture de ces nouvelles suscite c'est que le Canada sert de cadre, d'arrière-plan, à des drames et à des petites tragédies qu'évoque chacun des nouvellistes. Hubert Aquin relate la fin d'un amour qui conduit un homme au suicide. Jean Basile évoque le souvenir d'une amitié de jeunesse, et la tristresse d'un homme qui constate la distance qui le sépare de l'amitié et de la jeunesse à la fois, tristesse qui se situe au bord du désespoir.

A travers un compte-rendu clinique d'une grossesse, Gérard Bessette nous rend sensible le bouleversement que suscite une nouvelle naissance chez une femme. Tout changement profond n'annonce pas seulement un nouveau commencement, mais le terme d'une période de vie.

On retrouve dans la nouvelle de Marie-Claire Blais les mêmes personnages et la même atmosphère qu'ont rendus familiers *Une Saison dans la Vie d'Emmanuel* et *Les manuscrits de Pauline Archange*. C'est avec joie et avec une intense curiosité que l'on retrouve André Langevin. Depuis *Le Temps des hommes* ce romancier n'a publié que des articles. Sa nouvelle nous rassure: il n'a rien perdu de sa vigueur. Le mystère qui entoure ses personnages indique une tragique quête d'un rapport avec le réel. Une femme s'introduit dans la vie d'un

homme, fortuitement, brièvement. Celui-ci ne connait même pas son nom, mais sa présence restera vive en lui. Il voudra la préserver en dépit du mari qui en dotant cette femme d'une identité lui enlève toute réalité. Dans sa nouvelle Andrée Maillet nous rappelle que dans le monde de l'enfance les petits secrets sont parfois synonymes de grands drames.

Le monde extérieur fait irruption dans deux nouvelles de langue anglaise. Austin C. Clarke nous fait mesurer la distance entre les espoirs des immigrants noirs et la réalité le leur vie au Canada. Le héros-narrateur de la nouvelle de Mordecai Richler est un Juif canadien en visite pour la première fois en Israël. Ses sentiments pour ce pays sont contradictoires. Il est déchiré entre les exigences de l'absolu et les contraintes du réel. Il ne peut laisser libre cours à son admiration ou à ses réserves sans un sentiment de culpabilité.

Pour échapper à la souffrance, au malheur et à la laideur du monde le personnage de Hugh Garner n'a d'autre issue que la folie ou la mort. Dans la nouvelle de Hugh Hood nous sommes assaillis par la cruauté et l'avidité des enfants qui ne désirent qu'accaparer les biens de leurs parents mourants. En évoquant l'attachement d'une petite fille pour son chien, Margaret Laurence nous raconte sans le dire l'histoire d'un adolescent qui en harcelant ce chien essaie de se libérer de la douleur qu'il subit. Sinclair Ross constate combien la violence de l'âge jeune trouve un exutoire dans la violence généralisée d'une civilisation.

Dans quelle mesure ces nouvelles sont-elles canadiennes? Y-a-t-il un esprit commun qui les anime, un fil conducteur qui les lie? Il est impossible, et à mon avis inutile, de répondre à cette question. Ces écrivains sont canadiens par les circonstances de leur vie. Ils n'ont pas besoin de l'affirmer. J'ajouterais qu'aucun d'eux ne domine par une originalité qui frappe. Sans doute aurait-on souhaité déceler ce qui fait leur particularisme. Aucun d'eux cependant n'invente des formes nouvelles. On retrouve dans chaque nouvelle les qualités et les limites que nous ont déjà révélées leurs oeuvres antérieures. Chez Hubert Aquin c'est la liquéfaction du personnage par des événements dont la suite échappe à toute logique. Le mystère qui en résulte est celui de l'existence elle-même. On décèle chez Gérard Bessette l'influence du nouveau roman français. Mordecai Richler appréhende le réel à coup d'anedoctes.

Ce qui est sans doute le plus surprenant dans ce recueil c'est l'impossibilité d'établir une frontière entre les écrivains de langue anglaise et ceux de langue française, non pas qu'ils ne soient pas différents les uns des autres. Mais, ici cette différence apparaît comme étant le fait d'individus et non celui de groupes.

review articles

NEW CRITICISM

D. G. Stephens

DENNIS DUFFY. *Marshall McLuhan.* New Canadian Library, McClelland & Stewart, (Canadian Writers 1), $ .95.

MILTON WILSON, *E. J. Pratt,* New Canadian Library, McClelland & Stewart, (Canadian Writers 2), $ .95.

CLARA THOMAS, *Margaret Laurence,* New Canadian Library, McClelland & Stewart, (Canadian Writers 3), $ .95.

RONALD SUTHERLAND, *Frederick Philip Grove,* New Canadian Library, McClelland & Stewart, (Canadian Writers 4), $ .95.

W. J. KEITH, *Charles G. D. Roberts,* Studies in Canadian Literature 1, Copp Clark, $1.95.

AT THE MOMENT, two publishers have taken it upon themselves to augment the field of Canadian criticism with monographs about writers in Canada. McClelland & Stewart, and Copp Clark, are to be congratulated in their efforts to supply the reading public, and students, with up-to-date examinations of these writers. It is hoped that the direction which these series have taken will point the way for other publishers. Here is a good beginning, for the main thing these series do is to point out, quite dramatically at that, the need for many books of the kind that condense and articulate the whole quality of a writer's work. Before, such criticism was available only in articles or in general surveys about Canadian writing; specific information about one author is rarely available under a single cover.

Canadian Writers, the new series designed to be part of the New Canadian Library of McClelland and Stewart, is, according to the frontispiece,

> a series of handbooks designed to provide the student and general reader with compact and inexpensive introductions to significant figures on the Canadian literary scene. Each book is written expressly for the series by an outstanding Canadian critic or scholar and provides, besides a comprehensive critical approach to a given author, useful biographical and bibliographical information.

There are two words here which may bother a reader: "handbook" and "introduction". Students may shy away from a "handbook", for the word implies a guide or a manual, that which supplies direction; and since the books will usually be read after at least one work by the author is read, an "introduction" is not what is needed. Readers do not want handbooks and introductions to literature; rather they want information that enriches their original experience of read-

ing an author's work. And, in fact, these are anything but handbooks or introductions; instead, they are written by people who assume, and correctly, that their readers have read the primary sources, and are reading the criticism to widen their understanding of the authors involved.

This is particularly true in the Dennis Duffy book, *Marshall McLuhan*; here the author has related McLuhan theories in an understandable way, to enlarge on McLuhan himself, but also he has related the theory of McLuhan to the world that the McLuhan message attempts to define. For the first time McLuhan's position has been made clear to me; I have been anti-McLuhan mainly because I did not completely understand his approach. The Duffy book has helped me immeasurably to understand McLuhan, and I am sure it will do the same for others. I am not pro-McLuhan now, but, instead, have a fuller understanding of what he has done with the mediums of our time. I like Duffy's approach, and his sense of humour in approaching his subject; in his introduction he can say:

> That a Canadian, a professor of English, should attain New Yorker cartoon-status is no more astonishing than that the city of Montreal should host one of the most exciting international exhibitions of this century. Viewed in perspective, both events indicate that Canada has, for better or worse, abandoned its former adversary position in North American culture.

It is amusing, too, that when words are going out of fashion — or the written word, at least — the very man who talks about it is the man who is making the most money out of print. The age that McLuhan speaks about has McLuhan himself as its last prophet.

The second book in the *Canadian Writers* is Milton Wilson's, *E. J. Pratt*. Pratt is a major Canadian poet and to have Milton Wilson do this book is a great coup for McClelland and Stewart. Wilson is one of the few real critics in Canada. What interests him automatically attracts the reader's attention with his first page, and then gives full value for every bit of attention he gets. The anecdotes prod the reader on, and by the time we reach the little dull stretches of repeated plot from the epic poems, or the reminders that Pratt loved to concoct good menus because he liked food himself, we are so interested in what Wilson will say next about Pratt that we continue to read steadfastly, determined to miss nothing. The organization of this book is particularly good. The first two chapters discuss the shorter poems, from all parts of Pratt's career; it is not an organization based on historical development but rather a discussion of the whole Pratt canon, written by someone who knew the poet well, admired him, yet is able to stand in a strong position as critic of the work involved. The 'big' poems are the subject of the last chapter; I was sorry that Wilson dismissed *The Titanic* so quickly, for I would like to have read more by someone who says he liked the poem; to use Wilson's words, it is a "sometimes brilliant poem that I am rarely tempted to go back to." I really would like to know why, if it is brilliant. But this is nothing, really, when the whole book is examined; it is the most satisfying criticism on Pratt that I have ever read.

Not so satisfying is Clara Thomas's book on *Margaret Laurence*. I really was looking forward to this book, for I have liked Clara Thomas's work before, and I was interested to see what she would do

with Margaret Laurence, whose last book, *The Fire Dwellers*, disappointed me greatly. Some writers work too quickly once they get going, and I feel that Margaret Laurence has fallen into this category. Her African books and *Stone Angel* have a sustained quality that her last two books lack. Perhaps she is trying too hard, but the structures of *A Jest of God* and *The Fire Dwellers* are superficial; what she needs is control in plot and characterization. Clara Thomas does not deal with the finer points of style in her comments on Laurence; neither does she face the problems of plot and character. Instead, she comments in each case on the conflict, almost to a point of retelling the plot, and examines the reasons for the conflict. I sense that Clara Thomas comes more to Margaret Laurence's work as a woman rather than as a critic. This is not bad, and cannot be avoided, but a greater objectivity towards the ethic examined in the novels would show a firmer understanding of Margaret Laurence's art as a novelist. I look for greater things in both women, one as writer and the other as critic, but at the moment the fusion in this one book does not work.

Ronald Sutherland does approach Frederick Philip Grove with the objectivity of a well disciplined critic. His comments are astute, and his ability to place Grove within a proper perspective is quite refreshing. Desmond Pacey's book on Grove is very different, and informative, and is still the best detailed study of Grove the man and Grove the novelist. What Sutherland has done is to narrow the whole of Grove into a proper and fitting framework. His ability to do so may explain why these books are called 'introductions'; he does more than intro-

duce Grove, however. Sutherland takes the whole of Grove's work, and tries — very successfully — to place it within a larger scheme. He studies Grove as a novelist within the whole stream of fiction, and gives insights that any reader of him will appreciate. Grove was a full naturalist, and his ability to capture the environment is his forte. Sutherland records all this with care, and I recommend his book to anyone interested in Grove. The only fault may lie in that Sutherland makes Grove more interesting than he really was, or is; he is, after all, quite dull, probably because his work is so slowly paced.

I hope that W. J. Keith will write a larger work on Charles G. D. Roberts, for his Copp Clark monograph — which is what it really is — shows a control and ability to understand Roberts that criticism needs. Mr. Keith obviously has more insights into Roberts's poetry, insights that would trace the sources and influences affecting both the poetry and the stories. I kept wanting him to say more, and felt that he could do so. Obviously, the lyrics *In Divers Tones* need a more careful appraisal, and Mr. Keith suggests what could be done. The importance of Roberts and his influence on the verse in Canada which followed him needs a more careful examination; his was the beginning of a desire to create a special metaphor within Canadian poetry. But, limited by space, Mr. Keith cut short the discussion of the poetry. Right now Roberts seems to be taken more seriously as a writer of animal and other short stories than as a poet. The stories are important, but I doubt if they should be praised beyond the poetry. Mr. Keith's examination of the stories is acute and carefully presented, yet here again, I felt that he could say more. His book is not superficial, however; it seems rather to be an outline for something larger. At least, I hope it is, for I sense that Mr. Keith could do something for Roberts that few other critics in Canada could.

Some years ago, someone said that what we needed in Canadian literature was some good Canadian criticism. This has been remedied by a number of good magazines and other collections of essays about Canadian writers. Now, the student of Canadian literature has secondary sources that can be used to enlarge his appreciation of the work he may be studying. But more has to be done for criticism in Canada. These five books point a direction. They go only part of the way. But with them as a background, one would hope that the time is near for more careful statements, more detailed examinations of the creators and purveyors of the Canadian literary heritage. Until then, however, thanks are due not only to the writers of these books but also to the publishers who created the series.

LOWRY, THE CABBALA AND CHARLES JONES

William H. New

PERLE EPSTEIN, *The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry: Under the Volcano and the Cabbala.* Holt, Rinehart, and Winston. $6.95.

AS WE ARE REMINDED by Stephen Leacock's pointed satire "The Yahi-Bahi Oriental Society of Mrs. Rasselyer-Brown", the Theosophist movement attracted charlatans as well as serious students, particularly when it became a fad. Considering the number of people involved in theosophy from the 1880's into the 1930's — or into the 1960's, for that matter, with occultism becoming fashionable again — this can hardly be unexpected. Good, wealthy, uncertain people are often persuaded out of their money by the strong-willed, and are often coincidentally attracted to philosophies that offer them "answers". Conditions are thus ripe for the con artist. The "converts" accept him, abandon their homes, and enter communities of the "elect", whose sole function seems to be to await Armageddon and in the meantime praise their self-styled prophet/priest. One of the most blatant examples in Canada of this particular variety of the con game is recorded in a curious 1967 memoir by Herbert Emmerson Wilson, entitled *Canada's False Prophet.* It concerns the career of the author's brother, Edward Arthur Wilson, alias "Brother Twelve", who attracted people from all over Europe and North America — generally former theosophists — to follow him in 1927 to the Pacific Coast. There he bought Valdez Island and additional thousands of acres with his community's funds, and his "Aquarian Foundation" flourished. The Eleven Brothers in the Void spoke irregularly to Brother Twelve on matters of faith, and the "prophet" led his flock to believe what he chose. At least for a time. Wilson goes on in his book to describe the bizarre sexual practices of the group and the increasing sadism of Brother Twelve's cohort, Madame Zee, which ultimately led to its disintegration.

My point here is simply to emphasize that in Vancouver in the late 1920's and 1930's, interest in this strange society, and in hermeticism and the occult generally, was particularly strong. Not all of it was eccentric, of course, nor were all the writers and teachers in the field mountebanks. Some were serious thinkers, whose search into the signs and symbols of black and white magic was for them a way of trying to fathom the unknown. One of these was "Frater Achad" — Charles Robert Stansfeld Jones — a portrait painter from 1899 to 1910, the author of six books, a resident of Vancouver for many years, and undoubtedly one of Canada's least known writers.

Unlisted at the Vancouver Public Library, Jones' virtually unobtainable work seems recorded only in a brief article (3

October 1936) in the now defunct *Vancouver News Herald*. All of it is concerned with the occult — from the early *Crystal Vision through Crystal Gazing* and *XXXI Hymns to the Star Goddess* (a volume of poems), through a commentary on the cabbalistic numerology of Wagner's *Parsifal*, called *The Chalice of Ecstasy*, to the three commentaries on the Cabbala itself, all written during the 1920's, on which his reputation among metaphysical societies now rests: *Q.B.L., or The Bride's Reception*, *The Egyptian Revival*, and *The Anatomy of the Body of God*. In them are to be found a detailed analysis of the numerical, chromatic, and alphabetic correspondences associated with the states of mind depicted by the Cabbalistic "Tree of Life", and an exploration of the theory that the universe is constantly progressing or expanding "while still in accord with the One Order which prevails from its most minute atom to its inconceivable vast circumference". Both ideas were to attract the attention of Malcolm Lowry and (therefore) to be absorbed into his fiction.

In her recent book, *The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry*, Dr. Perle Epstein of New York University makes a great deal of Lowry's meeting with Jones, as being a turning point in the creation of *Under the Volcano*, the moment when Lowry had the mysteries of Cabbala opened to him and thus acquired a pattern for the novel's symbolism. To stress this diminishes the importance of Lowry's previous reading, however — in Melville, Ortega, Poe and other literary figures whose romantic imagination stimulated his own — and in the rhetoric of Charles Fort, and in the expository works of P. D. Ouspensky and J. W. Dunne. It also overlooks the general climate of interest in the occult that was already established in Vancouver by the time Lowry arrived in 1939. It is not that on moving to Dollarton he joined any psychic associations, but rather that he was interested in and (to some extent, at least) knowledgeable about hermeticism by the time he actually met Charles Jones. In 1941, Jones was a census enumerator in North Vancouver who called at the Lowrys' cabin in Dollarton as part of his route. The chance meeting was followed up by a series of arranged ones, as Lowry subsequently became one of Jones' pupils in the symbology of the Cabbala. Obviously Lowry found in Jones' work a structure on which to hang some of his more nebulous feelings about coincidence and fate; the diagram of the Tree of Life at the end of *Q.B.L.*, for example, could serve as a key to a number of the symbols in *Under the Volcano* — more illuminative, in fact, than the *Zohar* itself, which Jones was *interpreting*, and which Lowry never read. But in other cases, the discovery of Jones' work merely supplied an additional rationale for a design that he had already basically worked out.

Miss Epstein's thesis, quite simply, proposes that the Consul is a black magician (misusing his cabbalistic powers and so doomed to perdition), and that the consistent way in which the novel's symbolism is based on cabbalistic motifs supports her contention. She gains some justification for her position from Lowry himself. Writing in 1950 to Derek Pethick, he points out certain features of Geoffrey Firmin:

> The Consul has been a Cabbalist. . . . Mystically speaking, the abuse of wine is connected with the abuse of mystical powers. Has the Consul perhaps been a black magi-

> cian at one time? We don't know... a black magician is a man who has all the elements... against him — this is what the Consul meant in Chapter X (written in 1942) enumerating the elements.... The implication is that an analogy is drawn between Man today on this planet and a black magician.

But Lowry's emphasis is constantly on the *analogy*, the *possibility* of the identification, rather than on the identification itself. As he specified in his 1946 letter to Jonathan Cape, the number of chapters in the novel — twelve — is significant partly because of its cabbalistic importance. He adds:

> The Cabbala is used for poetical purposes because it represents man's spiritual aspiration. The Tree of Life, which is its emblem, is a kind of complicated ladder with Kether, or Light, at the top and an extremely unpleasant abyss some way above the middle. The Consul's spiritual domain in this regard is probably the Qliphoth, the world of shells and demons, represented by the Tree of Life upside down....

But then he says further:

> all this is not important at all to the understanding of the book; I just mention it in passing to hint that, as Henry James says, 'There are depths.'

There are indeed, and Miss Epstein's book patiently explores one of them. She is conscious, moreover, that it is only one approach, and thus her position is distorted when the book jacket announces that "Once and for all, *The Private Labyrinth*... clarifies Lowry's intention in his masterpiece." To have attempted that would have been to narrow the book, to deprive it of depth, however much intricate fretwork it might add, but final answers are not Miss Epstein's intention.

The Private Labyrinth opens with a history of the Cabbala from Jewish mys-

ticism through to the present, but unfortunately (though for the layman it will prove a quick guide to mystic thought) this part of the book reads rather like a chapter from a dissertation; it is factual, earnest, and flat. What it does most clearly is demonstrate the force that the Cabbala exerted not only upon the Hasidic movement (Miss Epstein is herself descended from the 18th century Hasidic philosopher Baal Shem Tov) and upon Christian philosophers like Cornelius Agrippa and Jakob Boehme, but also upon such movements as Rosicrucianism, Freemasonry, Romanticism, and Theosophy. Along the way many other influences were absorbed until the Cabbala becomes, in Miss Epstein's phrase, "unrecognizable amid the bric-a-brac of Oriental philosophy", but its importance (however intangible) can hardly be denied.

Among the literary works, other than *Under the Volcano*, in which the influence can be perceived, are *Faust, Parsifal*, and *The Magic Flute*. Partly because of the Faustian association, it is curious to discover that Miss Epstein's bibliography omits such critical studies as A. R. Kilgallin's essay on the Faust motif in *Under the Volcano*, or Jack Hirschman's idiosyncratic note on Lowry and the Cabbala in *Prairie Schooner*. The exact basis for the bibliography, in fact, is somewhat unclear. As a guide to Lowry criticism it is erratically selective; as a guide to studies of the occult it is similarly uneven. Jung's *Psyche and Symbol* is included, for example, but *Psychology and Alchemy* left out; Mme. Blavatsky's *Secret Doctrine* is in, but none of the works of Annie Besant (which Lowry read) are mentioned.

Yet for all this, the main body of *The Private Labyrinth* provides a good example of an exegesis carried out in industrious (if often subjective) detail. The cabbalistic correspondences of numbers, colours, animals, and names are all explained; the sexual implications of the Cabbala are examined in relation to the novel; and the author goes on to associate various of the symbols — animals, wheels, gardens, elements, beverages, etc. — with the Consul's progress as an adept. If by meditating on his "spiritual self", that is, Geoffrey may at one time have hoped to "transcend his condition and become divine", it becomes increasingly obvious that possessing the mystic powers not only promises the hope for equanimity but poses a threat to his existence as well. "Heaven" and "Hell" are thus the same place, perceived by persons either in harmony with their environment or not. As the tarot "fool" is actually the "supreme intelligence", so paradoxically is the abyss of hell also the height of understanding and illumination. A "white magician" — Sigbjorn Wilderness, for example, or Kennish Drumgold Cosnahan — can emerge from his contact with the occult forces not simply unscathed but with a new perception of harmony. (Lowry's previously unpublished notes to "Ghostkeeper" and the "Outward Bound" section of *October Ferry to Gabriola* — attached as appendices to *The Private Labyrinth* — make his awareness of this process quite clear.) But from the same encounter a so-called "black magician", for reasons of ego or whatever, will emerge misusing his powers, and he is ultimately overcome by his knowledge. The alchemical and mystic balance which would allow harmony is for him — for a man like Geoffrey — impossible any longer to achieve.

If the specific *identification* of the Consul as a black magician does not quite convince, the sense of the unknown that is evoked by such a consideration is absolutely faithful to the tone of Lowry's own perception of the world. As he pointed out to David Markson in 1951:

> you could with some justice 'rationalize' the Cabbala itself . . . but you can't rationalize . . . the unknown depths of the human psyche. . . . More or less popular and dry half-gobbledegookery though [Jung's "Man in search of his soul"] is — . . . you nonetheless might find it soundly full of the wisest kind of speculation. . . .

In his own later reading, he moved on from "Frater Achad" (even though in 1956 he was writing to Harvey Burt to have *Q.B.L.* and *Anatomy of the Body of God* sent to him in England) and back to other works that bear on the occult and that continued to influence him: J. W. Dunne's *An Experiment with Time*, for example, which caused such a stir in the late 1920's, influenced J. B. Priestley among others, and is felt in *Dark as the Grave*. Or P. D. Ouspensky's *Tertium Organum*, which influenced *La Mordida*. Or Charles Fort's *Wild Talents* (like the other two, recommended to Margerie Lowry's mother as early as 1940 as books concerned "with enlarging the frontiers of the mind"), which is central to at least one of the episodes of *October Ferry*. Or the Tao and the *I Ching*.

It is impossible, however, to separate out individual strands without doing injustice to the whole; what influenced Lowry was really life itself, with its complexity, its fatefulness, its coincidences, and its hidden potential. If in his later novels he was heading acutely consciously in a metaphysical direction, it is a path for which his earlier reading and writing prepared him. *Under the Volcano* expresses one stage along the way. It remains his greatest book, and in exploring one of the dimensions that makes it so, Perle Epstein makes us even more aware of the centrality of the metaphysical vision to all he wrote, and the intricacy of his craftsmanship.

ECLECTIC PUBLISHING

Douglas Barbour

RAYMOND FRASER. *i've laughed and sung the whole night long seen the summer sunrise in the morning.* Delta Canada. $1.00.

MICHAEL GNAROWSKI. *The Gentlemen Are Also Lexicographers.* Delta Canada. $1.00.

GERALD ROBITAILLE. *Images.* Delta Canada. $1.00.

GLEN SIEBRASSE. *Man: Unman.* Delta Canada. $2.00.

RICHARD SOMMER. *Homage to Mr. MacMullin.* Delta Canada. $1.00.

PETER STEVENS. *Nothing But Spoons.* Delta Canada. $1.00.

DURING THE LATE 1950's and early 1960's, Louis Dudek published *Delta*, an original and intriguing little magazine, in Montreal. *Delta* printed letters from Ezra Pound, "notes on metrics" by Dudek, and poems by many of

the newer Canadian poets such as D. G. Jones. At the same time he continued to work with Contact Press, which he and Raymond Souster founded. Both *Delta* and Contact Press are gone, but Dudek is still working hard to promote young poets through Delta Canada, his own publishing house. Already Delta Canada has an impressively long book list, even if the books on that list are uneven in quality. Whatever one thinks of individual books, however, Mr. Dudek deserves praise for continuing his enterprise. The little presses of Canada are as important now as they ever were, and, while Toronto and Vancouver have their fair share, Delta Canada is Montreal's only English language entry in the field. The six latest titles from Delta Canada perfectly demonstrate Mr. Dudek's eclectic tastes as an editor, ranging as they do from a very loose Bohemian poetry to the bilingual prose of Gerald Robitaille.

At best Raymond Fraser has just one thing in his favour and that's a humourous and slightly ironic awareness of himself that occasionally gets into his poems, and, when it does, makes them fun to read. Unfortunately, this self-awareness is all too infrequent in *i've laughed and sung* etc., and we are more often treated to the adolescent posturings of an egotist whose poems fail to convince me that he deserves the attention they give him. His dedication to Alden Nowlan is particularly ironic, since Nowlan possesses those very qualities of insight and awareness which Fraser so obviously lacks. Nowlan's poems appear simple but are not. Fraser's poems appear simple-minded and are. Moreover, Fraser has a tin ear. He lacks the ability to handle language with the subtle skill and awareness of rhythm which, to my mind, are the marks of a good poet.

Michael Gnarowski is careful with words, and with his own character. He thinks hard, and when he talks about "The History of Auschwitz", for example, he uses a clear, chiseled language which, sadly, fails to engage the emotions. Nevertheless, a few of its exact lines do sting the mind. Gnarowski, though not as clearly as Dennis Lee, grapples with the problems of living in today's *polis*, and tries to approach the concept of civilization through his poems.

"Amethyst Harbour", perhaps the best poem in the book, makes a coherent statement via the image of winter in a way that "Portrait of a Man Come to Say Farewell", a poem on much the same theme, does not. The one is a successful fusion of image and idea, the other merely a piece of rhetoric, despite the obvious care taken in creating it.

At his best, as in "Amethyst Harbour", Gnarowski can create a powerful poem, which speaks to the mind and emotions, out of the wintry landscape of Canada. But he can, and does, fall into the trap of rhetoric, of scholarliness perhaps. And the final two poems, attempts at a comedy of manners in bibliography, were better left undone. Humour is not Gnarowski's strong point. There is, however, enough interesting work here to make the book worth the buck it costs.

Delta is the first publisher to offer a book by Peter Stevens, a talented contributor to just about every periodical in Canada during the '60's. *Nothing But Spoons* contains some of his best work, especially two very funny, very human poems about his family life. Stevens has a wideawake sense of humour, and this quality is especially winning when it

appears in such poems as "Happy Anniversary" and "Before the Ice Carnival". There are also some fine evocations on the prairie landscape around Saskatoon, the poet's home at the time these poems were written. Stevens is a quite prolific poet, and many fine poems have already appeared in periodicals, so we can look forward to more books by him soon.

Like *Nothing But Spoons, Homage to Mr. MacMullin* contains some delightful poems. Richard Sommer has an interesting and flexible mind. He handles traditional forms with a certain ease, although he is better in more open forms, and tries his hand at many moods. But I like him best in the poems where his unusual imagination and his sense of humour are combined. "The Meaning of the Meaning of Poetry" is good fun:

> I wouldn't know, being a tummy man myself
>
> and dwelling here quietly with a girl named Wife and a deflowered skunk called Minority and a silver flute by the name of Tube
>
> not to mention our tropical fish which eat each other so fast it seems a waste of names to call them anything at all
>
> except stop it you

And anyone who writes lines like the following commands the reader's attention:

> The sunbeam, like a wet "flurry" of kisses, is essentially plural:
>
> the singular is "sunboom" and measureless.

Sommer's imagination is not tied down to bare realities; he allows it plenty of scope with the result that the best of these poems refuse to sit still on the page. His rhythms are strong, and his poems are full of words chosen lovingly for effect. I expect to see more of his work soon, and if it fulfills the promise of this first book, I know I'll enjoy it.

The inside cover of *Images* informs us that Gerald Robitaille "is perhaps one of the most significant Canadian writers of his generation, though as yet hardly recognized in his own country." It goes on to tell of Robitaille's publications, including "the sensational short novel, *The Book of Knowledge*," and suggests that he is the "only Canadian writer of note who writes literary French and English with equal ease."

"Montreal - Paris, 1949 - 1967" is the last line in the book and it explains it all. This is a notebook, the writer's thoughts jotted down at various times over an 18-year period. If you're interested in the writer then you'll find the notes interesting. Robitaille has certain basic concerns: art, the soul imprisoned in the body,

God, the realities of life, music, and truth, to which he returns again and again. Often his jottings are completely uninspired and lack originality, but there are times when he strikes off a near epigram of real charm:

> Sartre dit: "L'enfer, c'est les autres." Les autres, c'est moi, un vieux moi que j'ai laissé tomber quelque part dans le passé. Un vieux moi surmonté, oublié, ou négligé. L'autre c'est ou ce que j'étais, ou ce que j'aurais pu être, ou ce que je suis ou ce que je serai.

> Le corps est un petit univers qui lutte toute sa vie contre le grande et la mort est un acte d'amour avec le grand qui dure éternellement.

> No color is as full of unfulfilled promises as black.

These afford glimpses of an eccentric and intriguing mind, if a repetitious one. Robitaille, the genial and egotistic host at this literary *Smorgasbord*, fails to offer quite enough variety. But the book isn't too long, so he just escapes boring one. He had better stick to prose, however, for his few attempts at poetry reveal a paucity of invention.

Nevertheless, Delta Canada is doing us all a favour by publishing him, and, as a Montreal press, it is uniquely situated to present the works of this writer to the nation. Their publication later this year of his critical work, *A Savage in Search of Art*, may prove to be of lasting value as his publishers claim.

Glen Siebrasse has perhaps the most powerful imagination of any of these writers. He surprises with the ferocity and violence of his vision, which is evident throughout his book. Perhaps this is what separates him from the others here: in every poem one can recognize the same concerns, the same wild horror at the human condition. Siebrasse does not see the world as a beautiful place. It is harsh, and the animals in it, especially men, are predators.

Certain themes and images recur throughout the book, cementing it, giving the reader a sense of coherence as he wanders through what is essentially the ruined battlefield of a mind. Siebrasse handles his language well, and his harsh rhythms perfectly match his stark evocation of the world he perceives around him. This is not to say he is the only person in his poems. Many of the best ones are presentations of other characters: he has a large dramatis personae. But there is a central persona who speaks in the long sequence, "The Walled Cities", which is the showpiece of the book.

Siebrasse's poems do not lend themselves to short quotations: it is necessary to read them through. But, as an example of the way he handles language, I'll quote the following:

> Linda of the curls
> reads from her uncle's letter
> ... of the village in the delta where my enemy seduced the people. I set bombs in skins of houses; lungs flamed in my sight. I saw children run to the ruined laps of mothers. Yet I will survive tree and snow peak of rabbit, will come home to regain my act of love where it has flown before me over the water.

Perhaps one could claim that we need other writers to match Siebrasse's vision of horror with visions of something better, but his deserves to be read. *Man: Unman* is a powerful book, a myth of modern cruelty inside The Walled Cities where we try to survive.

books in review

WISE AND GENTLE

MARGARET LAURENCE, *The Fire-Dwellers*. McClelland & Stewart. $5.95.

STACEY MACAINDRA, the heroine of Margaret Laurence's latest novel, *The Fire-Dwellers*, is one of the most likeable losers in modern fiction. Vital statistics: thirty-nine years old, broad in the beam, under-educated, married to a laconic salesman, mother of four squabbling brats, chatelaine of a shabby Vancouver home. But who is Stacey, what is she? Lonely, bewildered, frustrated, desperately trying to find the person she once thought she was — in other words, a waif caught up in the universal search for identity.

Aspects of Women might serve as a general title to Mrs. Laurence's three explorations of female problems. There was the unforgettable Hagar, the bitter old woman of *The Stone Angel*; Rachel, the unrealized spinster of *A Jest of God*; and now in *The Fire-Dwellers* the most complex of these women, Rachel's married sister Stacey. In each of these novels Mrs. Laurence has managed to scratch through the cutaneous layers to the essential core of a human being.

Mrs. Laurence realizes that there are millions of other Staceys sorting dirty laundry and wiping dripping noses, but she never condescends to her frowzy housewife. Stacey is no tragic heroine, but she is a person worthy of respect for her valiant fight simply in coping from day to day. She is too honest to indulge in self-pity or self-delusion. She views herself with ironical contempt, but under the defence is a frightened little girl who got lost somewhere along the way.

The heart of Stacey's problem is that society forces so many roles upon her that she can find no clear line of continuity connecting one posture to another. By turns wife, mistress, mother, neighbour, all she knows is that she is expected to be beautiful, efficient, radiantly cheerful, and she is an abject failure in every department. It is significant that she is thirty-nine, that portentous dividing-line between playing at being grown-up and actually living with the consequences of adulthood. Her favourite day-dream is of herself as a teenager jiving with joyous abandonment. In one poignant scene, in outrageously unconventional garb she dances by herself in the recreation room while the children are napping. The pathetic vulgarity of her behaviour later strikes her when she catches a glimpse of her lovely fourteen-year-old daughter swaying gracefully to the music.

Stacey's relationship with her husband is one of the most remarkable achievements of the book. Mac seems to have something to say to her only when he reproaches her for spoiling the children. He seems to notice her only when he reminds her to get her hair done before an office party. He seems to be forever on the defensive with her in his awareness of her contempt for his job. Stacey's impulsive bluntness with his phony boss is a constant source of embarrassment to husband and wife. The final impression of Mac is of a man more lost than Stacey because he dare not look into the lower depths.

Their lovemaking is a swift, ritualistic act of necessity. When Mac appears to be attracted to a young girl in the office, Stacey cannot feel any real jealousy be-

cause she understands his frustrations which are so similar to her own. Circumstances lead her into a horrible sexual encounter with a warped buddy of her husband's. More meaningful, she has a brief affair with a sensitive young writer, but the abortive nature of the relationship intensifies the desperation of her situation. She is caught this side of utter humiliation at the age difference between them only because of the young man's understanding of her predicament.

The affair is an attempt to find some small personal area of her own. Increased guilt is the inevitable price Stacey pays for neglecting her children. By turns empathizing passionately with them, raging in exasperation at them, followed by tormented self-reproaches — this recurrent pattern of Stacey's relationship with her children is movingly credible. Moreover, each of the children emerges as a distinct, disturbing force in Stacey's life.

Stacey's struggles might have been described as disembodied states of mind. Margaret Laurence's major accomplishment in this novel is to make Stacey's inner and outer lives inextricably interconnected. As a physical presence, Stacey is undeniably there in her rumpled slacks, her nagging anxieties imaged in the glass of gin and tonic on the kitchen counter.

The novel ends in unresolved compromise. Some of the old problems disappear, others emerge to take their place. If there has been any progress in Stacey's development it has been an enlargement of understanding as she begins to comprehend that all the people around her are also living in burning houses, in persistent states of emergency. If this wider view seems somewhat arbitrarily imposed as an artistic solution it is because Stacey has so completely dominated our interest from beginning to end of this wise, gentle book.

PHYLLIS GROSSKURTH

BITTERSWEET AND BEAUTY

RUTH NICHOLS, *A Walk Out of the World.* Langmans. $4.95.

IF YOU HAVE READ *The Lord of the Rings, The Thirteen Clocks,* some Icelandic sagas, a Celtic fairy tale or two, and perhaps some Old or Middle English poetry (*The Wanderer, The Seafarer, Sir Gawain and the Green Knight*) and enjoyed any or all of them, then the chances are that you will enjoy this book. Whether Miss Nichols had, at eighteen, read any of the above, whether in other words she was "influenced" by Tolkien or Thurber if not the older, less known works, is unimportant if not exactly irrelevant, although one must point out that her knowledge of the "machinery" of Germanic-Celtic folklore and fairy tale is certainly impressive. The point is that this tale, if one attempts to "place" it, belongs in one of its aspects or another to the type of literature represented by the short and very scanty list above. There is an exiled king named Brand, with a younger brother named Thorn ("Lady," said the boy, "I am Thorn of the House of Wanderer"); there is a beautiful and royal great-great-grandmother with silvery eyes, the gift of second sight and the appropriate Welsh-sounding name of the Lady Iorwen; there is Auger, the dwarf, and Helm, the chief officer. There are Water Folk with royal purple hair and Forest Folk with

hair of green, and nasty grey creatures called "kobolds", somehow reminiscent of Thurber's "Todal", who have small sharp teeth and leave a nasty, nauseating smell behind them. There is also the usurper king Hagérrak, a contemporary of the Lady Iorwen and along with the kobolds, the moral "negative" of the story. Against him are placed the courage and purity of the hero and heroine, the brother and sister Tobit and Judith.

Judith and Tobit are, indeed, the real difference between this and most other fairy tales. They come to the exiled House of Wanderer not from the usual vague "across the sea" or "far away" or "another part of the forest", but from another space-time dimension, existing parallel to that of the people in the wood. They live in a bustling, ugly metropolis and in a dreary apartment block in the modern here and now. (Judith is even given the very "now" tranquilizer at one point in the story.) But Judith's hair and eyes — "hair as pale as silver and gray eyes" — link her to the Lady Iorwen and indicate to the exiles that somehow she is to be the saviour of the nation as surely as if she had showed up with a proclamation from the gods. The main part of the story is the narrative of the adventures of Toby and Judith after they wander into the woods near their home and through accident or fate step into another time and space.

But this is no mere *Connecticut Yankee in King Arthur's Court.* Judith and Tobit are established as different and unhappy in their "real" world right from the outset and they — particularly Judith — are happier in their new environment than they were in the modern city where they were born. Things are strange and sometimes frightening, but they have, in fact, found themselves as well as re-established the rightful king by the end of their adventure. And there is no truly happy ending; the marriage which takes place is between Helm and the Princess Angwen, not between Judith and Thorn — another difference from the traditional tale of faery. And there is no dim battle in the West, however much Hagérrak might resemble the Arthurian Mordred.

Yet Miss Nichols has captured the Celtic sense of bittersweet and beauty very well indeed. Also something of the darker strain of the Northern tales and poems. And the cadence of the speech — "Five hundred years ago I was queen of this land. The southern kings live long; it is a sorrow to them" — is not only suggestive of the Bible, but of a first-rate translation of something very old and very beautiful. The speech, the pictorial effects (torches, carven benches, glowing caves beneath the mountain, huge cats with glass claws, the tapestries and rich embroidered dresses) all contribute to this sense of beauty and wonder. And the illustrations (unfortunately we are told nothing about the illustrator except her name) are brilliant — always beautiful and often terrifying and completely faithful to the text. To the literary guidelist at the beginning I might add that if you like Beardsley or Burne-Jones you will be delighted by these drawings.

One either likes this kind of writing or one doesn't. Those who are presently concerned with literature as social protest may find this precious and maybe slightly decadent. Children who expect a simple fairy tale may find it too verbal or too complex. (And whoever heard of a "children's" villain who committed suicide?) I think therefore it will best appeal to children ten to fourteen and to adults (I say

this because it was being advertised as a children's book on one of our local radio stations). Miss Nichols sees it as a "fairy tale which verges on science fiction." I would be more inclined to leave the misleading word "science" out of it and simply call it a romance. A fine romance. I wonder where the author will go from here.

AUDREY THOMAS

EVERYMAN'S POEMS

WALTER BAUER, *The Price of Morning*, translated by Henry Beissel. Prism international. $4.75.

THESE POEMS by Walter Bauer (the original German appearing with the English versions *en face*) have an "everyman" quality setting them apart from today's hyperpersonal poetry. Yet we cannot call them "impersonal"; for if to be utterly committed is to be personally involved at the deepest level, then these poems are uniquely Bauer's in a suprapersonal sense that transcends the devices and mannerisms often resorted to by lesser poets to hallmark their work.

Walter Bauer, who emigrated to Canada from Germany in 1952, seems to write by just opening his lips and speaking poetically. He does not *discuss* with us: he looks us straight in the eye and *tells* us how it was then, how it is now. His former life in Nazi Germany, his present life as a Canadian, are the themes besetting his poetic consciousness. Recondite allusion, ambiguous imagery, are not for him: imagery there is, and immensely evocative, but its thrust is so direct that our response is immediate.

The magnificent series of twenty-six poems entitled "Fragment vom Hahnenschrei" grows out of the concept of the cockcrow that galvanizes the sleeper into awareness:

> The cock was awake.
> He was like
> A brilliant cloud from which
> His morning-crow came like a flash.

Bauer does not merely imply: This is how I hear a cock crow, this is how I see him erect in the dawn: he tells us that this is how a cock *is*:

> Magnificently
> His white feathers rustled
> In the first wind. . . .

and having read this we cannot imagine ever receiving a clearer image of a cock. In Henry Beissel's sensitive translation this is one of the many instances where his English not only conveys the essence of the original German but is highly poetic in its own right.

Predictably, many poems display the middle-aged émigré's nostalgia: "The knock on the door is/no longer for me" (from "Leaving the Apartment"). But this is balanced by "From Seven at Night till Four in the Morning":

> At two I hardly remember anything
> And wipe the leftovers of my life
> Into the garbage can. . . .
> At four I step into the sharp lonely wind
> And before the Milky Way fades
> I drink from it my freedom.

Morning is this poet's time of day—either as the ending of "a long night-shift" ("Dawn Came Grey as an Owl's Wing") or as the beginning of a new day seen existentially as a constant "now", as in "The Paper-boy":

> In the first morning light
> the paper-boy threw

the news of the world
Against closed doors. . . .
Whistling, the boy rode his cycle home.
The morning ran alongside,
A golden, barking dog.

Compassion for the nameless and a realistic sense of death pervade poem after poem. In "One Evening I Was King" Bauer obliterates all sentimentality:

I knew how to die,
How to die well, not everybody can do
that — . . .
Sinking down the way a branch bends,
suddenly collapsing with a crash
Like a stone
And silence — then the curtain. . . .
Death is quite different, I have learnt that
By dying.

The reason the poem "Canada" affects us so powerfully is not because Bauer offers his subjective impressions but because Canada speaks:

Here you receive another kind of wisdom,
Bitter and icy and not to everybody's
taste. . . .
The wind blows cold from Labrador:
I have a message for you from the ice age.

Occasionally he speaks from the battlefield, as in "This Was Not the Way Men Screamed"; and at times bitterness and irony come welling up:

To sing in old measures
and pretend that still there are harps —
where do people find the courage?

And yet: it is the poem "And Yet" that contains the quintessential Bauer in the quintessentially faithful English of Beissel:

Somewhere shots ring out every night,
laws stop up the breath of freedom, . . .
And yet we awake every morning,
we two, in perfect harmony.

LEILA VENNEWITZ

A VIEW OF HAWTHORNE

HUGO MCPHERSON, *Hawthorne as Myth-Maker* (University of Toronto Press). $6.50.

HEMINGWAY, IN A misguided but typical moment, described Hawthorne as one of those:

> who wrote like exiled English colonials from an England of which they were never a part. . . . Very good men with the small dried and excellent wisdom of Unitarians; men of letters . . . gentlemen . . . all very respectable. . . . Nor would you gather that they had bodies. They had minds, yes. Nice dry, clean minds. This is all very dull, I would not state it except that you ask for it.

Although the statement is typically exaggerated — as Hemingway at his worst usually did exaggerate — it is essentially an image of Hawthorne and his work that even the recent "golden age of Hawthorne criticism", to which Professor McPherson refers in his preface, has not done much to shake. And *Hawthorne as Myth-Maker* does not substantially change the image either. The Hawthorne who dropped "germinous seeds" into the soul of Melville and exerted a powerful influence on not only Henry James and George Eliot but Hardy too; the Hawthorne who projected both the complex quality of American culture for the first time, as well as some of the most delicately complex studies of human character and relationships in American fiction — this Hawthorne does not emerge in the book. One does not blame Professor McPherson. His ambitious intention is to present an image of Hawthorne as fascinating and meaningful as this:

> The essays which follow will attempt to define, . . . the nature of Hawthorne's . . . inward vision or drama . . . the myth-making nature of Hawthorne's imagination

Unfortunately the intention is not as fully realized as one might have hoped. And it is not, largely because Professor McPherson is not altogether able to escape the danger that he is clearly aware of: the imposition of "an external frame of ideas" on the novels and tales. This is most clear, I think, in his final chapter in which he constructs an ingenious wheel pattern (that reminds one in many ways of Yeats' wheel of personality types in *A Vision*), in terms of which he then categorizes the main character types in Hawthorne's fiction. But the danger haunts and at times (incubus-like) stifles intention in the earlier chapters too, which examine the way in which Hawthorne conceived and handled, in his own peculiar fashion, classical myth and the facts of New England history to create his own " 'personal mythology' — the personae and conflicts of his inward drama."

Another weakness is not connected so much with intention as with an apparent uncertainty about the nature of the audience to which the book is addressed. A good deal of the discussion of the major romances — the core of the book — is taken up with plot summaries that do not seem essential to an understanding of Professor McPherson's interpretations — if one has oneself read the books. (One would assume that readers of a volume in "The University of Toronto Department of English Studies and Texts" had done so.) And this confirms one's sense that Professor McPherson is not prepared to take risks or to follow his insights as far as they might legitimately take him. Thus in his discussion of *A Blithedale Romance* he points out some of the ways in which Hawthorne has made use of Greek myth. It is clearly the case that Old Moodie is a Zeus figure but surely just as significant that Hollingsworth is to be related to Hephaestus, and while a part of the pattern follows the Greek myths it is overlaid by, interlocks with others, Christian and Faustian, in a very complicated way that Professor McPherson's purpose prevents him from pursuing. The same kind of limitation occurs in the discussion of *The House of the Seven Gables* where Hawthorne's quite detailed use of the Eden myth interlocks with that of the Greek myths to which Professor McPherson draws our attention. One would have wished also that the *complexity* of Judge Pyncheon's self, as projected in terms of "the sunny image of

his ancestor" might have been explored and made clear. "Endowed with common-sense, as massive and hard as blocks of granite, fastened together by stern rigidity of purpose . . . " he certainly was but in even the most casual of encounters with the innocent Phoebe, Hawthorne speaks of him in terms of the cloud that embraced Ixion and adds, with characteristic explicitness:

> although Judge Pyncheon's glowing benignity might not be absolutely unpleasant to the feminine beholder with the width of a street, or even an ordinary-sized room, interposed between, yet it became quite too intense when this dark, full-fed physiognomy . . . sought to bring itself into actual contact with the object of its regards.

The most rewarding part of Professor McPherson's book is that in which he examines seriously and at length Hawthorne's treatment of Greek myths in *A Wonder Book* and *Tanglewood Tales*. This is new, interesting and useful. Too often in the rest of the book one is tantalized by the suggestion of interpretations that are never fully developed. This does lead one back to the books, which is one of the things, one assumes, that criticism should do. However one wishes that Professor McPherson had been either more or less ambitious in his pursuit of that imagination that appeared to Hawthorne's contemporary Melville to be as powerful and comprehensive as Shakespeare's.

W. F. HALL

INDIAN FESTIVALS

GEORGE CLUTESI, *Potlatch*. Gray's Publishing. $5.95.

THIS BOOK is a simplified account of the Tloo-qwah-nah feast, a Nootkan version of those pan-Coastal ceremonial feasts which Canadians of European descent have come to call "potlatches." Most of the ceremonial and social life of the Coastal peoples was regulated and ordered at such gatherings. They were banned by the government between 1884 and 1951, a ruthless blow at the heart of Coast Indian culture which is still remembered with bitterness.

Clutesi, besides being a carver and painter, is an expert on the dance and music of the Nootka. As a member of the nobility of the Tse-shaht Nootka (this is implied, at least, in his book) he owns a number of impressive dances. He is himself a singer, a dancer, and a teacher of Indian dance. He is thus a man of the theatre, who is here describing a form of ritual art which he knows intimately.

He has obvious deficiencies as a writer; his style is all too similar to that of those British Columbian writers, from George Griffin and Isabel Ecclestone Mackay to Christie Harris, who have written popular accounts of the mythology and customs of pre-Christian British Columbia. As to his versifications of traditional speeches, the less said about them the better —

> . . . The dance, the play of great import to us all. This inheritance we must not let fall.

When one gets beneath this rather sticky surface, though, one sees that there

is an interesting mind at work. Clutesi also shows real acuteness of observation outside his immediate area of concern. The descriptions of nature, though stylistically gelatinous, are vivid and accurate in detail.

As an example of the precision of Clutesi's description of the music and dances I quote the following two sentences.

> The song was slower in tempo but with a more intricate beat. The basic three beats were discernible but at frequent intervals it rambled to five faster beats in a row without a rest.

This description is about as concise as a verbal description of music can be and still avoid technical jargon. Another example, describing part of a sea-serpent dance:

> On the third round of the song the sea-serpent was livelier and when the song leader intoned the words of the chorus he seemed more alert, more expressive in his movements and when the chorus was reached he danced with renewed vigor, prancing, gyrating, moving next to the earthen floor on his haunches, ending the dance with a burst of whirls on his bended knees to dart behind on the last boom of the very loud drum.

The faded prose produces an impression of romantic vagueness; but I can say, having seen the dance in question, that the description is as precise as a choreographer's diagram.

This book shows that the Wolf Ritual of the Nootka was, like the Cannibal Dance of the Kwakiutl, concerned with the taming of the barbaric element in man. Civilization is, after all, a state of mind, not of technology. Many of its various dances depicted anti-social behaviour only to show it brought under control by reason, self-restraint, consideration for others, respect for legitimate authority, and the other social virtues. Various frightening creatures of the forest (the wolves, the sad wanderer of the woods who has lost his soul, the brutal dog-eater) represented that savagery of the instincts which must be understood and conquered, as did various images of lust, both beguiling (the sirens of the woods) and comic (the mink, and the stupid though amiable "Yellow Cedar Face"). True, there is an ambiguity here which perceptive readers will sense; but nevertheless the dance is seen primarily as an image of order and reason, an interesting contrast to the "Dionysian" image of Northwest Coast ritual presented by Ruth Benedict and some other anthropologists. The lesser dances often had charm and a simple elegance, or a good-natured rustic humour.

Because this is a book intended for the ordinary reader, perhaps even for older juveniles, the greatest emphasis is placed on the external colour of the ceremonies. The meaning of the rituals is expounded by Clutesi on two levels, that of social order and that of individual morality. There is much moral beauty in this exposition. Though there are indications that these rituals once symbolized cosmological events as well, Clutesi does no more than hint at this aspect of the symbolism. It is not clear whether this level of meaning has been forgotten over the years, or whether the author is aware of it but has chosen not to reveal it to the profane.

On the surface this is simply another "colourful" book about Indians. Beneath the surface it is something rather more than that. It should be read by any person interested in the pre-Christian cultures of Canada. British Columbia in this context is still in a stage comparable to

that of Mexico and Peru a century or so after the Conquest. At that time Indians, most of them of noble birth, were still writing, though often in inadequate Spanish, accounts of the older civilizations. For all its deficiencies of style, Clutesi's book might ultimately prove to be as important as those of Ixtlilxochitl, Tezozomoc and Garcilaso de la Vega.

NORMAN NEWTON

UNE MOISSON POUR LE SPECIALISTE

DAVID HAYNE ET MARCEL TIROL, *Bibliographie critique du roman canadien-français 1837-1900*. University of Toronto Press.

A MESURE QUE LE roman canadien-français occupe une place de plus en plus importante dans la production littéraire du Canada Français, la nécessité se fait sentir de remonter à ses sources pour en découvrir les composantes psychologiques. David Hayne et le regretté Marcel Tirol, en publiant leur bibliographie critique du roman canadien-français du dix-neuvième siècle, viennent combler le voeux des chercheurs qui trouveront parmi les onze cent cinquante références de la bibliographie bien des réponses à des questions restées controversées.

La liste des auteurs est précédée d'une énumération de tous les ouvrages qui éclairent, d'une façon ou d'une autre, le roman canadien. Parmi les 239 titres on trouvera des thèses importantes comme celle de Tuchmaïer sur l'évolution de la technique du roman canadien-français et l'ouvrage, peu connu au Canada, de Virgile Rossel, critique suisse, sur la littérature française hors de France.

Suit la liste des auteurs, qui sont au nombre d'un millier. C'est ici que l'appareil critique se révèle d'un grand secours pour compléter l'histoire littéraire.

Dans quelle mesure Aubert de Gaspé a-t-il été redevable à l'abbé Casgrain pour la rédaction de ses *Anciens Canadiens*, restés un des classiques de la littérature canadienne-française? Par un choix judicieux de citations, tirées de la correspondance d'Aubert de Gaspé et de l'abbé Casgrain, Hayne et Tirol permettent au lecteur d'arriver à la conclusion que *Les anciens Canadiens* doivent peu à celui qui s'est piqué de tenir la littérature canadienne-française sur les fonts baptismaux. En effet, selon l'aveu de l'abbé Casgrain, il se serait borné à suggérer à Aubert de Gaspé des modifications concernant les premières pages et la conclusion. A l'avenir, les critiques qui se pencheront sur le dix-neuvième siècle canadien devront tenir compte de ces révélations, qui les dispenseront d'attribuer à l'abbé Casgrain une influence qu'il n'a pas exercée.

Les notes ne sont pas toutes de ce poids. D'habitude elles viennent compléter ce que l'on sait sur les romanciers peu importants de l'époque. Au No 967, consacré à Joseph Marmette, on lira l'analyse des ambitions littéraires de celui qui, inspiré par l'exemple de Walter Scott, eût désiré doter la littérature canadienne-française de grandes fresques historiques.

Bref, la bibliographie de Hayne et de Tirol contient une abondante moisson pour le spécialiste. L'épithète *critique*, abusivement employée par tant de compilateurs, est ici justifiée et garantit à cet ouvrage de référence une place de choix sur les rayons de toutes nos bibliothèques.

GERARD TOUGAS

LYRIC SPECTRUM

PETER TROWER and JACK WISE, *Moving Through the Mystery*. Talon Books, $5.95.

In Patagonia once
so legend has it,
the giant sloth was domesticated,
stabled in caves
and ridden
like a grotesque elephant.

Apocryphal perhaps
but a brave tale
and I see the shaggy tribesmen
prodding their behemoths
toward Tierra Del Fuego
in the drafty daybreak of the world.

"The Sloth Riders" — from Peter Trower's *Moving Through The Mystery*. It manages — and so do many other poems in this collection — to capsulate a very large consciousness in a flashing image, like a spark flaring in a colored sky. It is almost a haiku.

This is Trower's second book. The first, *Poems for a Dark Sunday*, was published privately. This second is the next best thing to private publication; only 1,000 copies have been printed. Too bad. This is good poetry. Open, clean, rich, properly brooding, and appropriately melancholy. These, too, are really poems for a dark Sunday. Some, like the title itself, are too artful. They are too patently "good poems", good, well-scrubbed, well-behaved poems with excellent posture, clean teeth and their shoes on the right feet. Clichés. (The april voice/ entreats/ from april years,/ plaintive,/ sadarrogant,/ earlypure/as all her gardenias.)

Others are too Profound. (There is no defense in dogma . . . / there is no escape in history . . .) And finally, to be done with the eviscerating, there are a few which can be dismissed as beautiful head poetry, great to read if one is stoned and velvet moths are crawling about in your brain, but otherwise too far out to be worth the effort of spooling in one lysergic-soaked image or peyote-peppered line at a time.

As for the rest — the bulk — they are crystal. They are a lyric spectrum emerging like the passage of light through the prism of Trower's senses. Tender as three-day bruises. Fragile. And yet some contain lava and spices. The temperature varies, and so do the seasons. The moods are sharply etched. Trower has good control, lots of power, lots of perception.

And Jack Wise, of course, has kaleidescopes in his head. He is somewhere between an archaeologist obsessed with Quezalcoatl and a Gestalt therapist, Paul Goodman for instance, working out his conception of the whole and interrelatedness and ecology. Excellent!

The matching of Trower and Wise is a happy one, and not coincidental since they are functioning on the same wavelength. How do you illustrate, for instance, a poem called "the sea runs diagonally"? Well, Wise's illustration is pure Wise and yet perfect for the poem.

Much of the material will strike urban readers as falling hopelessly into the nostalgia trap. Trower seems to be writing between dips in Walden Pond. Yet the moods of the poems — Tom Thompson, Thoreau; Trower's cadences reach back deep into these heroes — are not artificial. He has been living for years on the Sunshine Coast, between Robert's Creek and Gibson's, and the background is all real. It is for this reason that one is tempted to describe the poems as being aboriginal; they are connected to their environment;

everything is alive, and Trower himself is open to the flow every bit as much as the Patagonians on whose sunken star he takes his bearing.

But lest one assume from this that Trower is nothing more than a hermit, cut off from whatever the mainstream might be, it needs to be added that he pays his political dues. "A New Anarchy" is as fine a manifesto of the New Left-hippie-dope-Zen-ecological-group-grope-anti-war "movement" as can be found anywhere. No accident that *The Georgia Straight* used Wise's illustration of it for the cover of one edition.

> All dawn will detonate in a phoenix reassessment . . . the chrysalis will split and the butterflies of us burst forth

Even the politics is not bad. Apocryphal perhaps, but brave.

ROBERT HUNTER

NEWTON'S VARIATIONS

NORMAN NEWTON, *The Big Stuffed Hand of Friendship*. McClelland & Stewart, $5.95.
NORMAN NEWTON, *Thomas Gage in Spanish America*. Queenswood House, $6.00.

THIS IS NORMAN NEWTON'S third novel. Two previous books, *The House of Gods* and *The One True Man*, dealt with Mexico's archaic past. Both these novels had the curious charm of the prose romance rather than the characteristic psychological complexities of contemporary fiction. In each, character was subordinated to the much richer mosaic of history and archeology that informs the background to these books. *The Big Stuffed Hand of Friendship*, while a radical departure in treatment, is not so in theme; for all three books examine the dilemma of the moral man in a society whose extensive corruption makes him ineffectual and leaves him to a lonely pursuit of personal virtue.

The Big Stuffed Hand of Friendship is satirical in intent, and like satire it may vex as much as it diverts. It will certainly vex all those who wish to escape the relentless morality of the book and its total lack of radical sentimentality in dealing with the character of native Indians or the social-moral quagmires of small town life. In commenting on these Mr. Newton makes his point with the moral precision of a medieval theologian combined with the tragic perspective of a poet.

The novel opens with a Coast Indian version of the Great Flood. We move from this account of destruction by water, the elemental and tragic consequence of evil on a cosmic scale, to the grimy seduction of a young Chinese girl, evil on a petty human scale. Mount Simms, the Mt. Ararat of the Indian myth, broods over the sleeping town of Port Charles. Port Charles is obviously both a composite portrait of many small British Columbian towns and a microcosm of society.

It should be pointed out that the scope of Mr. Newton's satire extends beyond the limitations of the purely social. The satirical sweep of his novel goes beyond a *Main Street* or a *Babbitt*. To fail to grasp this is to misunderstand the entire book. From the beginning to the final paragraph in the epilogue which describes the lesser and therefore symbolically meaner animals' attempt to overthrow the kingly Lion, the novel works with the themes and images of destructive corruption, damnation and precarious salvation. Thus the characters, while they might seem

exaggerated fantastics, and therefore unbelievable, are so only if viewed from the perspective of a limited realism. They are in fact grotesques, images of a cumulative debris of petty vices which coalesce into moral monstrosities. The Reverend Mortimer Grubb, the with-it Anglican clergyman, a latent homosexual, hag-ridden by lust for both sexes, seems incredible and unconvincing when in fact he is but the logical extension of a spiritual and intellectual bankruptcy. Bertram Rawlins, more repugnant because more pivotal, and prestigious in his society, is an equally powerful grotesque.

Rawlins is the completely secularized man, a complex snarl of conventional attitudes without any vestige of moral conviction, yet possessed of an ominous private megalomania and a ferocious bigotry that exudes, "from his very pores, the mindless and savage determination of a small, bad-tempered dog".

Where the Reverend Grubb, ludicrous as he is, inspires some compassion because Grubb despite his bathos suffers, Rawlins inspires only repulsion. The lust for power animates Rawlins. A desperate need for spiritual revitalization, no matter how dangerously spurious and bizarre the means, drives Grubb.

Nor does the satiric thrust stop here. A conference of Canadian poets held in Jefferson High School, of which Rawlins is principal, affords a sharp commentary on the cliché flabbiness of much that passes for contemporary verse. This is a series of burlesqued vignette portraits of poetic ego-maniacs. An amusing tour de force in itself, it is perhaps less impressive than those sections of the novel which describe the struggle and defeat of Stanley Maxwell and his sister Mercy in their attempt to find a way to live with dignity and honour among the citizens of Port Charles.

Stanley and Mercy, along with Wounded Knee, the Indian slum district, form the impressive pivotal core of the novel. The native Indians are drawn with a scrupulosity that allows for neither easy sentiment nor palliative idealization. Thus Stanley in particular emerges as totally and believably human. We see the slow subtle warping of his character into bigotry and hate. He and his sister are native aristocrats and Stanley is not without aristocratic hauteur. In plain language he is sometimes a snob. What other salve does he have to soothe the wounds that either bare sufferance or outright indignity had inflicted? He and Mercy were, "destroyed in the gentler Canadian way which cripples but does not dispatch". Stanley is unjustly dismissed and humiliated by Rawlins. He gets drunk as a result and ends up in jail. Mercy is seduced by the town's salesman — Lothario Ben McTavish, who has already seduced and abandoned Shirley Chang, a young Chinese girl.

The brother and sister retreat to their village. On the small cluttered gill netter that takes them there Stanley indulges in the bitter ruminations that form the moral norms for the novel, "the chiefs were men of taste and generosity — but the whites hated all this generosity, authority, legitimacy. They were devils eaten by avarice and hatred of nobility."

Only Simon Green, the ineffectual best-intentioned character in the novel, is even dimly aware of these values. And Simon can do little but cultivate his garden, a thesis on the thirteenth century Majorcan theologian Felix Lull. Simon, the representative of a limited virtue, is besieged by the crude forces of Port

Charles' moral shabbiness. A teacher in Rawlin's school, Simon is bullied by Rawlins, almost seduced by the pretentious and vulgar Jennifer Connell, and teased by the Chinese girl for whom he suffers a callow infatuation.

But while incapable of active heroism, Simon is stubbornly upright. He cannot be bought, seduced or coerced. He is guilty of a sentimental mawkish lust for Shirley but he comes to recognize and resolve this. In the end he remains his own man. In the final holocaust of the Indian riot Simon sees Rawlins and Maud Grubb his mistress caught in a ludicrously compromising position that will destroy his power in the town, restore Stanley's job and vindicate his and Simon's opinions of Rawlins. The forces of decency appear to triumph momentarily in the genuinely hilarious apocalypse of the finale.

The novel might strike an impatient reader as contrived and wooden. It has a certain inelasticity. But this is only because the various parts tend to juxtapose rather than flow into one another. The final effect is, therefore, that of a mosaic, of something architectural rather than fluidly organic in form.

Thomas Gage in Spanish America is Mr. Newton's contribution to the Great Travellers Series, whose general editor is George Woodcock. It is an absorbing and eminently readable retelling of Thomas Gage, a seventeenth century Dominican's travels throughout Spanish Mexico and central America. Thomas Gage was an English Roman Catholic, whose family suffered during the catholic persecutions in England and who sent their son, Thomas, aged about thirteen, to the Jesuit College for English boys at St. Omer near Calais. From St. Omer the young Gage went to Vallodolid where he became acquainted with the world of Spanish monasticism, a strange world that combined rigid discipline and self-sacrifice with the subtlest forms of intrigue.

Gage found himself eventually disinherited by his father, and persuaded by Father Antonio Melendez, a fellow Dominican, to join a missionary expedition to the Philippines. *The English American His Travel by Sea and Land, or a New Survey of the West Indies* was the result of this mission.

Gage, Mr. Newton writes, "was not a very good writer: his evangelical moralizing sits oddly in a literary style which tends toward a dusty Baroque floridity." Neither dust nor Baroque flourishes en-

cumber Mr. Newton's style. His book simplifies and chastens the original without losing any of its exotic vividness.

A curious and little known fact emerges from Thomas Gage's account of Mexican life in seventeenth century New Spain. It appears that the Spanish Church, far from being the vehicle of oppression it is generally assumed to be, was, to the contrary, as enlightened as any church of its time. Nor was Spanish rule in Mexico particularly oppressive. It was considered a point of doctrine, "that Indians were, as much as the Spaniards rational men". Rather, it was the conquistadores, motivated by rapacity and greed, who set aside this doctrine. Later the Creoles broke the laws of the Spanish Crown, which fixed the wages and attempted to regulate the working conditions of the Indians. The Spanish Crown attempted enlightened feudalism, the Creoles enforced a system approaching slavery.

The richness, diversity and Baroque opulence of life in New Spain is meticulously detailed in this little known work. Not only the brilliant landscape and luxuriant vegetation, but Gage's peculiar and extraordinary adventures are recorded, adventures that ended with his death during the English invasion of Jamaica. Before he died, Gage had escaped from Mexico, returned to England where he recanted, abjured his religion and turned spy and informer for the Puritan cause.

Norman Newton has produced a careful and thoroughly well-documented version of the travels, bringing the qualities of his own mind and style to help leaven the heavy prose of the original.

MARYA FIAMENGO

ON THE VERGE

**** HELGE INGSTAD, *Westward to Vinland.* Macmillan. $8.75. For the many who are fascinated by the story of the Norse discovery of North America, this is the indispensable book. It tells how Ingstad, after searching from Labrador to Rhode Island for the site of Vinland, finally discovered the remains of the Viking settlement of L'Anse aux Meadows on Newfoundland, and thus brought archaeological corroboration to the sagas. This is the popular account which Ingstad promises to follow by a version for the scholars, but it contains all the information needed to demote Columbus.

**** G.P.V. & HELEN B. AKRIGG, *1001 British Columbia Place Names.* Discovery Press, P.O. Box 6295, Postal Station G, Vancouver 8, $5.70. A much needed book, and a model of its kind, with an excellent introduction on the way places are named, and sound, often fascinating information regarding the places whose names have been selected. The authors write with a wit unexpected in such a context, and with a fine eye to incongruity and irony in naming. Everyone will miss the names of a few favourite places, and one sees gaps even in the knowledge of two such assiduous searchers for information. But, all in all, the book is first-rate, and one hopes it is only the precursor of a massive and definitive reference book by the same hands on the place names of the Pacific Coastal region.

*** GEORGE ALLAN ENGLAND, *The Greatest Hunt in the World.* Tundra Books. Paper, $2.95. This is a reprint (and also a retitling) of George Allan England's *Vikings of the Ice*, published in 1924, probably the best account ever written of the Newfoundland seal hunt, that "carnival of blood" which was — and to a minor extent still is — the nearest thing in the Anglo-Saxon world to the bullfight. With admirable fortitude England endured the hardships of the voyage into the ice, watched the bloody slaughter with a growing equanimity, and returned to write about it with the kind of skill and detachment that showed how human, and in some ways how admirably so, were these men who on the ice could live like demons. An interesting — if somewhat journalistic — study in the complexities of even the most simple men.

G. W.

EARLY MORNING, KINGSTON TO GANANOQUE:

The twenty miles to Gananoque
with tangled dust blue grass
burned, and smelling burned
along the highway
is land too harsh for picnics.
Deep in the fields
behind stiff dirt fern
nature breeds the unnatural.

Escaping cows canter white
then black and white
along the median, forming out of mist.
Crows pick at animal accidents,
with swoops lift meals—
blistered groundhogs, stripped snakes
to arch behind a shield of sun.

Somewhere in those fields
they are shaping new kinds of women.

by Michael Ondaatje