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Autumn, 1970

THE FRONTIERS OF LITERATURE

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OXFORD

THE FRONTIERS OF LITERATURE

THE FRONTIERS of literature have always been fluid. In a time of self-conscious intermedial miscegenation we are inclined to think our age unique. In fact, the only difference lies in the expansiveness of our techniques. Essentially, writers have always been interested in the activities of painters and musicians, and have always wished to have some part of them, and vice-versa. Similarly there has always been that borderland in which, in every generation, the art of literature had blended into those varieties of craftsmanship by which writers have earned their subsistence through serving the channels of information and propaganda which only in very recent years have earned the right to call themselves mass media.

The links between the writer and the visual artist have always been much closer than the advocates of “pure” or abstract painting have been willing to admit. Until the late nineteenth century nobody seriously doubted that the aim of painting was to illuminate themes that were identical with those of poetry or fiction. William Blake and William Hazlitt were only the precursors in the early nineteenth century of a movement which reached its height among pre-Raphaelites like Dante Gabriel Rossetti and William Morris, who regarded painting and poetry as almost interchangeable ways of expressing right sentiment, and which achieved a second peak among the Surrealists, whose paintings always had literary implications and whose poems rarely lacked visual suggestiveness. In our day of the early 1970s the conceptual artists on the visual side of the frontier and the concrete poets on the literary side have come very near to a hybridization of their complementary tendencies.

In music the links are subtler, but not less complex. There is a natural musical element in all poetry — developed to a pathological extreme in writers like Swinburne and Victor Hugo — and even in certain rhythmic kinds of prose. From

Yeats chanting his poems like mantras, to the musician setting them as songs, lies no great distance. From the earliest days of oral literature, the composition of verses to be sung has always been a function of the poet; music was a part of early drama, and for many centuries the masque has been a form mingling poetry, music, dance and dramatic action. With Monteverdi the masque developed into opera. For generations thereafter the provision of verses for operas was the work of mere literary hacks, but in the eighteenth century Lorenzo da Ponte, with his inimitable scripts for *Le Nozze de Figaro* and *Così fan Tutte*, raised the writing of libretti to an art, and in recent years many writers of standing have turned to writing for opera, including, in Canada, James Reaney, Mavor Moore and George Woodcock.

The newspaper apprenticeship of novelists is in no way new: indeed, if our age differs substantially from past generations, it is in providing *less* of a position in journalism for the serious writer. Perhaps our dailies are staffed by mute, inglorious Hemingways, but there is little evidence to support the assumption in the novels that are occasionally produced by reporters or columnists. In general, radio, television, and, to a lesser degree, film, have taken the place of newspapers and magazines as sources of income for writers and as means by which they can expand their artistic capabilities. Radio drama, now a literary form doubly vanished because of the decline of the medium and also because of the failure to publish the best of the scripts that yearly gather dust in the unresearched archives of the CBC, extended significantly in its day the non-visual potentialities of drama and produced a new kind of theatre for voices, while, if television has been disappointing in its encouragement of literary or quasi-literary experimentation, the same is not true of the cinema.

The scope of the collection of writings on the frontiers of literature which forms the present issue of *Canadian Literature* is necessarily limited by space, and there are aspects of the field which have hardly been touched — such as opera writing (though in past issues of *Canadian Literature* — Nos. 12 and 41 — James Reaney has written fascinatingly on the links between writer, musician and audience). Other aspects of the drama and its changing relation to writing are documented by Mavor Moore, while five members and former members of the Film Board staff chart the present fragile relationship between literature and the cinematic arts. As for the daily press, it is only in the review columns that any pretensions to literary excellence survives, and Phyllis Grosskurth, writing as a professional critic, throws doubt on the prospect of even that relationship retaining much significance. In general summary of the whole question of “Lit-

crature and the Mass Media", Patrick Lyndon establishes an important criterion when he defines literature as "what is written to last, with a serious purpose, and involving an imaginative re-ordering."

It is because, by and large, we accept this definition, that we have ignored some of the more ephemeral forms of intermedial relationships. A mere happening, amusing though it may be, is not by any definition literature or even related to literature. On the other hand, the work of concrete poets, on the borderland between the literary and the visual, has to be taken seriously, as Mike Doyle and Peter Stevens have done. Peter Stevens advances more widely, to survey writing from the point of view of the painter who seeks by literary means to expand the understanding of his art, and Audrey Thomas comes towards the same point from the other side, considering the writer as critic and appreciator of the visual arts; their essays overlap a little, but that is both inevitable and fruitful. We are brought nearer to the sources of creation by the feature prepared by P. K. Page; at once a fine poet and a fine painter, she demonstrates in prose, verse and graphic art how her various forms of expression have so admirably mingled.

There is a further aspect of the expanding frontiers of literature which involves a technological development that has been going on for many years. Print — as was pointed out long before McLuhan — modified literature and created new genres. So, in their ways, did radio, television and film, but we should not exaggerate their effects, since the ultimate aims of literature and the mass media are different, and new techniques are often means to old ends. One can see this by assessing the effect of the new tools which the writer has acquired over the past fifty years — typewriters, tape-recorders, photo-copying devices. They have all eased his task, and made quantitative changes in literary production theoretically possible, but the limitations of the brain's power to create indefinitely has meant that writers in the electronic age have done little better in terms of output than such mass-producers by pen and ink as Balzac and Ballantyne. But in terms of literary studies — of providing the *material* for more exact scholarship and more insightful criticism — it does seem, from the evidence presented in Sandra Djwa's convincing article — that the computer can, if it does nothing else, unseat some of the glibber and more superficial of literary judgments and prompt critics to work with greater care.

The frontiers of literature: by the geography of the human mind they touch on every province of consciousness, and there is always infiltration across the borders. Pure literature — that sterile ideal — can never in fact be achieved.

LITERATURE AND MASS MEDIA

Patrick Lyndon

THERE SEEM TO BE SO MANY happy jointures possible between literature and the mass media: style, content, modalities, audiences. The pen meets technology; the poet meets the mob. Perhaps, indeed, relations are so far advanced that mass media and literature are not just brushing lips but are old marrieds. Or the apparent contacts may be illusions, not even glances.

Mass-media is such a fat word, stuffed with boss dee jays at one end and ye olde global village at the other, that it is difficult to find the bone. It seems to me that, essentially, mass media transmit messages to which the great majority of the population expose themselves, often individually, nearly always voluntarily, and among Canadian adults any way for about six hours per day per person.¹ In North America mass media win over any single occupation, pursuit or recreation; they take more time than work, are more faithful than love, more persistent than allergy.

Most of us need reminding that exposure to mass media is usually voluntary. The only way, therefore, for a medium to become a mass medium is to attract and hold a large audience without the benefit of sanctions, elected power, authority or the fear of God. Mass media do it by providing individuals with "protection" against the terrors, threats, and insecurity of reality. It is not possible to understand mass media without understanding this; the form of the media, in comparison, is nugatory.

Mass media provide this protection by presenting, in simplified form, frequently and intensively, demonstrations of all the techniques by which man has attempted to neutralize and control the irrationality and cruelty of reality.

In a world which, in reality, is bloody and tyrannical the endless streams of reports on its activities — in page after newspaper page, on the hour, half hour, ten minutes before the hour, and so on — show that man can face it. The

announcer does not turn to stone. The newspaper is unsinged. The audience lives. In fact the purpose of the news is not only to show that man can face it but that he can apparently make sense of it, too.

In a world where, in reality, the best man often loses, the contests which mass media arrange are so fairly regulated, so equitably balanced, so ruthless against cheating that the best man wins—or at least the winner is the best man. Evidence that reality can be put in order by man for man.

In a world of dreadful chance, where disease, ugliness, stupidity, misfortune, poverty, disfigurement, friendlessness are *not deserved*, mass media redress the balance through projection. Helped by the many possibilities for projection which mass media provide—covered with acne she can seduce Apollo, fired today he has tenure this evening, tied to Wawa all their lives they can go around the world this morning and snuggle between the sheets in Buckingham Palace to-night. Mass media help to straighten out reality.

Even mass media's music has the same appeal. In a world of errant, minatory noise the kind of music mass media provide offers symmetry, regularity, and the comfort of easy resolutions. Once again man is in control.

And finally, when the scandal of human existence, in reality, becomes so gross that one would willingly lose one's senses and one's conscience, mass media like the carousel, fast cars, drugs, alcohol, rock, give a taste of both without seriously harming us. The kick in the eye of film, the punch-up on TV, the fires on the front pages of newspapers lure us, safely. Too much and the entire audience may turn on the gas: hence the omission of suicide stories in newspapers, the refusal of the CBC to show *Warrendale*. But, generally speaking, mass media help us to take leave, without actually shutting the door on us; in fact always bringing us back for more.

Mass media, in short, are society's great *psychic regulator*. They shape up reality. Around the clock. And the majority depend on them.

Surely the media publish or broadcast material which is not so relentlessly regulatory? What about *Anthology*? What about NET? What about Cyril Connolly in *The Sunday Times*, Saul Bellow in *Atlantic*? What about *Ulysses* at Loew's? But none of these gets near a mass audience. When the first words of the announcer herald *Anthology*, dials turn; when the movie house marquee shows *Ulysses*, heads turn. NET, *The Sunday Times*, *Atlantic*, cater to special audiences; they are simply not mass media.² Those who forget that exposure to mass media is voluntary are sure that if Lawrence Welk were forced to play Berio or *Reader's Digest* obliged to serialize *A la recherche du temps perdu* there

would be a rub off. But it's turn-off. The majority come to mass media for services they need. If a medium does not provide this service at all, or insufficiently, it cannot expect to attract a mass audience.

IS LITERATURE a part of this?

NASA has made us all so etymological and McLuhan so morphological that many people would probably define literature as anything written, and would not flinch from including washroom signs, the wrapping around Panchromatic-X, and the text on a dollar bill. But taking all words back to their roots and always defining content as its form is not always useful.

Any reasonable definition of literature it seems to me, like *Canadian Literature's* itself, has to be much more restrictive, denoting what is written to last, with a serious purpose, and involving an imaginative reordering. Literature, then, is an art, and *belles lettres* is another way of putting it.

What society expects from art is, in fact, that it should be the *psychic unregulator*. The artist is charged by society to extend the area of man's psychic security by disorienting him, by threatening him, and by constantly changing pace. This does not mean the artist does not provide pleasure but it is pleasure with a penalty. Thus all the rewards which mass society seeks, the artist denies. Instead of helping to control reality, he flings it at us. Instead of solutions he gives problems, and instead of resolution, suspension.

Consequently whether we wish it or not, whether it saddens us or not, whether it irks art-promoters or offends liberals the truth is that, among the sane at least, art can claim only those who have enough psychic security to risk art's assault. And this is a small minority. For it must be evident now that those of us in education or art-promotion who might be best equipped to expand that minority, do not know how to do it without tearing society apart and starting all over again. All one can do is simply to expose. However reluctant we may be to recognize it or however distasteful it is to write it (for it is a desperate truism) even the majority of college graduates in North America — after maybe 14-20 years of education — are still corralled between the fences of consumer magazines, Sears pictures, popular musicals, and Johnny Carson.³ If this seems overdrawn, look around the plane next time you fly (where the proportion of college graduates is usually very high, judging from the rings). Indeed look at the next reader of *Reader's Digest*; according to the magazine it is read by nearly half of all college-educated Americans.⁴

Only the visual arts today seem able to move outside their catch basin. Often perhaps their appeal is misleading or meretricious but no matter if they manage to catch the eye. It is here where art and mass media can and do marry.

It is very difficult to see how this can possibly happen with literature. It must be evident even to those who have been litterateurs from infancy (if indeed there is any other kind) that literature has worked itself out of all but a highly specialized audience. This is not because electronic media suddenly gave man back his integrity, for the death of literature as a potentially demotic force seems to have long antedated radio and TV. Maybe the American and French revolutions coincided, in the West any way, with the rejection of literature as a possible instrument for general public use and its consignment to the aristocrat's attic. To the unlettered the written word cannot often have been friendly and hence was without much support in the new dispensation.

Alternatively others would say that the common man's instinct warned him that literary men tended to be *inhuman* and therefore not to be emulated. George Steiner points out that some of the men who devised and administered Auschwitz "had been trained to read Shakespeare or Goethe, and continued to do so." He wonders whether there is not "between the tenor of moral intelligence developed in the study of literature and that required in social and political choice, a wide gap or contrariety." Steiner may be voicing the unspoken suspicion of non-literary man.

At any rate, literature has been shelved, and one limb has been decaying after another: as a form with a potentially public appeal poetry dropped off long ago; drama as literature is insupportable; only porno and Judaism keep the novel breathing.

All this is not solely because of a sociological shift. We have to recognize that literature's need to petrify what is inherently fluid — language — makes it go out of date much more readily than the other arts. I wonder if we realize not only how difficult, but how incomprehensible *centuries* of literature are to those who are not cognoscenti. Indeed by a reverse of the geometric progression in which we glory I dare say that today 25 years is the maximum period requiring no major readjustment by the ordinary reader of English. For consider this passage written just outside the limit, published 27 years ago. Many critics would consider this writer's style preeminently limpid and unvarnished. But read him now not as a critic but as an ordinary reader, in 1970:

I had a naturally ingenious and constructive mind and the taste of writing. I was youthfully zealous of good fame. There seemed few ways of which a writer need not be ashamed by which he could make a decent living. To produce something

saleable in large quantities to the public, which had absolutely nothing of myself in it; to sell something for which the kind of people I liked and respected would have a use; that was what I sought and detective stories fulfilled the purpose.⁶

They don't talk like that any more. Maybe they don't because of mass media, which brings us back to the beginning. Certainly there are points of contact between literature and mass media, but they are very tenuous: quirks of style, uneasy satire. Contact can never be more adhesive, for literature and mass media are antipathetic in function and in form and we do not know how to make them friends.⁷

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ This composite figure is a very rough amalgamation of BBM and CDNPA figures and data from various broadcast listening and viewing surveys published in *Marketing* over the past two years. However since the bases of the various studies are dissimilar the extent of weighting needed to yield a composite figure affects the reliability. The latest composite U.S. figure, no doubt cobbled together from different studies in the same way, is reported in the statement on Violence in Television Entertainment Programmes issued by the National Commission on the Causes and Prevention of Violence on September 23, 1969 as follows: "a typical middle-income American male devotes a total of about five hours a day to the mass media."
- ² *The Sunday Times* has a fair sized "quality" audience but the *News of the World's* circulation is four times bigger and the latter indeed claims to reach 41 per cent of all the adults in Britain (British Rates and Data, December 1968). *The Atlantic* shows a circulation of 325,167 (in *Standard Rates and Data*, December 27, 1969 where it is listed as a 'class publication') but *Readers Digest* shows 17,585,611 circulation in the same issue.
- ³ *Readers Digest* claims a readership of 40 million adults, 12.1 million of whom are "college-educated" representing "42.6% of all people who have gone to college" in the United States. (*Advertising Age*, January 5, 1970. page 34).
- ⁴ Even if it can be argued that "literature" is delicately geared to the hierarchical range of man so that what the naive reader takes from *True Romance* may be identical with what a more mature reader takes from *Anna Karenina*, that Arthur Hailey and Robert Lowell provide the same insights but to different classes, the hierarchy and the classes remain.
- ⁵ Steiner, George, *Language and Silence*. 1967.
- ⁶ Waugh, Evelyn, *Work Suspended*, first published 1943.
- ⁷ It's impossible not to disagree with John R. Seeley (*Time's Future in Our Time*); "Let us be clear that at least one course will not be open to us. We will not be able to afford, because it will be unworkable, a society whose 'cultural' divisions run as deep, and whose cultural discrepancies rise as high, as do the present discrepancies and divisions in wealth and income." But it cuts no ice to state it. The only solution is to let literature, at least, go hang.

THE DECLINE OF WORDS IN DRAMA

Mavor Moore

I N JOYCE'S *Finnegan's Wake*, a play is announced which never takes place. H. C. Earwicker dreams it up in his dream, for presentation at the Feenichts Playhouse. It is "adopted from the Ballymooney Bloodriddon Murther by Bluechin Blackdillain (authorways 'Big Storey')." It is a pity we never had the play, for if the dialogue had been in the same style — language mocking language — it might have suggested that in the theatre words have reached the end of the line. Joyce ducked the challenge by making Earwicker's play a Mime. But in Samuel Becket's recent forty-second epic *Breath*, words are dispensed with and vocal communication reaches the zenith of abstraction: inhalation, baby's cry, exhalation.

Finnegan's Wake was published in 1939. The previous year the French iconoclast Antonin Artaud had published his *Le Théâtre et son Double*, in which he sought to demolish the literary basis of theatre in favour of the "concrete language" of the stage, which "is truly theatrical only to the degree that the thoughts it expresses are beyond the reach of the spoken language." Artaud's proscription applied equally to the written text. "The fixation of the theatre in one language . . . betokens its imminent ruin, the choice of any one language betraying a taste for the special effects of that language; and the dessication of the language accompanies its limitation."

Has this ruin already overtaken us?

Artaud saw at the root of our times' confusion "a rupture between things and words, between things and the ideas and signs that are their representation." Wanting a theatre which would "break through language in order to touch life", he cursed our "artistic dallying with forms, instead of being like victims burnt at the stake, signalling through the flames." He makes a frontal assault on the whole canon of dramatic literature:

We must get rid of our superstitious valuation of texts and *written* poetry . . . Let the dead poets make way for others. Then we might even come to see that it is our veneration for what has already been created, however valid and beautiful it may be, that petrifies us, deadens our responses, and prevents us from making contact with that underlying power, call it thought-energy, the life force . . . or anything you like. Beneath the poetry of the texts there is the actual poetry, without form and without text. And just as the efficacy of masks in the magic practices of certain tribes is exhausted — and these masks are no longer good for anything except museums — so the poetic efficacy of a text is exhausted.

In order to survive, Artaud insists, the theatre must make capital of “what *differentiates* it from text, pure speech, literature, and all other fixed and written means . . . On the stage, which is above all a space to fill and a place where something happens, the language of words may have to give way before a language of *signs* whose objective aspect is the one which has the most immediate impact upon us.” Even when words are used, he wants them used differently: “Let there be a return to the active, plastic, respiratory sources of language, let words be joined again to the physical motions that gave them birth, and let the discursive, logical aspect of speech disappear beneath its affective, physical side, i.e., let the words be heard in their sonority rather than be exclusively taken for what they mean grammatically . . .”

Like the philosopher Hume, and like MacLuhan in our own day, Artaud is of course sitting out on a limb and sawing himself from the trunk with his own argument: using words to plead that words no longer plead well. But like them he cannot be easily dismissed. If professors of English literature do no more than smile loftily at his impertinent depreciation of their vested interest, and if theatre-goers who crowd the latest “happening” have never heard of him, Artaud has proved too prophetic to be put down as a crank hypothesist. Like most prophets, however, he was less a foreseer than a seer, observing around him currents whose direction and force others less percipient underestimated. In retrospect, we can see how it happened. From the vantage point of today’s spontaneous and often improvised theatre, more apt to reveal bodies than minds, and even from the calculated laryngeal ritual of such groups as Grotowski’s Polish Laboratory Theatre, we can see the chain of now seemingly inevitable steps which led us here. What Artaud did not perhaps allow for, in his concentration on the live theatre, was the possibility that if his diagnosis was correct the film might displace the stage as a dramatic form for the general public, and the theatre itself — like a virgin protesting her purity — lose more in popularity than it gained in self-esteem.

I do not propose to deal here with the traditional arts of mime and dance, or

with the more recent silent cinema, which have always been primarily wordless, but with those forms of dramatic art traditionally employing a verbal text: the play (known as "straight" in the theatre), the opera (*seria* and *buffa*), the musical comedy, and the dramatic film — although the categories have become somewhat blurred. I wish to suggest the various influences which seem — at an astonishing pace — to be shaping the theatre and the lyric theatre of today and tomorrow, and which may change forever the anatomy of dramatic criticism.

It is no news, of course, that the television age inclines even literate people to think visually — a habit which President Pusey of Harvard feared would lead us to "think with the eye's mind instead of the mind's eye." But I hope we are beyond the point where any but a sheltered philosopher would claim that the stimulation of the mind is antithetical to sensory awareness, or even that verbal language is always the best means of expressing thought, let alone emotion.

I have never seen the beginnings of the anti-verbal theatre traced to Maeterlinck, but when that volatile theorist noted that the most exciting drama in the world went on inside the head of an old man sitting quietly by the fire, he plainly started something. Chekhov was possibly the first great playwright to exploit the possibility of achieving a kind of reverse suspense by having his characters do nothing until you were ready to scream. Often nothing *ever* happened — and that was the point of it, just as later it became the point of *Waiting for Godot*. But while waiting for nothing to happen, and getting stirred up by pregnant pauses, may provide welcome variety and plenty of food for thought between stretches of activity, it is fundamentally an interstice — and certainly not one of the colourful and sensually exciting kind which provides the escape from daily toil so often required of the theatre, whether verbal or spectacular.

BY FAR THE MOST POPULAR form of theatre today is the "musical", the main features of which (despite the label) are scenic spectacle and dancing. The effect of the musical on the straight play has been to arouse a demand for equally galvanic frenzy in the staging of even the most relentlessly verbal drama, usually at the expense of the dialogue. It is one thing to see this kind of hyperthyroid *mise-en-scène* in works written for the style, such as *The Great White Hope* or *Indians*, but another to see Euripides and Shakespeare used as raw material for Walpurgisnacht. Moreover the increasing use of some form of thrust or apron stage — a fashion largely popularized in our time by Ontario's Stratford Festival Theatre — has made constant movement manda-

tory: in order to share their favours with the surrounding audience, the actors must resolve continuously — all too often with the result that half the audience gets the first half of a line and the other half the second. Speeches are not so much cut as lopped.

The musical, or its hyperactive equivalent in the straight play, is usually carefully choreographed and “set”. But a different style characterizes the free-wheeling improvisation of groups such as the Living Theatre, where dialogue is often made up by the performers as the play progresses (or whatever it does) and involves the more exhibitionistic of the audience as well. Much of the burden of communication is also put on sighs, wails, shrieks, grunts and other vocal but non-verbal expressions — all of which a writer is hard put to codify by anything more exact than “Oh!” or “Grrr!” In fact the dramatist, in this pluralistic kind of theatre, is no more than his title: “The word-man.”

If it is true that operas are first and foremost musical compositions, we need not concern ourselves with libretti except as singable collections of vowels and consonants; I do not agree with this, although we may enjoy opera in a foreign language *qua* music. But contemporary opera often exploits speech patterns and rhythms, and sometimes uses the very same improvisation and word-begging vocables that characterize our “straight” theatre. Here is a stage-direction from the electronic opera *Stacked Deck*, by the U.S. composers Richard Maxfield and Dick Higgins:

If the light is red or orange for ten seconds [*note that the cue is visual and mechanical, not musical*], he approaches the nearest lady and looks over her shoulder, grinning, and sends out a puff of smoke. If the light has not changed yet, and the lady has not reacted unfavourably, he may pick her up, set her on his shoulder, turn his head and kiss her leg, grin, set her down gently, and motion offstage. If she slaps him, he sings “Palas aron azinomas” [gibberish] and pinches her behind, then dodges away from her, his head drawn into his shoulders, chortling, and hides behind the nearest character. If she wants to go offstage, they go.

What has happened to bring us to this pass, it seems to me, is only intelligible if we view the theatre, both “straight” and lyric, in the context of the mechanical dramatic arts of film and television with which we are surrounded, and of the new mechanical means which technology has at the same time made available to the live theatre.

While it is true that radio, and sound recordings, provided an unparalleled opportunity for a flowering of the spoken word (and still do, if for a smaller audience), and while it is true that music and “sound effects” have always played

an important role in live theatre, the new technology has given us an immensely wider range of both visual and aural effects than the theatre possessed before. In film, moreover, *all* possible effects can be used *together*, can be carefully controlled and matched, and be just as carefully measured for proper amplification wherever the film is shown. Almost for the first time, that is to say, these elements are not necessarily separate and then wedded, not different and then blended, but facets or aspects of a singly conceived artistic whole. The words which characters in the drama are called upon to say or sing, then, are only one of these facets, and by no means necessarily the most important. (In fact, the effect is always funny when a character says something which we have already visually comprehended.) This is particularly obvious in the case of the close-up, where a slight movement of the eyes, or a breaking strand of rope, can literally speak volumes. A sting in the music, a sound effect, or a switch in its source, can do the same. The performer needs neither to explain nor to project.

Some of the technological advances that have enlarged the live theatre's armoury of effects need hardly be mentioned: sophisticated lighting, front and rear-projection, stereophonic sound, infinitely mobile scenery, and the like. And as with film, they can be used as aspects of a whole. But while most of these reduce the need for wordage to inform the audience of what is going on, there are other influences, many of them less obvious, which have contributed to the decline of the word.

One such is amplification itself. The film has accustomed our ears to amplified sound. We do not have to strain to grasp a whisper in a movie-house; it grasps us. Hi-fi recordings and electronic musical instruments have further deafened us, to the point where we can either quickly understand what we are meant to or ignore words or lyrics if comprehension is immaterial. In either case we have become unwilling to *reach* for speech — especially in many of the huge barns into which the economics of modern theatre has forced our productions. This development faced the theatre with a difficult choice: either amplify or go "intimate" — intimacy being best achieved by what the films cannot offer, an audience surrounding the players and even actual physical contact between them. Most musicals (which must play in larger auditoriums) use amplification throughout, even though this means sacrificing all subtlety in the delivery of the lines, since microphones reduce the range of the voice. Most straight plays turn instead to "audience involvement". It is not by chance that the greatest international theatrical success of the moment, the musical *Hair*, does both.

Films have had another little noticed effect on the course of theatre. To make

a profit, a film requires international distribution — and since the coming of “talkies” language (in the narrow sense of one tongue) has proved a serious stumbling block. Neither sub-titles nor dubbing meets the problem more than half way, since we generally notice only as much of the dialogue as we have to and concentrate on the picture. We have thus acquired, as an audience, a second habit inimical to spoken language: a tendency to disregard what is being said in favour of what is being shown. To prove the point one need only compare a twenty-year-old film on its TV rerun with most of the newer productions: the purple passage has given way to the grunt, which needs no translation. Our dramatic heroes reflect the trend; the Stanley Kowalskis and Willy Lomans of this world are not notably articulate. The point I wish to make here is not the critical cliché that they are anti-heroes, but that the less articulate they are, the more easily the stage-play translates into a film — which is much more widely distributable than the stage-play — and the more easily the film translates into Yugoslavian, or what-have-you. Actions not only speak louder than words; they seldom need an interpreter.

This presents the playwright or the lyricist, naturally, with a serious problem when he wishes to make these inarticulate slobs express themselves in anything resembling fine words. But here we must note still another, perhaps less important, way in which the international reach of film has down-graded speech. A primary dramatic function of speech used to be the differentiation of character by nationality (accent) or class (dialect). When the Japanese watch Mary Poppins spout Japanese, or “transatlantic” English replaces British and American educated speech, or assorted European actors pretend to belong to one family (as they often do in films), national distinctions go out of the window; one can only conclude that we are getting deaf to them. Furthermore, the democratization of our whole social life — in which the films have played a major role — increasingly makes nonsense of verbal class distinction. When presidents are less eloquent than plumbers, even with the help of ghost-writers, speech becomes a poor index of status.

BUT THE FILM, when all is said and done, merely restricts the role of speech. It cannot be held responsible for the curious fact that language itself, whether spoken or written, seems to have become suspect — a victim, perhaps, of over-exposure. For more is being said and written today than ever be-

fore, and it is all being given much wider circulation than ever before, mainly through radio, television, pocket-books, magazines and the daily press. This seeming anomaly — the proliferation of wordage on the one hand, and the shrinkage of its role in that mirror of mankind, the theatre, on the other — disappears if we note two things: first, that *all* means of communication, including spoken and written speech as only two of many, are proliferating; and second, that the coinage of language (in its narrow sense) has become debased.

The chief responsibility for this, I believe, lies with the ubiquitous advertising industry. This stricture is not likely to give any advertiser I know a moment's unease, nor to worry his clients. We admire the word-jugglery of the modern promoter, and often succumb to his blandishments; but in the process we have developed, as a defense-mechanism, a deep distrust of verbal cleverness of all kinds. I do not mean we do not enjoy verbal felicities, only that we no longer take them for truth. The credibility gap, that typical lesion of the sixties and seventies, is caused as much by disenchantment with words as by fondness for activism.

And that, I take it, is what Artaud meant by the "rupture between things and words, between things and the ideas and signs that are their representation." Apply this explanation to the theatre, and we are forced to ask whether, after the preciousness of Wilde, the prolixity of O'Neill, the inanities of Coward, the obscurities of Eliot, our dramatic speech has not worn itself impossibly thin. Certainly the Theatre of the Absurd has shown us that there is a vein to be mined in turning language in upon itself, verbal jokes played at the expense of language — but is not this the very confession of bankruptcy to which Artaud referred? Is it not the beginning of an end?

The question is hardly rhetorical, since our academies persist in revering texts which would appear to have become irrelevant, persist in ignoring (or at least slighting) all languages which cannot be printed and bound, and persist in believing what so many of their students apparently no longer believe: that words get closer to life than any other means of contact or communication. Our English Departments, and other Departments of Literature, are — with a very few honourable exceptions — the sturdiest guardians of this perishable doctrine, and not unnaturally. But they are manning a Maginot Line. Their students, when they are not learning the new language of film (with precious little help, in most cases), echo Eliza in *My Fair Lady*:

Don't talk of stars
Shining above:

If you're in love
Show me!

I grant you that Eliza sings (or says) this to her swain, and that they couldn't get along without words. Nobody wants to get along *without* words, surely. And surely — most important of all — it is not a question of words *versus* other means of communication or expression. The case, it seems to me, is that words for thousands of years carried, magnificently, a burden which they may now share with other extensions of man, no less subtle or powerful, and capable of as much sophistication and profundity. There are functions which words will continue to perform better than any other means, and functions which may now be better served by words *among* other means. The text may even be *primus inter pares* — but this is not yet a status generally acceptable to our academies.

“Why should we refuse”, wrote Macneile Dixon in 1935 in his *The Human Situation*, “to admit the infinite complexity, the innumerable windows through which the soul may view the astonishing landscape?”

The theatre, in all its forms, is exploring the landscape through new windows, as it must.

CANADIAN ARTISTS AS WRITERS

Peter Stevens

PAUL KANE was probably the first painter to attempt a deliberate delineation of the land and its people, as he makes clear in the Preface to his journals, *Wanderings Of An Artist Among The Indians of North America*. He sees his paintings as having not simply an aesthetic value, but also an intrinsic value to the historian, for he is interested in depicting Indian costumes and customs as well as the "scenery of an almost unknown country." A. Y. Jackson in *A Painter's Country* claims that Kane's paintings "furnish a valuable record of the country and the people but as works of art they are not very important". This view is fairly common: Kane is seen as a mere forerunner of the photographer, not as a very original painter, for his paintings and drawings show no real individuality. The same might be said about the written record of his travels.

For the most part *Wanderings Of An Artist* is written in an unadventurous, anonymous prose but at times there are flashes in it of a more interesting writer. Certainly he writes clearly about the customs, the ceremonies, the songs of the Indians (lacking the understanding and sympathy that the Indian painter George Clutesi shows in his recent *Potlatch* but lacking the overly flamboyant style of Clutesi as well) but expresses, despite his life-long interest in the Indians, a suspicious mistrust of them. He recounts on one occasion how sorry he was to leave a party of Indians for he had "experienced many acts of kindness at their hands, hardly to be expected from so wild and uncultivated a people." He is unrelenting in his description of their filth and ugliness. He finds their language a barbarous splutter, but he does sense something of their doom, even though he has no criticism for the way the Hudson's Bay Company treats the Indians, for he maintains that the Company pursues a "just and strict course . . . in the conduct of the whole of their immense traffic." Yet he sees "that opening up the trade with the Indians to all who wish indiscriminately to engage in it, must lead to their annihilation." Thus, there lurks an elegaic tone behind the records both in the painting and in the writing.

Kane is impressed by the grandeur of the country and includes some descriptive matter about the landscape. He discusses the buffalo herds and the waste involved in their hunting, but joins in the hunt wholeheartedly. Kane constantly understates the rigours of his journey. He underplays the fear and the terror he felt in facing some of the tribes, his tenacity in accomplishing long journeys through western winters, his stubborn courage in pursuing his objectives.

In a sense, then, Kane explored the land physically, captured it and its inhabitants by means of his art and ironically enough gave a kind of immortality to those Indians he himself saw as doomed. He relates the Indian idea that by being painted, a human somehow was drained; painting somehow curtailed life. On one occasion Kane was told this by the mother of an Indian girl he was sketching. Kane replied by "assuring her it was more likely to prolong" her life. He seems rather prosaic at times, for instance, when he listens carefully to Indian legends, then dismisses them with the comment that they are "the fanciful creations of their superstitious credulity."

But an irony, intentional or not, breaks into the flatly straightforward account every now and again to give the reader a fuller notion of Kane's character. He watches a scalp dance for about four or five hours, "seeing no variation in it, nor any likelihood of its termination" and is thus "deeply impressed with the sincerity of a grief which could endure such violent monotony for so long a period." During one journey the travellers find a cache of butter hidden the year before, and Kane laconically remarks, "it proved an acquisition to our larder although its age had not improved its flavour."

After the often painful and terrifying journey across Canada and back, during which Kane tries to keep his civilized demeanour and opinions, at least in the even prose of the book, he finds on his return that "the greatest hardship I had to endure, was the difficulty in trying to sleep in a civilized bed." So he had discovered the grandeur and beauty of the land almost in spite of himself. Perhaps it really had reached under Kane's skin, even if it rarely digs into the staid surface of the prose of his journal.

EMILY CARR was much more sympathetic towards the Indians, and *Klee Wyck* is full of her concern for them, and her willingness to accept their legends and their customs. When she learned that the old Indians in Ucluelet believed, as Kane's Indians did, that a picture did harm to the model, Emily Carr refused to paint the old Indians. She didn't want to damage their

belief, for "down deep we all hug something. The great forest hugs its silence. The sea and the air hug the spilled cries of sea-birds. The forest hugs only silence; its birds and even its beasts are mute." There speaks a much more individual voice than Kane's. Of course, Emily Carr wrote much more than Kane, books devoted to certain segments of her life: her days with the Indians, her childhood, her time as a landlady as well as other collections of her prose sketches. These segments are brought together in her autobiography *Growing Pains*.

She stresses the pain in her career from the early opposition of her family through the misunderstanding of her teachers and her neglect of painting in order to survive, to her acceptance as an artist. There is no question that her whole life was centred around Canada, or at least her idea of the Canadian west, a landscape teeming with power, relentless in its swirling fertility and mystery, just as she portrayed it in her forest scenes. Her autobiography expresses her early interest in, and deep response to the forest, an immersion in the woods "to be felt not with fingertips but with one's whole self." She expresses her first encounter with the forest: "tree boles pillared the forest's roof, and streaked the unfathomable forest like gigantic rain streaks pouring, the surge of growth from the forest's floor boiled up to meet it."

In Europe she feels a great need to return to the west. Epping Forest can sustain her only for a day, for it has no "turmoil of undergrowth." She discovers something of the haunted mysterious quality of her Canadian forest in Treganna Wood in Cornwall but always she is obsessed by the Canadian landscape. Perhaps the best single section of her autobiography is her account of her visit to the Cariboo country, for her writing here is as vigorous as her painting, full of resilient language, a little exotic and quaint, but boisterous, full of life, as she plunges whole-heartedly into tough and rough space after the meekness of England.

Her writing also gives some clear portraits of the people she came into contact with, although at times it seems impossible that one person could meet so many eccentric people in one lifetime. Emily herself emerges as a somewhat eccentric, slightly dotty person but a woman with great tenacity of purpose. Her despair at being unrecognized and at being dismissed as an insignificant artist comes out occasionally in such remarks as this, dropped almost casually into the narrative: "it was then that I made myself into an envelope into which I could thrust my work deep, lick the flap, seal it from everybody."

Unlike Kane, Emily Carr often talks about what she is trying to do in her

painting. She talks of her own ideas in relation to what she is taught, clinging to her own belief in herself. She seems to immerse herself in her art as much as she does in the forest, so that the one becomes the other. It is a total response through art to life in order to get at the essence, such as she recognized in Indian art: "Our Indians get down to stark reality." She wants to express the surge of life, the "continual shove of growing" she sees in the forest and it is no wonder she continually returns to images of water to describe her view of art and of the forest. She sees art as "a fluid process" just as she sees the forest as being "submerged beneath a drown of undergrowth."

Words become for her almost as important as her painting, even though she concentrated on it only during the last years of her life. She had kept a note-book with her when she painted in order to try to express the core of what she wanted to paint and she found that in words she could present "essentials only, discarding everything of minor importance . . . This saying in words as well as in colour and form gave me double approach." Emily Carr, then, comes to terms with the land through a total response and commitment to her own ideas about art, writing and life. Both her painting and her books (despite some over-writing and some sentimentalizing) give a sense of real joy in her work with an underlying bitterness, although this rarely breaks into explicit statement.

A. Y. Jackson has travelled all over Canada and has led a full, active artistic life, yet I find his autobiography *A Painter's Country* a rather colourless book. Certainly the main facts of his life are recorded and some sections rise above the generally flat tone, most notably his accounts of painting trips with Dr. Frederick Banting and Lawren Harris. Often, however, Jackson seems deliberately to miss opportunities. For instance, he dismisses his early European experience simply by saying "we had a most thrilling time" and he off-handedly refers to his involvement in a mutiny in the army without developing it in the narrative. He does not expand on the reactions to the Group of Seven's work shown at the Wembley Exhibition, as he feels most readers will have read about the controversy, not realizing that most readers would be interested in his own personal reactions as one of the painters involved. In fact, Jackson is curiously uninformative about how he became interested in art and gives only the barest details about his painting. He faces the problem of the country itself, the problem of painting a country not "mellowed by time and human association." He recognizes how certain aspects of the country lend themselves to different kinds of painting; he, in fact, suggests how Lawren Harris may have changed to abstraction through contact with the mountains: "The Colin Range was an amazing place, a kind of cubists'

paradise full of geometric formations, all waiting for the abstract painter."

Of course, Jackson writes of his fellow painters with some insight, so his autobiography is enlivened by his portraits of J. E. H. MacDonald, Lawren Harris and Tom Thomson. He has a somewhat dry sense of humour, especially in dealing with some of the characters he met in his travels. However, I think a reader would do well to consult *A. Y.'s Canada* as well as the autobiography for a clearer picture of Jackson. Unfortunately, the text by Naomi Jackson Greves is by turns excessively cloying or self-consciously literary, but it contains passages from letters and journals by Jackson which expand parts of the autobiography. At times Jackson puts his reaction to the landscape into words in his unpublished journal: "It is a bleached out landscape, bare of vegetation, shale beaches strewn with debris, pieces of boats, canvas, pulleys, and Franklin's water barrels grouped round the roofless house, many of the barrels full of water. Some bore great rips of bears' claws on them." He sees the country as giving "a prodigious cosmic thrill" but is not swamped by it. He feels the artist is finally responsible to his art, not simply to a recording of the country:

The artist is not dependent on old houses and barns. The old and the new are all grist to the artist's mill. There are colours and forms, and lines of movement and varying effects of light, and if there is less ready-made stuff then it is up to the artist not only to observe but to emphasize and create and to give his own interpretation to what he sees.

Jackson's writing is a kind of compendium of camping hints, with some portraits, told in a simple if somewhat flat style, lightened occasionally by laconic humour that breaks out at times into critical comment on Canadian neglect of art and of the country. He complains that we are still locked in philistinism and that we have given over too much to the Americans. Nowadays, he says, the Canadian Arctic "has become as remote as Wall Street. If a Canadian wishes to visit the Canadian Arctic, he has to get permission from Washington."

THERE IS A poetic streak in Jackson which manifests itself in his colour notations. One of his drawings has this reminder of colouring written on it: "water warm silver; reflex green; willow bright orange; old fireweed; dwarf birch" — almost a plain imagist-like poem.

Of course, some of the Group of Seven painters wrote poetry: J. E. H. MacDonald wrote some nature poetry and light verse and in 1922 Lawren Harris

published a collection of free verse pieces, *Contrasts*. This poetry in general consists of descriptive catalogues in somewhat stodgy and artificial language. The volume expresses a Whitmanesque optimism, embracing all humanity (later Harris was to say that his creed was "art for man's sake"). Harris in his poetry and in his art is a great Yea-Sayer; he considers it blasphemy "To say nay, nay, and smile at aspirations, dreams and visions". He believes in no system and wants man to respond freely to external reality to reach some transcendental quality.

These ideas crop up in Harris' essays as well as in his poems. A beautiful volume of Harris' paintings published by Macmillan is garnished with statements from Harris' writings assembled by R. G. P. Colgrave, and Harris' ideas about the transcendental qualities of Canadian landscape are expressed here explicitly. Harris acknowledges the effect of the North on his paintings but its grandeur is deeper than a mere surface presentation in painting, for the North is "a source of a flow of beneficent informing cosmic powers behind the bleakness and barrenness and austerity of much of the land." Harris finds the land "mostly virgin, fresh and full-replenishing."

One remembers that Emily Carr dedicated her autobiography to Harris and certainly her idea of art as a "fluid process" seems close to Harris' notion of art as a total response in each individual, "an urge to inner activity". Art is "a dynamic bridge between opposites". Harris reaches beyond Emily Carr's insistence on stark reality to "the idea of a universal order achieved by giving oneself fully to the particular." Art's function (and this sounds very modern and psychedelic) "is to enlarge our consciousness" so that it "leads us both to find ourselves in our environment and to give that environment new and more far-reaching meaning." Harris insists that we should react to life around us "in terms of direct, immediate experience." All these expressions about expanded consciousness and the going through a directly perceived object to some cosmic revelation without being trapped in a systematic approach is related to his move into abstract painting, for he once suggested that the abstract expressionist manner in painting was "an extension of experience beyond the range of realistic painting."

Harris' poetry contains at times some implicit condemnation of modern civilization and industrialism, but in general Canadian painters until recently have not indulged in written social criticism. There is no equivalent to Borduas' manifesto in English-Canada. Jackson complains in his autobiography of Canada's neglect of culture. Greg Curnoe sends out occasional anarchic blasts from London, Ontario, even including written messages in some of his paintings. The nearest we come to a painter as social critic is Harold Town in his statements made on

various TV and radio shows and especially in the prefatory essay to that strange series of drawings, *Enigmas*. These drawings are full of Amazonian women subjugating, trapping, humiliating man, although the final drawing, three black shapes (presumably men) standing on some of these Amazonians, may give rise to a vague optimism.

The prefatory essay does not explain the drawings, but is a rambunctious attack on things Canadian. He fires at the usual targets: erosion and pollution (our foremost national products), the Canada Council ("relentlessly dedicated to the discovery and deification of mediocrity"), the Senate, the discrepancy between law and justice, Americanization, Canadian womanhood, and Puritanism.

Canadians have no real concern for themselves as Canadians nor for the country. They love sports and spend more money on them than on culture and the curing of disease. They see no potential in their resources: "We possess sweeping forests, consequently we insist on importing furniture from the little country of Denmark, made from wood grown in Africa, and held together by paltry platitudes of design."

What saves this essay from being merely a rather hysterical destructive denunciation is Town's obvious concern for and love of Canada. He comes back to the land, suggesting that Canadians need "a proprietary interest in topsoil, a sense of place, an urge to challenge the present, and rush to the future." Somewhere there must be "an indigenous self." So, just as the drawings end on a hint of optimism, Town finds some slight reason for optimism in the fact that we have "an aggressive creative community." And always there is the land, "a geographic complex of stunning grandeur, with a violent, yet surprisingly poetic climate." The essay closes with a tempered, almost ironic hope: "We are, in fact, savagely self-repressed, nevertheless ours is the only nation seemingly steeped in a consistent sort of idiocy."

Town's writing at times shows a real if somewhat flamboyant flair and wit, and exists in a poetic atmosphere. Some Canadian painters have experimented with writing poetry. I have already mentioned Curnoe's use of words in his paintings. The London group cohere to some extent around the literary magazine, *Alphabet*. This periodical often includes graphics and on one occasion printed a concrete poem (James Reaney, the editor, preferred to call it an illuminated poem) by London painter Jack Chambers. Reaney has recently been writing some emblem poems. The sculptor, Florence Wyle, published a volume of poems in 1959 and Roy Kiyooka has written some interesting poems. There

has been a cross-breeding of art and poetry in the realm of concrete poetry in which we find writers taking over some of the graphic effects of art.

THE SMALL GROUP of writers of concrete poetry in Canada show a great deal of variety in their methods. Some have used the typewriter as something akin to the painter's brush. David Aylward in his *Typescapes* deliberately avoids using the letters on his typewriter; he makes patterns down the page with the symbols of punctuation and abbreviation, and these patterns are off-centred as another device to separate his work from 'normal' poetry. The effect is to take the poetry out of the realm of word-meanings into a realm of shape-and-space relationships close to a mechanical calligraphic pattern. Hart Broudy in a recent set of 'typewriter-drawings' for *GrOnk* uses type for sharp-edged design and by close clusters of letters achieves effects of light and shade. Bill Bissett also uses the typewriter as a precision instrument in order to gauge exactly the stresses and pauses in some of his poems. He strives for a musical notation, and the repetitions of lines one after the other, the spacing altering slightly every now and again, words merging at some points, are meant to suggest the pacing of the chant-effects within a poem. This writing can work but I find little relation at times between the design of words on the page and the actual chanting of the poems by Bissett himself. The flat even quality of the typewritten lines does not suggest the rhythms that Bissett's voice puts into the poems. Some method of heavy and light emphasis (such as Broudy uses) might give a more precise rhythmic effect. Bissett has probably gone farther into the mixing of art and poetry than anyone else in Canada, in such a book as *The Jinx Ship Nd Other Trips*, for instance, a meld of graphics and drawings (to me these are crude and generally undistinguished), lettering and typescript as "illuminations" of poems and prose, and typographic design, the whole book interleaved with collages, abstract paint patterns, random pages of ads from glossy magazines. The reader must immerse himself within the book, not trying to extract a literary meaning but rather to involve himself in a total response. I do not find the book successful, because some individual parts are more approachable than others, some parts have a too juvenile tone, some pages are too haphazardly smudged, so that a totality of response is not really possible. Nevertheless, it is an interesting, if finally unsuccessful attempt to extend the concept of concrete poetry beyond the framework of the single page.

Individual concrete poems are what stay in the mind. Earle Birney has experimented with shape in several poems. In one he attempts to turn the non-verbal ideogram of constancy into words, retaining ideogrammatic shape. The word **ROCK** is the centre of a swirl of words representing water around the rock but the line of words, however much it eddies within the space of the page, heads eventually to the rock. Jane Shen has attempted to transliterate Chinese ideograms, using the images implied by the ideogram to give the abstract 'meaning'. Lionel Kearns has an intriguing design of zeros and ones, a large figure one (made of zeros) enclosed within a large zero (made of ones) to depict "The Birth of God". Although the design is precise, defined and almost mathematical, the nature of the one emerging from nothing implies an expansion of all the contradictory tensions and opposing forces within the universe.

Ian Hamilton Finlay, while admitting certain limiting factors in the nature of concrete poetry, maintains that whereas "normal" poetry is circumscribed within society, concrete poetry is confined only within space. Space, then, a concern of painting, is an essential part of concrete poetry and, apart from Bill Bissett, the most consistently adventurous poet of this nature, a poet trying for total involvement with language in space, is bp Nichol. His *Journeyings And The Return* contains a package of cards, small booklets, cardboard designs: all manner of shapes and sizes of paper and card which the reader has to manipulate in order to sense his relationship with the words or patterns printed on them. Nichol has extended his interest since then into the nature of seeing. He seems to be questioning the very act of reading itself, apparently wanting the reader to go beyond a literal meaning in order to weigh, independent of meaning, the nature of lettering itself. If a letter can be seen in different ways, even though it lies flat on the page, he seems to suggest, a word will yield different "meanings" if we can be made to see its variety of surfaces and perspectives. His series "Eyes" suggest this insistence on close looking.

The typewriter has helped in the design and shape of poems but more than a typewriter is necessary. One of the most interesting continuing experiments in poem-drawing is the comparatively unnoticed work of Judith Copithorne, especially in her two books *Release* and *Runes*. The poems in these books are calligraphic designs, words and pen-strokes held together in one design on the page. The words may at times be in a linear sequence surrounded by rhythmic calligraphy, but more often the lines are looser, veering off in all directions but held within the fluidity of the calligraphy, giving an impression of spontaneous and inner organic growth. The shapes and lines that Judith Copithorne "illuminates"

her poems with seem firstly to control the words, hold them within the space created by the calligraphy and secondly to free the words and lines because there is no necessity for the pen to keep to a rigid pattern. She achieves a taut equilibrium between freedom and control, and the words themselves are suspended in free space, their meaning coming across in sections as the eye follows the pattern. But the eye is also always conscious of the whole pattern of the poem-drawing as an object enclosed by the frame of the page. Sometimes the calligraphy becomes too fussy, sometimes the words merge too obscurely with the design but in general Judith Copithorne's attempt at calligraphic poetry seems to me a very interesting and worthwhile experiment in mixing art and poetry.

Many of the poems and poets I have mentioned in this brief survey of concrete poetry are included in *the cosmic chef: an evening of concrete* edited by bp Nichol and published by Oberon Press. This is a boxed folio showing the variety of Canadian concrete poetry, full of sharp design, typewriter sequence, calligraphy, comic strip experiments, extensions of language and sound. The editor defines this area of cross-breeding of art and poetry I have tried to give a short account of here:

everything presented here comes
from that point where language and/or
the image blur together into the
inbetween and become concrete objects
to be understood as such.

THE MIXTURE OF ART AND POETRY is a growing concern in Canada. More and more books of poetry are being published with illustrations. Eldon Grier's *Pictures On The Skin* is a splendid book to look at, poems carefully arranged on the page, interleaved with collages, silhouettes, photographic negatives, drawings, colour designs. Unfortunately the poetry does not live up to its presentation. The poems, which include some about various other artists and musicians, are rather fuzzy in outline. Grier's painterly interests do not really work in this book. The poetry has little visual quality and not much of the hard-edged clarity one might expect from a painter. Grier acknowledges the influence of a "chaotic permissiveness" but the poems do not have much spontaneity or outrageousness. They exist in a kind of controlled blur. His poetry is much more successful in his earlier *A Friction Of Lights*, particularly in the opening poem

"An Ecstasy", a collage of segments about growth in metamorphosis, illogical yet cleverly juxtaposing ideas, suiting the notion that real creation is an overgrowth that breaks limits. There are several poems in the volume about art and artists — two very good poems about Marini, for instance. He also suggests the quality of Apollinaire by using the notion of one of the poet's typographical experiments as an image of its influence on him:

I am almost asleep
but I feel a transfusion of fine little letters
dripping slantwise into my side.

P. K. Page is another painter who has written poetry. She sees both poetry and painting as an organic unity in her creative life, and although she has concentrated on painting for much of the time since the 1950s, her selected poems, *Cry Ararat!*, include some later poems, and some, particularly those in the first section of the book, seem very painterly. The hieroglyphic shapes in "Bark Drawing" are visually presented and the poet, aware of the connection between words and sight, talks of "an alphabet the eye / lifts from the air." Throughout the poems she sees words as somehow deadening. They have power, for the act of naming is a making, as she suggests in "Cook's Mountains", but these same mountains are entities in themselves and before being named "they were not the same." Still, as she is told that they are called the Glass House Mountains, "instantly they altered to become / the sum of shape and name." Words set a limit but also connect with the visual response: "two strangenesses united into one". Nevertheless, a gap exists between the senses; in "This Frieze of Birds," she feels the frieze can be made into "an intricate poem, neat", but for real birds we can "find no words", though the poem tends to offer a contradiction to itself in the exact descriptive detail in the closing stanzas. The idea is repeated in "Only Child", where a too scientific knowledge or naming takes away life:

Birds were his element like air and not
her words for them — making them statues.

The poet-painter demands a sensuous response to life, an openness of spirit, for definition and limitation wreak violence on spontaneous existence, an idea that seems to be expressed in "Leather Jacket" published in a recent *Canadian Forum*. Perhaps this idea is related to the drawing of the perky, intricate bird entitled "And You, What Do You Seek?" that appears as an illustration in *Cry Ararat!*

P. K. Page's poems contain very clear visual pictures but she tends to push the images towards abstraction. The details of the garden in "After Rain" move into a simplified "primeval" atmosphere. She sees a snowman as a primitive figure merging with the landscape, just as the man in "Journey Home" becomes the landscape, the transformation being a continuous, growing process. She reduces the knitting women in "The Knitters" to rather abstract monolithic figures "by Moore". This merging towards abstraction arises from detail, giving large shape to small particularities, just as the insistence in whiteness in much of the poetry seems to gather the diffuse prismatic colouring of her world. Her world is often chillingly abstract (notice how much snow there is in P. K. Page's poetry), but she may be trying to express a large order and pattern in the world in which we are involved; however, perhaps the somewhat cold and psychological analysis in some poems prevents the reader from participating in an involvement in the world she presents.

The best book of poetry devoted to the process of painting itself is *The Danish Portraits* by Heather Spears. This slim volume evokes a sparse and rather harsh Scandinavian landscape in some poems, but the poems dealing with painting are not self-conscious or narrow, as they are not simply discussions of aesthetic problems. These problems are related to her own personal life, and her attempts to catch and hold a real person in portraits become mirrors for her own effort to discover her own reality in relation to the models and in particular to the man she loves who serves as a model for a portrait. Thus, the poems are expressions of two sides of her personal life, preventing them from becoming mere artificial or transcendental exercises.

"no ideas" expresses her dissatisfaction with her recent paintings but by the end of the poem we find the dissatisfaction arises from the absence of her lover. If he were to return, she could perhaps paint again, make her eyes focus to catch a real presence — "I could wear / out the two of us just looking" — but she recognizes that his reality as a lover would be a barrier to her painting, and she complains, "you'd interfere." The poem is a presentation of the problem of relationships both in art and life: the artist wonders about her relation to the object to be painted but the artist as human being wonders how this can exist within a human relationship of love.

She encounters the power of paint to have an independent life of its own when she paints a portrait of her son. He had burned his arm and as she sketches the pose, the burned arm "wants to remake / my picture for its own sake." It is difficult to know whether it is the pose arousing pity in the painter, the arm itself as

focus or the painter's own memory of the day on which he burned his arm which causes this emphasis. All these layers are brought together in the concluding lines:

a wound
radiating into sound
skin, radiating into sound
how he screamed then.

So again the painter is faced with the problem of the discrepancy between art and life and the difficulty arising from her own knowledge of that discrepancy, for she herself is "still precisely aware / of the gap between the imagined and the real."

This discrepancy is at the centre of the dozen poems which make up the opening sequence, "The Danish Portraits." The poems are notations about her attempts (usually failures) to capture the likeness of her lover in a portrait. The poems give some of the visual detail but somehow she feels her portrait must catch more than she can see. When her lover has gone, his presence "untames" the room and "creates its own wilderness its own forms / At the very margins of the visual." This presence is beyond her control and in other poems she senses that a painting is somehow a confinement, a narrowing down, something that cannot live up to the form in her imagination. Yet a portrait can exercise its own control, can lead the viewer into the painting and evoke its mood within the viewer. The painter's failure to paint her lover's portrait is counterpointed by two or three poems which suggest that she can include more than reality within a painting. The opening poem, for instance, details something about the sitter's real life which the painter regrets she has not experienced first-hand but the artist says she catches something beyond the knowledge of the sitter's character within the town. In another portrait of a girl "exposed and unsure", the painter pushes "the encroaching shadow back", makes

Light of your frailty and dismay
On the dark primed passive canvas.

But the poem also carries the idea of control and confinement. The painter "contains" the sitter in her portrait. And this is her problem with the portrait of her lover and accounts for her ambivalent attitude, for she likes his "untamed" quality. He recognizes something in her eyes when she looks at him in terms of a portrait. He sees her eyes are "almost crazed" and he is afraid of "the look that smites [him] selfless." He cannot accept this as part of human love, although the

painter herself says that such a look in her eyes "could prove / The exact equations of a close embrace." Time and again she finds herself lost in merely looking. She wants emphatically to "do this marvellous thing", which amounts, I suppose, to a picture of real human love but to do it may result in the destruction of that love, so she continually draws back:

I will do it
Like plunging my hands into blood
But I could not touch you, even if I could.

She also feels that this fixing of her love would in a sense control her lover, and yet his character is unfixable:

I will make you enter this narrow dwelling
Because there is no telling
Where you would go, could I not confine
You here in my craft.

But the portraits fail; the drawings lie unfinished (or even unstarted) with "regret and rational rage / Folded like tissue paper between each page." And her love has failed — "The truth is you will never come again."

The poems in *The Danish Portraits* are subtle and uncompromising in their honesty about the life of art and its relation to human love. Art and love are constant counterpoints, a kind of interchangeable objective correlative. Perhaps the poems remain a little obscure in places because the details of the paintings and the personal lives are not given fully. Seeing the portraits might help, but one can understand why she would not want them reproduced, as she thinks most of them are failures. But these obscurities do not detract from the real insight into art and love contained in the twenty-six poems in the volume.

THESE THREE POETS have all spent a good deal of their time outside Canada, so that the Canadian scene and Canadian concerns do not figure largely in their work. The same might be said of Jack Shadbolt who has spent some years in Europe, but he has himself acknowledged the effect of the Group of Seven on his work as well as the especial influence of Emily Carr and Frank Varley. Shadbolt has detailed this in what I consider to be the best prose book by a Canadian artist, *In Search of Form*, a book in which he describes his artistic

development, illustrated at each step by many of his drawings and paintings.

Shadbolt sees art as a continuous process, layers of trial and error, revelations by spontaneous response, refinements, extrapolations from reality in an interaction between the imagination and the intellect. Creation, for him, "starts in the preconscious and works through to final intellectual recognition". The artist works towards a total structure, a form which may be inherent, but which will emerge only through a sequence of parlaying possibilities of varying relationships between and within objects. These objects may be seen in various gradations from minute particularities to symbolic abstractions and all the degrees lying between may be released by breaking open the object to take account of its (and the surrounding space's and object's) "rhythmic proliferation."

Within the work of art itself or within the process of its creation Shadbolt sees a tension between the form of the object (the thing being painted or drawn) and the energies within seeking to destroy the form. Art seeks "a planned spacial equilibrium." He makes it clear that he has never been afraid to allow spontaneous happenings to occur in his drawings to release the inner energies of form, so that "form creates its own images." These become part of his own style (a word he does not like to use) and he defines his own artistic process as a "dialectic of opposites" in which "improvisation [is] resolved by structure."

He likes to work from reality but strives to re-create it in as many authentic ways as possible in order to understand it thoroughly. Only then can he work with the constituent parts, try to loosen them into abstractions and symbolic simplifications or to see the emblematic disposal of parts. Form may emerge from these drawings, for "drawing is idea more than fact." He suggests that "form also finds the experience," although perhaps this happens because the experience is working within, searching for the form. Thus, there are connections between the psychic and the physical without the intervention of the intellect. An artist may learn rationally about composition and colour but nothing can change his own individual brush stroke, his own personal physical experience of the medium itself.

All this sounds very much like a discussion of certain ideas current in modern poetry. Shadbolt's discussion of his own artistic creation sounds at times close to notions of the deep image, composition by field, concrete poetry and organic form. Certainly, Shadbolt's seems a very poetic temperament and he makes great use in his book of words associated with poetry: image, metaphor, rhythm et al.

In case I have made this book sound too theoretical by concentrating on the ideas about the creative process (and perhaps the last third of the book does tend

to emphasize the solution of some of Shadbolt's artistic problems too specifically), let me hasten to add that the book includes some autobiographical detail as well as some evocative descriptive details — such as descriptions of Victoria and its surrounding district, and the fishing fleet at Coullioure, for instance. But even if the emphasis is on the problems of artistic development and creation, the book remains a completely fascinating study of one artist's sincere concern to understand his own art, the motives and springs of it and his recognition of his "sensuous involvement with form."

Like Kane, nearly all these Canadian painters who write see the land as something they have to return to and come to terms with, but they do not see it as something by which they necessarily feel dominated. There is more evidence of love than subjugation in their attitudes. This brief survey, I hope, gives some sense of the ways in which Canadian artists specifically express their concern and love for both their art and Canada.

TRAVELLER, CONJUROR, JOURNEYMAN

P. K. Page

CONNECTIONS AND CORRESPONDENCES between writing and painting . . .

The idea diminishes to a dimensionless point in my absolute centre. If I can hold it steady long enough, the feeling which is associated with that point grows and fills a larger area as perfume permeates a room. It is from here that I write — held within that luminous circle, that locus which is at the same time a focusing glass, the surface of a drum.

As long as the tension (at/tention?) is sustained the work continues . . . more or less acute.

What is art anyway? What am I trying to do?

Play, perhaps. Not as opposed to work. But spontaneous involvement which is its own reward; done for the sheer joy of doing it; for the discovery, invention, sensuous pleasure. “Taking a line for a walk”, manipulating sounds, rhythms.

Or transportation. At times I seem to be attempting to copy exactly something which exists in a dimension where worldly senses are inadequate. As if a thing only felt had to be extracted from invisibility and transposed into a seen thing, a heard thing. The struggle is to fit the “made” to the “sensed” in such a way that the whole can occupy a world larger than the one I normally inhabit. This process involves scale. Poem or painting is by-product.

Remembering, re-mem-ber-ing, re-capturing, re-calling, re-collecting . . . words which lead to the very threshold of some thing, some place; veiled by a membrane at times translucent, never yet transparent, through which I long to be absorbed.

Is it I who am forgotten, dismembered, escaped, deaf, uncollected?

Already I have lost yesterday and the day before. My childhood is a series of

isolated vignettes, vivid as hypnagogic visions. Great winds have blown my past away in gusts leaving patches and parts of my history and pre-history. No wonder I want to remember, to follow a thread back. To search for something I already know but have forgotten I know. To listen — not to but for.

I am a two-dimensional being. I live in a sheet of paper. My home has length and breadth and very little thickness. The tines of a fork pushed vertically through the paper appear as four thin silver ellipses. I may, in a moment of insight, realize that it is more than co-incidence that four identical but independent silver rings have entered my world. In a further breakthrough I may glimpse their unity, even sense the entire fork — large, glimmering, extraordinary. Just beyond my sight. Mystifying; marvellous.

My two-dimensional consciousness yearns to catch some overtone which will convey that great resonant silver object.

Expressed another way — I am traveller. I have a destination but no maps. Others perhaps have reached that destination already, still others are on their way. But none has had to go from here before — nor will again. One's route is one's own. One's journey unique. What I will find at the end I can barely guess. What lies on the way is unknown.

How to go? Land, sea or air? What techniques to use? What vehicle?

I truly think I do not write or draw for you or you or you . . . whatever you may argue to the contrary. Attention excludes you. You do not exist. I am conscious only of being "hot" or "cold" in relation to some unseen centre.

Without magic the world is not to be borne. I slightly misquote from Hesse's *Conjectural Biography*. A prisoner, locked in his cell, he paints all the things that have given him pleasure in life — trees, mountains, clouds. In the middle of his canvas he places a small train, its engine already lost in a tunnel. As the prison guards approach to lead Hesse off to still further deprivations, he makes himself small and steps aboard his little train which continues on its way and vanishes. For a while its sooty smoke drifts from the tunnel's mouth, then it slowly blows away and "with it the whole picture and I with the picture."

Magic, that Great Divide, where everything reverses. Where all laws change. A good writer or painter understands these laws and practices conjuration.

Yes, I would like to be a magician.

DREAM

fish on a hook fish in the sea
bird in a CAGE bird on a TREE
beast in a STALL beast graz^Eing FREE

THE THREE ARE ONE
THE ONE IS ME

salt in the mine salt refined
water in river & stream water contained
wheat in the field wheat ground

WHEN THE THREE ARE ONE
AND WE THAT ONE

THE BLIND WILL SEE

One longs for an art that would satisfy all the senses — not as in opera or ballet where the separate arts congregate — but a complex intermingling — a consummate More-Than. This is perhaps just another way of saying one longs for the senses themselves to merge in one supra-sense.

Not that there aren't marriages enough between the arts — some inevitably more complete than others. But no *ménage à trois*. Let alone four or five.

Trying to see these categories and their overlaps in terms of writing and painting I start a rough chart:

WRITING		WRITING/PAINTING	PAINTING	
<i>Aural</i>	<i>Visual</i>	<i>Marriage</i>	<i>Calligraphic</i>	<i>Painterly</i>
Poetry written to be spoken: Chambers' <i>Fire</i> .	Some of Herbert's poems	Arabesques	Klee	Monet
Poetry written to be sung: Cohen's <i>Suzanne</i> etc.	Dylan Thomas' <i>Vision and Prayer</i> e. e. cummings etc.	Concrete poetry Bill Bissett's "typewriter poems" etc. Illuminated Ms.	Tobey etc.	etc.

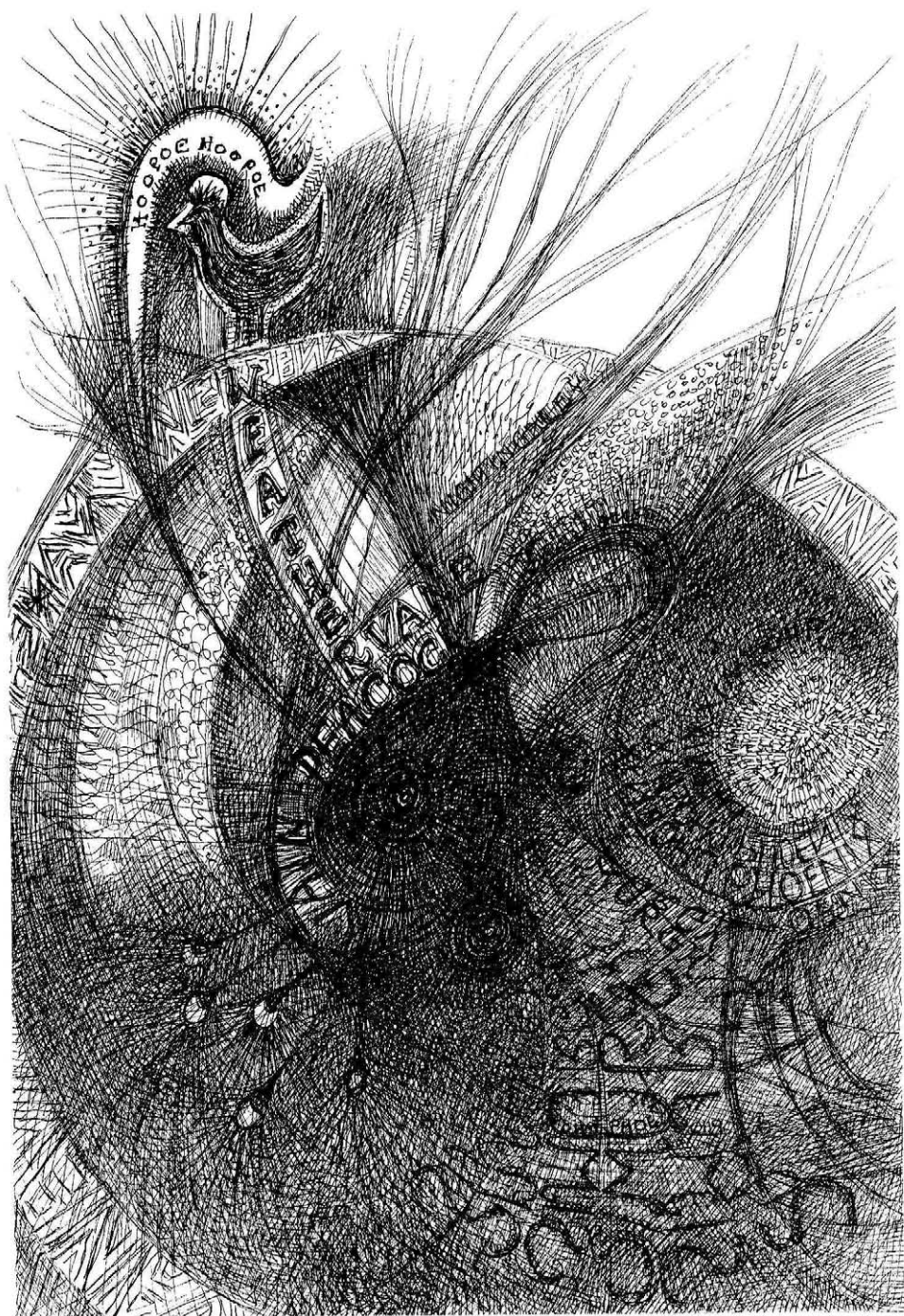
I get only so far when I stop. Too many ideas rush at me. The categories shift and merge in such a way that I am at times unable to distinguish even between the visual and the aural. John Chambers' recording of his poem *Fire* brings me up short. This is an aural poem. It relies for its effect on long silences between words — the silences as significant as the words themselves. If one wants to reproduce this poem on paper one can use the conventions of musical transcription *or* one can space the words on the page that the poem becomes . . . visual. What is time to the ear becomes space to the eye.

"In not being two everything is the same."

Moving through the category "Marriage" to "Calligraphic" and "Painterly" one must come at length to pure colour. No form at all. And moving from "Marriage" through "Visual" and "Aural" one must finally arrive at pure sound — no words at all.

The notes of the scale: the colours of the rainbow.

"A Father said to his double-seeing son: 'Son, you see two instead of one.' 'How can that be?' the boy replied. 'If I were, there would seem to be *four* moons up there in place of two'." (Hakim Sanai of Ghazna)



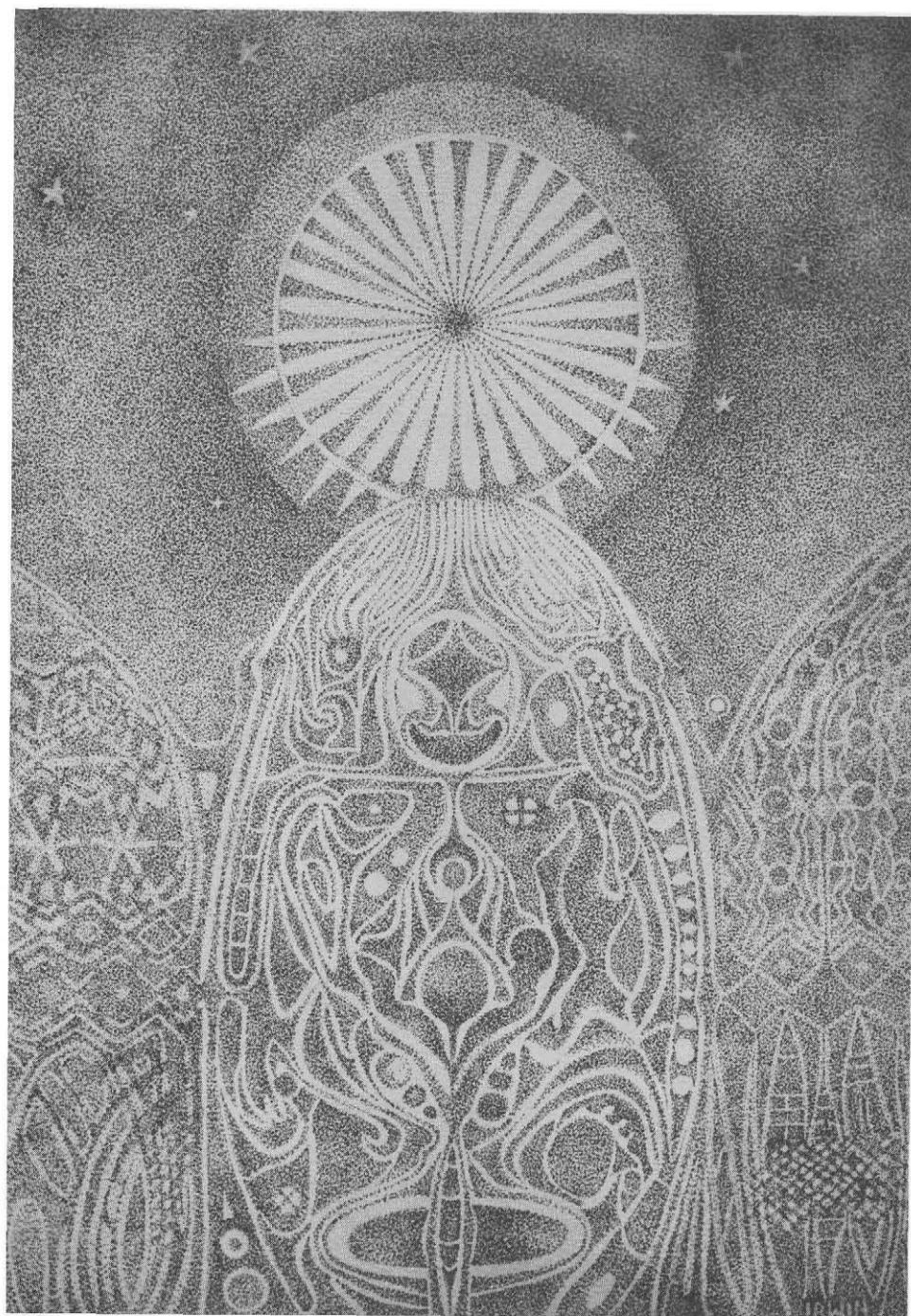
If writing and painting correspond at the primary level as I believe they do, how and where do they differ?

With a poem I am given a phrase. Often when I least expect it. When my *mind* is on something else. And my hands busy. Yet it must be caught at once, for it comes like a boomerang riding a magical arc and continuing its forward path it will vanish unless intercepted. And that phrase contains the poem as a seed contains the plant.

It is also the bridge to another world where the components of the poem lie hidden like the parts of a dismembered statue in an archaeological site. They need to be sought and found and painstakingly put together again. And it is the search that matters. When the final piece slips into place the finished poem seems no more important than the image in a completed jig-saw puzzle. Worth little more than a passing glance.

Painting or drawing the process is entirely different. I start from no where. I am given no thing. The picture, born at pen-point, grows out of the sensuous pleasure of nib, lead or brush moving across a surface. It has its own senses this activity: varieties of tactile experience, rhythms. Beating little drums strumming taut strings. And sometimes there is the curious impression of a guiding hand — as if I am hanging on to the opposite end of some giant pen which is moving masterfully and hugely in some absolute elsewhere, and my small drawing, lesser in every way, is nevertheless related — a crabbed inaccurate approximation.

Yet in all essential particulars writing and painting are interchangeable. They are alternate roads to silence.



THE DOME OF HEAVEN

P. K. Page

I sense the Dome of Heaven circling
enclosing six directions in my eye
fixed as sun at solstice which unlocks
the polar seasons with its key.

Near. Close. Here. Intrinsic to my flesh
my pulse, my breath.
What is this rush of air
this lull, these tides
whose slow mercurial advances pull
all waters in their mesh?

All waters — globe enlacing
rope of brine, unravelled blue
(eyes, veins, bracelets and chains
swirl in this watery swell).

Why do I see it in a looking glass
as in a crystal ball?
Huge.
Small.
The Dome of Heaven is a speck
a dot, the merest sphere
fading, invisible.

Somewhere the senses centre.
Is it here?

CANADIAN POETRY AND THE COMPUTER

Sandra Djwa

WHEN READING THROUGH the works of the English Canadian poets of the 1880's, the critical reader is sometimes taken a little aback by the continued repetition of certain words and phrases such as "dream", "sleep", "vision", "trance", "spell", "secret", "mysterious", "unknown", or, if we prefer, there is "mystic spell", "charmed vision", "visionary moment", and "inappellable secret".

This insistence, at the diction level, on variations of the dream experience borders on the ludicrous and we are soon tempted to blue-pencil whole passages in Carman as examples of romantic excess, and to suggest that Roberts and D. C. Scott might have done well to edit their styles a little. Yet, is this approach ultimately helpful? Is an appreciation of the poets of the 1880's related to a stylistic norm which stresses neatness and economy, or does their very excess at the diction level point toward some fundamental understanding of the nature of things — a world view, a myth or a cosmology?

It is possible to dismiss this whole cluster of diction as simply vague transcendental aspiration, the Canadian backwash of Victorian romanticism. And there is no doubt that there is a certain amount of this involved; historically speaking, Canadian poetry has always been derivative. However, granted this fact, and granted that the common terms of diction are also very probably inherited, a more helpful approach might be the question of whether or not our poets did something unique with their particular inheritance. Did they construct a particular myth or cosmology from the common terms of romantic diction; and, if so, was there any continuance of myth or diction from the poets of the 1880's to those of the 1920's?

In Roberts' case, the reader soon becomes aware that he consistently uses the word "dream" and that it most often collocates with "sleep", "vision", "spirit", and "mystic". To determine whether or not these constant references to "sleep" and "dream" are simply the common coin of romantic diction as in, say, Keats'

"Sleep and Poetry", or whether they are associated in a structure unique to Roberts' poetry, it would be necessary to classify each occurrence of the word "dream" together with its most commonly collocated words; this would include categories such as the common night dream, the impossible wish, the day dream, and the waking vision, that moment which Wordsworth describes in "Tintern Abbey" when the poet is "laid asleep in body, and becomes a living soul" and is so enabled to "see into the life of things".

For Roberts' poetry, the purpose of the classification would be to determine whether he adopts any of these particular aspects of the dream consistently and whether or not each occurrence reinforces a particular myth of the poet's experience in nature. Further, because we already know from Roy Daniells' fine study of the 1880's poets in the *Literary History of Canada* that "dream" is also a very strong metaphor in Lampman's work, it might be worthwhile to attempt to determine if there is a complex associated with this word which passes from Roberts into the poetry of Lampman, Carman and Scott. But, the amount of listing and cross-referencing in a project of this scope would be quite prohibitive for any one person, and it is at this point that the computer comes into its own as a useful listing device.

BETWEEN 1966 AND 1968, the published books of seven poets, Isabella Valancy Crawford, Sir Charles G. D. Roberts, Archibald Lampman, Duncan Campbell Scott, E. J. Pratt, Earle Birney, and Margaret Avison, were key-punched. Between 1968 and 1970, seven other poets, Charles Mair, Charles Sangster, Bliss Carman, A. J. M. Smith, A. M. Klein, Irving Layton and P. K. Page, were added.¹

The procedure followed was the same in all cases. Each poet's published books in chronological order were key-punched on computer cards at the rate of one typographical line per computer card. The computer cards containing the poet's canon were then fed into an IBM 7044 computer for printout. Following proof-reading and necessary corrections, the computer then drew up a word frequency count. This is an alphabetical index listing every word that a poet uses and indicating its frequency of appearance. On the basis of the critic's understanding of a poet's work, and taking into consideration both the frequency of occurrence of particular words and the apparent collocations or associations of clusters of words, a selected list of words under the heading of thematic categories was then drawn up by hand. This listing under headings was key-punched as a thematic

index and the computer then printed out concordances to the selected words from its memory bank.

After the works of Roberts had been key-punched and a word-index produced, it soon became apparent that except for function words and grammatical symbols, "dream" and words associated with it did indeed form the largest category of diction in Roberts' canon, as it also did in the works of Lampman and Scott. "Dream", "sleep", "vision" and its variants occur 217 times in Roberts, 368 times in Lampman and 221 times in D. C. Scott. In each case, it has the highest frequency of any thematic word occurring (an average occurrence would be from five to fifteen times) and indicates that for each poet the cluster of words associated with "dream" has primary significance. Further, by their continued appearance with a recognized structure of value delineated by a particular diction cluster, it was found that certain words such as Crawford's "love", Roberts' "dream", Klein's "little" and Margaret Avison's "sun" come to take on metaphorical significance. This is not to suggest that these elements of diction are always used as active metaphors. Yet, most often, the key terms emerge in context as a metaphor representing a larger myth.

In Roberts' work, the "dream" emerges primarily as a description of the poet's aspiration towards "the Spirit of Beauty" beyond nature. As this metaphor is explored through the thematic concordance, it can be documented that it becomes associated with a whole mythic structure in which Roberts expresses life as a "dream" emerging from the great "sleep" of Eternity, which is, in turn, a "dream" of God. Through the human "dream", man is put in touch with this eternal world. Referring to the dream experience, Roberts has two sets of terminology which he uses interchangeably; one set is connected with Darwinian evolution while the other is primarily Christian in nature.

This process is quite explicit in a poem such as "Origins" where the germ of life emerges from Time: "Out of the dreams that heap / the hollow land of sleep"; it then develops by evolutionary processes, only to return to its divine maker, God. Similarly, in his poem "The Marvellous Work", Roberts praises the evolutionary God whose "Eternal Cause":

Is graven in granite-moulding aeons' gloom;
Is told in stony record of the roar
Of long Silurian storms, and tempests huge
Scourging the circuit of Devonian seas . . .

Athwart the death-still years of glacial sleep!
Down the stupendous sequence, age on age, . . .

In the obscure and formless dawn of life,
 In gradual march from simple to complex,
 From lower to higher forms, and last to Man.

In effect, Roberts has taken over the general aspects of the Wordsworthian-Keatsian transcendental dream, associating it with poetic comfort. However, he changes a few of the essential terms of the dream experience to accommodate some of the problems raised by the Darwinian hypothesis. But, if the primary function of the dream metaphor is to alleviate pain, Roberts' choice was particularly unfortunate as it carries along with it its own built-in negation — that of the nightmare. So, although Roberts' poetic decorum precludes evil as a subject, whenever evil or death intrude into his poetry almost despite the poet, they do so, as does the nightmare, through the dream. The blinding of Orion, the capture of Launcelot, and the sick soul of the poem "One Night" all emerge from the dreaming state.

Archibald Lampman adopts Roberts' dream metaphor and with it much of his poetic myth including the "sleep" of time, the "dream" of human life and the possible evolutionary progress of the human soul. However, Lampman's concept of the poet is that of the passive observer who, standing a little apart from himself and from nature, is empowered to see into the nature of things. In this formulation, the unconscious creatures from the world of nature, such as the frogs and cicadas, become poetic emissaries from the world of dream which underlies the universe. This relationship is quite explicit in the poem "The Frogs".

In effect, the peace and comfort of the eternal dream, unconsciously known by the frogs, is passed on to the poet who lays himself open to this experience. But if the voice of the frogs can bring assurance of the eternal plan, the "dream" which underlies existence, there are other voices which remind Lampman of the fear and sorrow which are also a part of human life. The voice which comes out of the darkness, "the crying in the night" of Lampman's much anthologized "Midnight" would seem to be part of a larger sequence of poems dealing with the nightmare aspects of existence often specifically associated with the loss of the comforting "dream" as in the poem "The Loons".

The "dream" in D. C. Scott's work is first associated with "rest", "death" and "magic". In poems such as "The November Pansy", "The Height of Land" and "Lines in Memory of Edmund Morris" the transcendental attempt to reach a "mystic world, a world of dreams and passion / that each aspiring thing creates" is unsuccessful and the "secret" beyond nature remains "unutterable", a "something" that "comes by flashes / . . . — a spell / golden and inappellable". When

the transcendental dream does succeed, as it does in a series of "magic" or fantasy poems, it results in death for the mortal concerned, as in the poems "The Piper of Arll", "By the Willow Spring", "Avis" and "Amanda".

In Scott's early work the death theme is associated with the dream and with rest; in his later work it becomes associated with a dying world. In the poem "The November Pansy", he suggests that a "seed" of life might be dropped from the dying world to re-kindle life elsewhere. This linking of human death with the suggestion that the earth is growing old is dominant in Scott's later work and it seems to mark the end of a cycle in which Roberts' evolutionary "germ" of life has burst up into fruition and is now decaying.

IN CONSIDERATION OF THIS ANALYSIS, it would appear that a critical re-evaluation of the work of Sir Charles G. D. Roberts is necessary to point out that Roberts did establish a poetic myth with his inherited romantic diction, that the function of this myth was to reconcile the Darwinian germ of life with the Christian world spirit, and that this myth was adapted with some slight variations by Roberts' major successors, Lampman and D. C. Scott. Further, it would appear that the early work of E. J. Pratt, supposedly a sport in the Canadian stream, might have developed in response to the poetry of Roberts.

Pratt's ode, *The Iron Door* (1927), provides a good transition from the 1880's to the 1920's because it is a poem which has its roots in the earlier group, yet, in development, it rejects the transcendental dream. The whole visionary experience of the poem is specifically contained within a human "dream", undercut by contrast with the reality of "terrestrial day". But, if Pratt rejects the dilute romantic aspirations of the earlier "dream" poetry, he does so by turning to the law of tooth and claw which he finds explicit in Roberts' tales of the wild and some of the later poetry. "The Great Feud", for example, has its genesis in the first two chapters of Roberts' book, *In the Morning of Time*, which was first published in 1919, just as Pratt was beginning to write. In Chapter One is the setting for "The Great Feud" — the red clay estuary complete with giant lizards, the prototypes for Tyrannosaurus Rex, and bloody internecine battle. Here too are members of an evolving man-like species associated with the rudiments of reason — prototypes for the ape mother and her brood.

Similarly, a prototype of the battle between cachalot and kraken in Pratt's poem "The Cachalot" (1926) is to be found in a tale entitled "The Terror of

the Sea Caves" from Roberts' book, *The Haunters of the Silences* (1907).² It is substantially Roberts' concept of the national epic and the military sea poem (cf. "The Shannon and the Chesapeake") which recurs in Pratt's later poem, "The Roosevelt and the Antinoe". In addition, the whole iceberg section from *The Titanic* (1935), including suggestions of the berg's eventual disintegration as a part of a natural cycle, can be shown to have a strong relationship with Roberts' poem "The Iceberg", first published in *The University of Toronto Quarterly* in 1931.

Pratt's progress would appear to be contained within the framework of the older Darwinism established by Roberts and Lampman. The difference between Pratt and his predecessors (and in parallel development to the later poetry of Scott) is that he continually uses the earlier pre-formulated world view to suggest its opposite. "The Great Feud" is a dominantly stavistic structure emerging from the evolutionary Darwinism of one of Roberts' later romances. A second difference between Roberts and Pratt is that the latter shifts the focus from external to internal nature as he explains in *Newfoundland Verse*: "the fight / with nature growing simpler every hour, / her ways being known". Man using the full resources of his courage, reason and self-sacrifice can resist the primal forces of the sea; however, when the primitive forces of external nature are internalized within man, "these blinded routes" are almost without cure: "the taint is in the blood". So that where Roberts searches external nature for the "secret" of "beauty" or "life", Pratt turns inward in an attempt to find the existential "why" of human behaviour.

It is at this point in clarifying the details of a poet's myth, that the computer can be of considerable help to conventional scholarship. One of the great surprises of the Pratt word-index was that the encompassing metaphor appeared to be that of "blood" rather than the expected "sea" or "water", although, of course, "sea" is a larger category than blood. Yet, as each reference to the word "blood" was followed through the thematic concordance, it began to appear that Pratt internalized the tides of the sea within the veins of man, as is explicit in the lyric "Newfoundland":

Here the tides flow,
And here they ebb;
Not with that dull, unsinewed tread of waters
Held under bonds to move
Around the unpeopled shores —
Moon-driven through a timeless circuit

Of invasion and retreat;
 But with a lusty stroke of life
 Pounding at stubborn gates,
 That they might run
 Within the sluices of men's hearts . . .

Red is the sea-kelp on the beach
Red as the heart's blood,

This is a natural metaphor for a Newfoundlander, but, more importantly, it is also a natural metaphor in terms of Pratt's modified Darwinism. Man, evolving from the sea, still carries part of the sea within him. In Pratt's myth, the bloodstream becomes an evolutionary battleground where the forces of instinct (associated with cold-blooded creatures) and those of higher reason (associated with warm blood) are continually at war. As Pratt writes in "Under the Lens":

Along the arterial highways,
 Through the cross-roads and trails of the veins
 They are ever on the move —
 Incarnate strife,
 Reflecting in victory, deadlock and defeat,
 The outer campaigns of the world,
 But without tactics, without strategy.

Creatures of primal force,
 With saurian impact
 And virus of the hamadryads,
 The microbes war with leucocytes . . .

Once it was flood and drought, lightning and storm and earthquake,
 Those hoary executors of the will of God,
 That planned the monuments for human faith.

Now, rather, it is these silent and invisible ministers,
 Teasing the ear of Providence
 And levelling out the hollows of His hands,
 That pose the queries for His moral government.

As is suggested by these examples, Pratt internalizes both good and evil and associates them with a physiological metaphor of the bloodstream. In Pratt's published books of poetry, "blood" and its variants (appearing 265 times) are primary nouns and have the same significance in Pratt's poetic myth as does that of the "dream" in Roberts' world view. Clustered about the metaphor of blood

is a series of related nouns: "vein", "artery", "love", "hate", "instinct", and "reason". As might be expected, "red" (with its variants of "crimson" and "scarlet") is the dominant colour.

In Pratt's work, the blood line not only determines the pedigree of the creature, but it also establishes its physiological possibilities for good or bad. It is this aspect of the blood metaphor, suggesting the Biblical "sins of the fathers", which is evoked by the woman representing universal humanity in *The Iron Door* when she asks why "blood" and "time" should always bring forth a "Cain". Cyrus, on the other hand, in *The Fable of the Goats*, evolves a sport "leucocyte" in his Aryan bloodstream which enables him to make peace with the Semite goat and so save universal humanity through moral evolution. Consequently, as has been expressed in the critical formulation of John Sutherland, Northrop Frye and Desmond Pacey, Pratt's poetry moves from "stone to steel" or between the ethical norms of "the temple and the cave"; what has not been noted, however, is that it does so along the metaphor of the bloodstream.

In this connection, it is important to see that for Pratt the whole process of life from microscopic spore to man constitutes the evolutionary process. In his structure, Christianity is the evolved pinnacle of human conduct, and when man falls away from this ideal, he can only fall into atavism:

But what made *our* feet miss the road that brought
The world to such a golden trouve,
In our so brief a span?
How may we grasp again the hand that wrought
Such light, such fragrance, and such love,
O star! O rose! O Son of Man?

Because of this, an understanding of the relationship between Roberts' book, *In the Morning of Time*, and Pratt's poem, "The Great Feud", is important to an understanding of Pratt's work. Roberts was writing of man's evolutionary progress at the very time when Pratt, a pacifist, sick at heart at the carnage of World War I, was coming to the conclusion that man was not progressing but retrogressing to his animalistic past. *In the Morning of Time* provided a structure of immense ferocity embodied in animal form which perfectly expressed Pratt's feelings regarding the bloody, brutal and unreasoned precipitation of World War I. Then, too, Roberts' stress on "reason" and evolutionary "progress" indicated to Pratt the precise lines of argument with which he must disagree. "The Great Feud", with its perversion of reason and the moral law, its bloody internecine

combat and the concluding implications of cyclic recurrence, is Pratt's atavistic answer to Roberts' evolutionary progress.

Pratt's substitution of an atavistic myth for Roberts' evolutionary Darwinism is, perhaps, the key to much of Pratt's work. This explains Pratt's fascination with the giant creature, the survival of the fittest, and the emphasis on the power of the superior creature, be it man or machine. And because Pratt is also holding in suspension Wilhelm Wundt's mechanistic physiology which stresses the unreasoned mechanical response, that which links the animal, fallen man, and the machine is precisely this mechanical instinctive response. When man or his representative (such as *The Titanic*) falls from reason to instinct, there is a magnificent rush of unbridled power. And it is this response to the removal of reason which fascinates Pratt.

Further, as Pratt accepts that aspect of popular Darwinism which suggests that inheritance is carried along the bloodline, these evolutionary or atavistic struggles are always carried on in that arena. "The Witches' Brew", Pratt's farcical version of Milton's *Paradise Lost*, establishes an underwater Eden where the fall from cold-blooded to purely human (warm-blooded) sinning is accomplished through an alcoholic apple in the bloodstream. "The Great Feud" is again about the fall from instinct to reason and the return to brute force through demagoguery and a "yeasty" ferment in the blood. *The Titanic* also invokes a fall from steel to stone, and Brébeuf, associated with hubris, falls from Christianity to demonism or black magic. Similarly, the characteristic technique of Pratt's shorter poems is the flashback to the primal past, as in the reversion to the wordless hate of "Silences" or to the void before the earth began in "The Ground Swell".

AS THIS DOCUMENTATION would indicate, there was, in fact, a very close relationship between the major poet of the 1880's, Sir Charles G. D. Roberts, and the major poet of the 1920's, E. J. Pratt — a bend in the stream of Canadian poetry rather than the sharp break suggested by present critical comment. Further, it is possible that A. J. M. Smith, D. C. Scott and A. M. Klein, although busy carving out new provinces for poetry, were also fully aware of the work done by their predecessors and contemporaries.

In this transmission, D. C. Scott would appear to be significant. One of the surprises of the A. J. M. Smith concordance was a substantial "death", "love",

"beauty", and "dream" complex not unlike the formulation of D. C. Scott's concordance. This is not to imply that D. C. Scott's sometimes metaphysical *Beauty and Life* (1921) was to Smith as Roberts' work was to Pratt, for Smith's whole canon is much more profoundly influenced by Eliot's fertility myth. Yet, there are significant parallels with the older poets in Smith's work. In this connection we might compare D. C. Scott's "Variations on a Seventeenth Theme" — a series of modulations on death using the primrose, Eliot-fashion, as an organizing metaphor — with Smith's habitual practice. Then, too, Smith's poetic technique of metamorphosis, often related to successive shadings of reality, would seem to be quite close to Scott's poetic (cf. Scott's "The Tree and the Birds", and Smith's poem "The Fountain"). Similarly, there are continual parallels with D. C. Scott's concept of the timeless geological North ("Lines in Memory of Edmund Morris") in F. R. Scott's work, as well as a strong emphasis on the evolutionary concerns of Roberts and Pratt.

If it is Pratt's concern that man is in danger of reverting to his animalistic past, in the poetry of Abraham Moses Klein, man very often *is* an animal, and a predatory animal at that, as in this description of Hitler:

Fed thus with native quarry, flesh and gore
He licked his whiskers, crouched, then stalked for more.

Hitler is also specifically identified with an atavistic fall and the concept of inherited evil: "Judge not the man for his face / out of Neanderthal! / . . . the evil of the race / informs that skull!" "Animal" is Klein's largest category of diction, recurring some 400 times with "blood" also a substantial category, occurring seventy-six times. In Klein's work, "blood" is most often associated with the spilled blood of the small and innocent creature. Klein's poetry appears to suggest two worlds: one is the world of the "Black Forest" ethic where the good little man is pursued by the ravaging beast; the other is the reconciling art world of Biblic wood and fairy tale where the small boy of "Bestiary", hunting at his leisure, can stalk the "beast, Nebuchadnezzar".

It is one of the ironies of the development of Canadian poetry that E. J. Pratt and A. M. Klein, both fundamentally kind and compassionate men, should, by virtue of their differing historical and religious perspectives, have been fundamentally influenced by diametrically opposed aspects of the same myth or world view. Pratt, strongly influenced by the Darwinistic superior creature, is fascinated by the spectacle of immense strength and power, the giant whale, the enormous iceberg, the largest ship the world has ever known; Klein, who has been made

tragically aware of the immense danger of unbridled power during the Nazi era, holds as exemplar the good little man, the homoculus, the dwarf.

This would imply that Roberts' evolutionary Darwinism has become atavism in the works of E. J. Pratt and that the whole concept funnels into the Aryan myth, where it is picked up by A. M. Klein in the late thirties. In a real sense, Canadian poetry has been a direct response to a world view or *weltanschauung*, and if it may be hypothesized that an appreciation of the Puritan mythos is essential for an understanding of the poetry of the United States, it might be equally hypothesized that for Canadian poetry, coming as it does 300 years later, an understanding of the ramifications of popular Darwinism is essential.

But, although Canadian poetry has developed in response to the prevailing popular philosophies and literary influences (even Pratt has a few poems suggesting Eliot's fertility myth structure), it does not seem possible to argue that literary climate alone can explain the links of connection between our poets. Current interest and mere chance do not seem adequate explanations for the fact that Roberts and Pratt choose to write of the struggles of cachalot and kraken; that Lampman and Smith invoke machine hells in corresponding accents; that D. C. Scott, F. R. Scott and Earle Birney turn to the North land as the new Eden; that Pratt and Klein both write ironic litanies of progress noting that man has turned to the beasts of the field for his instruction; that Klein's little hunter seeks out the enemy "spirochete" in Pratt's "whispering jungle of the blood"; that Birney uses the following terms: "Andromeda" (1), "apotheosis" (1), "architrave" (1), "Armagadding" [Armageddon] (1), "Betelgeuse" (1), "cordite" (1), "hieroglyphed" (1), "narwhal's" (1), "pleiades" (1), "saurian" (1), "saurians" (2), "trilobites" (1), "tyrannosaur" (2), usually once, and with implications of Pratt's schemata; or further, that when insisting on man's need to accept responsibility for his own evil, Birney equates man's potential savagery with the iceberg of Pratt's *Titanic*, suggesting "the iceberg is elective".

These persistent linkings suggest that we need to re-evaluate one of the major issues of the 1940's — the question of the continuity of Canadian poetry. The term "continuity" has an unfamiliar ring in this context. In most critical texts we stress not continuity, but the division of the Canadian stream into four unrelated groups: those of the pre-1850's, the 1880's, the 1920's and the post-1940's. If such a continuity does exist, how may it be indicated? Northrop Frye, reviewing A. J. M. Smith's *The Book of Canadian Poetry* in 1943, states that he senses a "unity of tone" in Smith's selections. In his later essay, "The Narrative Tradition of English Canadian Poetry" and his "Conclusion" to the recent

Literary History of Canada (1967) this has been expanded to suggest a unity of tone achieved by a dominant thematic pattern — one of the cruel North characterized by a forbidding nature and a “garrison mentality”. However, if we are to accept John Sutherland’s angry dismissal of Smith, Frye and the Canadian tradition in his preface to *Other Canadians* in 1947 or the tacit editorializing of his lineal descendants, Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski in their recent anthology of criticism, *The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada* (1967), there was not only no continuity in Canadian poetry prior to 1940, there was no Canadian poetry worthy of consideration prior to 1940.

Disregarding the question of poetic worth, I think this assertion can be disputed on the basis that there simply has not been enough work done in the area to be able to make so final a statement. I am inclined to agree with the later Sutherland, writing in *Northern Review*, when he suggests, somewhat elliptically, that it might not be a bad idea if the Canadian poet were not unaware of his place in the tradition of Canadian poetry. The necessity for this is obvious, and I would think that it would apply equally to Canadian criticism, too. Without an understanding of our own development, we cut off our poetic roots: without Roberts, Pratt is not entirely explored; without Pratt, we negate aspects of Klein and Birney; without D. C. Scott and Lampman, aspects of Smith’s poetic are incomplete. Similarly, Layton’s insistence on the image of man as a “dis-eased animal”, Cohen’s “Lines from My Grandfather’s Journal”, Avison’s preoccupation with the technical terms of space, Page’s “dream” metaphors, and Atwood’s *The Journal of Susanna Moodie* do not emerge from a cultural vacuum, but are intimately related to the development of writing in Canada.

FOOTNOTES

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² In the case of Pratt’s poem “The Cachalot,” there is also very likely an intermediary text, Frank Bullen’s *The Cruise of The Cachalot; Round the World After Sperm Whales*, 1898. From notes contributed by both Pratt and Roberts to an anthology of sea poems for school children entitled *Verses of the Sea* (1930), it would appear that both poets were familiar with Bullen’s work. As Bullen’s work came after *Moby Dick* and does share some similarities with it, this supports Pratt’s contention that he did not read *Moby Dick* until after the completion of “The Cachalot.”

THE CANADIAN CRITIC: IS HE NECESSARY?

Phyllis Grosskurth

ABOUT ONE HUNDRED YEARS AGO, England's leading literary critic, Matthew Arnold, declared that good criticism was more important than second-rate literature. He was speaking with particular relevance to his own time. The great Romantic movement which Arnold described as "abortive" had petered out with the early deaths of Byron, Shelley and Keats. Coleridge had faded away and Wordsworth, for many years before his death in 1850, had become a conservative institution. Arnold, profoundly convinced that he was living in a creative vacuum, was gloomily contemptuous of the pallid, pessimistic literature of his own day — including his own. Consequently, he looked to criticism to re-establish standards, to distinguish the excellent from the second-rate, and to act generally as a stimulus to a fresh period of creativity.

Time, of course, has proved him obtuse in his failure to recognize the genius of, say, Dickens or the Brontës or Browning. But let us not condemn him too harshly, since he was a man with a real passion for literature in contrast to some critics, past and present, who make one wonder if they nourish a pathological distaste for writing or art or music or the theatre. For the moment, then, let us put aside the fact that many of Arnold's judgments have not accorded with those of posterity and turn to the reasons for his particular attitude at a particular moment in history. In the middle of the nineteenth century English readers could feel proudly confident that they possessed a long tradition of literary masterpieces. (However, it is possibly significant that the Victorians were still uneasily hesitant about their immediate predecessors, the Romantics, particularly in view of the poets' embarrassingly unconventional lives. When Keats' love letters to Fanny Brawne were published posthumously in 1848, Arnold dismissed them superciliously as "the love letters of a surgeon's apothecary").

But the point to be grasped is that a nineteenth-century English critic felt secure in measuring contemporary works against the achievement of the past.

Arnold's particular method of evaluation was the application of what he called "touchstones". When confronted with a new and uncategorized work, he would compare it, for example, with the tone of Hamlet's dying speech to Horatio:

If thou didst ever hold me in thy heart,
Absent thee from felicity awhile,
And in this harsh world draw thy breath in pain,
To tell my story.

The fallacy inherent in this rather simplistic approach is that one can be highly selective in the quality of the lines one chooses to use as "touchstones". It ignores the fact that two authors might be aiming for entirely different effects. This particular passage happens to be deeply moving but there are others whose authors might cringe to hear them repeated. Wordsworth was also one of Arnold's favourite poets but he had absent-minded lapses and Arnold would never have used these immortal lines as "touchstones":

This is a work of waste and ruin;
Consider, Charles, what you are doing.

Nevertheless, there was a great storehouse of literature which was as familiar to Arnold as his own name and which had inescapably moulded his attitudes, and this security gave him an assurance, a sense of confidence even when he was blandly wrong. Sometimes it even helped him to make judicious evaluations.

One often hears the story about the president of Harvard University who, when asked how long it takes to make a great university, replied, "Three hundred years". This same observation might be applied to the creation of a great literary tradition. And that is precisely what we lack in this country. As a result it seems to me that the outstanding quality of the average Canadian reviewer might be described as failure of nerve. When confronted with the spanking new literature of his own country, he tends to be timorous, hesitant, or evasive; or, at the opposite extreme, he becomes truculent, contemptuous, or vitriolic. If we can count on him for any consistency, it is an almost undeviating lack of enthusiasm for anything Canadian. Why, heavens, it might stamp him as being chauvinistic or provincial! This is just a single instance of our genius — for this is what it almost amounts to — for demeaning ourselves, a manifestation of our infinitely boring inferiority complex. The contemptible attitude of a great many Canadians to one of our most distinguished original thinkers, Marshall McLuhan, is a case in point. Morley Callaghan is particularly bitter about his treatment by

Canadian critics. I do not exempt myself from this syndrome. I do not know how many books I have reviewed — certainly in the hundreds — but only a small percentage of them have been written by Canadian authors. One obvious reason for this omission is that a great many more books are written by Americans and by Europeans. And let's face it, a great many more important books that seem to interest the rest of the world. But I cannot evade my responsibility as easily as all that. On the whole — *mea culpa* — but I do not enjoy reviewing Canadian books as a general rule. I, too, suffer from the syndrome common to the average Canadian reviewer — I honestly do not believe many good Canadian books are written, and when reviewing them, I find myself gripped by some inhibiting force. I rather suspect that many of the writers themselves feel somewhat inhibited creatively here. Certainly some of them have told me that they seem to gain creative confidence when they are working thousands of miles from Canada.

Why this sense of inhibition? Canada may be a large country geographically but her literary community is very small indeed. We all tend to know each other intimately or at least to be friends of friends. And news travels fast among this incestuous group. For example, a few years ago I reviewed Margaret Lawrence's *A Jest of God* for the *Globe and Mail*. Even though I usually adhere to a policy of not reviewing books by personal friends, I agreed to take this one on because I had been so enthusiastic about her previous novel, *The Stone Angel*. I found myself greatly disappointed in *A Jest of God* and as a result I suffered misery writing that review. I even toyed with the idea of sending the book back to the literary editor and asking him to find a more "objective" reviewer, but that alternative was rejected by my Puritan conscience. The review itself was not a vitriolic piece. I simply stated that after the great excitement I had experienced while reading *The Stone Angel*, I felt sadly let down by *A Jest of God*. Mrs. Lawrence is a very generous-spirited person, and she has never conveyed to me that she felt any resentment towards what I believe she realised was an honest opinion. However, with her publisher it was a different matter. A few days after the review appeared I ran into him at a party where he proceeded to attack me in highly emotional terms. Is it understandable that I have shied away from reviewing Canadian books ever since then? *A Jest of God* went on to become the very successful film, *Rachel, Rachel*, but I have not changed my opinion.

I am not going so far as to claim that all my criticism has been, in Matthew Arnold's phrase, sweetness and light. I do recall the great pleasure I felt in the praise I lavished on Gabrielle Roy's *The Road Past Altamont*. But I also remember with a certain grim satisfaction the hatchet jobs I did on Graeme Gib-

son's *Five Legs* or Scott Symons' *Place d'Armes*, two novels which happen to have been written by Canadians but, in my opinion, would have been deplorable in any language. I may be completely wrong about this — as I may have been about *A Jest of God* (a book infinitely superior to the two I have just mentioned) for one cannot evade the fact that ultimately criticism is based on subjective reaction.

At the risk of being tarred and feathered, then, I do not believe that Canadian writing at this point is either extensive or impressive. Perhaps it never will be. There are countries, old countries, which have not developed a literature which has gained an international reputation. And, as American influence gains a strangulating hold on so-called Canadian culture, my pessimism, I admit, increases. This does not mean that I have lost faith in all Canadian writers. There are some whom I consider very fine indeed. But — and here I seem to be contradicting my earlier point — at this rather sensitive moment in our history I detect a tendency to bestow on some writers the most absurd attention where in more prolific countries they would simply be lost in the shuffle.

Well, what is one to do in this situation? Throw up one's hands in utter despair? My answer is a qualified optimism. I have made it clear that I am opposed to a myopic chauvinism; and I am equally hostile to a petty provincialism whose instinctive reaction is to deplore anything Canadian. A Canadian reviewer should be aware of what is being written in Canada and he should bring it to the attention of the Canadian public. He can also do what he may to offer help to promising young writers by reading their manuscripts, or by recommending their work to publishers. (Incidentally, most of us still hold the romantic notion that the novel is the most creative form of writing. I couldn't begin to tell you the number of starry-eyed students who have told me that they were writing "a novel". One of my own favourite Canadian books is Peter Newman's *The Distemper of Our Times*. Perhaps our literary future lies in non-fictional writing).

But the outlook for responsible, informed reviewing in Canada is very discouraging. *Tamarack Review*, *The Canadian Forum* and *Saturday Night* are in perpetual financial difficulties. They have been held together by a noble band of few active members and they deserve the highest commendation. But what I find absolutely deplorable in this country is the book review pages in our newspapers. When I arrived back in Canada five years ago after living for some years in England, I felt an indescribable sense of loss when our dreary Sundays could not even be cheered by spreading the weekly papers on the floor and spending hours

reading through the arts sections. In England, literature, like the other arts, is considered news.

As far as Toronto is concerned, the situation has not improved in the slightest in those five years. On Saturday the *Globe and Mail* continues to run a fine section on books in its magazine supplement, an arrangement which has aroused a certain amount of criticism from some quarters. It is organized by a highly competent, full-time literary editor, William French, who knows what is going on in the literary world and has the imagination and judgment to compile a balanced group of reviews. In 1965 I was very pleased when he asked me to contribute a review every three or four weeks, which is the *Globe and Mail's* policy with reviewers. This pleasant arrangement continued for two years; we parted amicably when I moved over to the Toronto *Daily Star* to write a weekly review for two years; and I am happy to return to his fold once more.

The *Telegram's* book page is run by Barry Callaghan largely as a forum for Barry Callaghan who generally writes one long review, eked out by a series of mini-reviews, something like a quick shopping guide. But the situation at the Toronto *Star* was the one that I found even more depressing. Here was a newspaper with the largest circulation in Canada, yet on Saturday it ran what purported to be a page devoted to reviewing books, utterly dull in format, duller still to read. The only bright spot was Robert Fulford whose daily column was often devoted to an urbane, witty, well-informed discussion of a current book.

Mr. Fulford was depressed about this situation too. Two years ago he persuaded the *Star's* management to do something about it. The *Star's* policy was against appointing a full-time literary editor, so Fulford's job was virtually to act in this capacity in addition to writing his daily column. It was a courageous thing for him to do but it was exhausting, and it is little wonder that he left a short time later to become editor of *Saturday Night*. For various reasons the others dropped away, and towards the end of my two-year stint I often felt like the weary knight of Browning's poem, "Childe Roland to the Dark Tower Came".

But I still remember with mingled enthusiasm, regret, and nostalgia, the conversation we had that day with Bob Fulford when he outlined his plan for not only giving vitality to the *Star's* book page, but for making it the best book page in Canada. His model was the *Observer* in which regular reviewers give a unique impress to a literary section. I remember Bob saying, "Why, I find Cyril Connolly interesting even when he's writing about gardening!" Bob didn't give us any sermons about objectivity of treatment or the importance of sensing what would be best sellers or beating other papers with the first review of a book. He knew

that we had developed individual styles of writing and individual prejudices. He had enough faith in us to expect us to be as impartial and perceptive as humanly possible; but he expected us to have very human reactions too. He knew we all shared a passion for books. He paid us the tacit compliment of assuming that what we wrote would be lively and interesting. And I sincerely believe it was, even for a surprisingly long period after Bob left. But it was bound to fall apart without an experienced guiding hand.

The Canadian public's attitude towards books has something of the awkward embarrassment with which it regards all the arts. I think we are still enough of a frontier nation to consider them somewhat effeminate, and our hard-headed Puritanism whispers that they are frivolous and therefore dispensable. Nor do potential readers receive from publishers, book sellers, or newspapers, much stimulation to read books. In this country it would be inconceivable to imagine anyone making a full-time living from reviewing books. Most of the reviewing is done by journalists or by academics.

Have the reviewers themselves done enough to create an enthusiasm for books? There is little opportunity for them to find a forum. Even when they do, the publicity departments of most of Toronto's publishing firms are surprisingly unco-operative or unenterprising in supplying them with advance copies of books. But what about the reviewers themselves once they have found themselves in the happy situation of talking about a subject in which presumably they are enormously concerned? I have already suggested that some of them tend to display a lack of confidence in Canadian books. Yet this is not adequate cause for the extraordinary attitude of the Canadian public towards the critics. I cannot think of another country where such an uneasy relationship exists between critic and public. I maintain that book reviewers suffer from guilt by association with TV, drama, and music reviewers, many of whom seem to view their function as that of demolition squads. The public is not wrong in regarding many of these as venomous, self-important, and envious of those who are truly creative. They lack confidence in their responsibility as constructive forces in the community. Clearly some of them use their columns as outlets for personal aggressiveness.

This is not what Matthew Arnold had in mind when he talked about criticism as an educative function. It should, as Arnold comprehended, above all stress the importance of art in our lives. As far as Canada is concerned, Canadian literary critics can stimulate people to read books; they can make people concerned or angry enough to write letters to the paper when a favourite author is attacked; they can make us aware of what is being written in this country and how we

differ from what is being done elsewhere and in what way we may be part of an international movement. In other words, criticism can create the sort of dialogue which is so necessary to a cultural climate.

True enough, we have not a native literary tradition such as Matthew Arnold had to support him. But we have infinitely more literate readers whom we can reach. For that matter, we are not hindered by Arnold's comparative insularity. The most popular writer among college students for the past few years has been Hermann Hesse. Only by assuming that we are part of the international cultural scene can we ever hope to gain this sense of nationality—by which we mean feeling grown up and being taken seriously by the rest of the world, which we hear so much about these days.

THROUGH A GLASS DARKLY

Canadian Art Criticism

Audrey Thomas

“ART IS ONE OF THE NECESSITIES of life,” says Henry James; “but even the critics themselves would probably not assert that criticism is anything more than an agreeable luxury — something like printed talk.”¹ Nothing more, perhaps, but sometimes something less, a great deal less; or should we say it depends on who is talking? For, six months after undertaking to survey Canadian art criticism both as literature and as a separate literary genre, my first impulse is to confess to the reader that no such thing exists. However, the curiosities which I did uncover, as well as the few articles and books which may only be the exceptions that prove the rule, are too interesting and, in the case of Emily Carr’s *Growing Pains* and A. Y. Jackson’s *A Painter’s Country*, too important to be written off so quickly, simply because there is no real body of Canadian art literature behind them. This article will be a survey then, neither definitive nor particularly comprehensive, of some of the literary curiosities (and some of the literary gems) which I did discover in my search for the still unborn Canadian art criticism as a literary genre.

Let us begin with a curiosity. In the *Canadian Magazine* (“of Politics, Science, Art and Literature”), in November, 1902, a woman named Kathleen Hale recalls a journey to the home of Homer Watson:

It was an amber day in October, when with a sense of adventure we set out for that village [Doon]; the kind of day when, as Mobray says, “Nature holds a bit of yellow glass to our eyes, till, like children, we catch a glimpse of the golden ages.” Doon, nestling near the heart of Ontario, is get-at-able by a “local” train, when it resolves itself into a station house and half a hundred cottages.

This is a feature article, with half-tone sepia reproductions of Watson’s paintings plus a photograph of the painter’s studio — an article intended, presumably, for the well-bred ladies who read the *Canadian Magazine* and saw art and artists

through that "bit of yellow glass" the writer mentions in her opening paragraph. And the leisurely style of the opening to what is in fact a rather brief article, could have been — could it not? — the exact style of the opening of any one of a number of Victorian novels, and in that sense alone it becomes a literary curiosity. And it has its descendants, not only in the interviews with Margot Fonteyn or other illustrious artists on the women's pages of the Canadian dailies, but also in the magazine that was to become the only Canadian Art magazine, or only magazine of "Canadian Art criticism", if one wishes to be magnanimous.

In the 1950 summer issue of *Canadian Art* (néé *Maritime Art* and now *Arts-canada*), a reviewer, whom I shall make anonymous, begins her review (again a "feature" on a particular painter).

Like a true artist, [X] is very humble about herself and her work

The romantic conception rides still, or rides again; and here is something written by a man, in *Canadian Art*, Autumn, 1953:

The art of Marthe Rakine, like the personality of the painter, is bright and sparkling.

The leisurely introductions are gone, perhaps, but for some reviewers the romantic attitude remains unchanged, it would seem, since 1902.

Going ahead from 1902 to 1943, we find something of the same attitude in a much more serious *Canadian Art* article by Philip Surrey (then photo-editor of the *Montreal Standard* and also a painter), entitled "Silk Screen Prints Enlist". This article is a criticism of the subject matter of the famous silk-screen prints done by such artists as J. W. G. Macdonald, A. Y. Jackson, Thoreau Macdonald, Lawren Harris, and Arthur Lismer, and sent overseas to the Canadian troops. Surrey maintained that:

Nobody thought enough about the soldiers who were going to look at these pictures. . . . A Raphael Madonna, Botticelli's "Primavera", Vermeer's "Head of a Young Girl"; Degas' ballet dancers or "The Millinery Shop" — all of these, though they have no direct relation to his own background, would have more meaning to a young soldier far from home than stark and stormy scenery.⁵

He regretted there were no paintings of sports, offices, factories, homelife, tea-parties or logging camps, no "pretty girls".

We have tea-parties, night-clubs, logging camps, concerts, regattas, beaches, burlesque-houses, movies, churches, coal-mines, rail-roads, ships. None of these were used.

Presumably all the above would depict Canadians back home smiling as they went about their work and play. The romance and gaiety of Canada's coal-mines and burlesque-houses! That the "stark and stormy scenery" might have been more appropriate does not seem to occur to the critic. And he makes no attempt actually to assess the artists' work as art, rather than as propaganda or therapy.

Yet a genuine criticism of the extensive use of landscape in Canadian art had been made by André Bieler in a *Canadian Art* article of the year before (1942), "On the Canadian Group of Painters".

By crowding the walls of our galleries with pictures showing only the untainted beauty of our land, we have left no room for the expression of that deep uneasiness and sorrow that is in our souls. The depression did not hit us as it did the United States. That sudden bringing-down-to-earth so beneficial to our friends across the border did not occur here.

And he goes on to say he does not suggest "that we should all rush out and paint soldiers and sailors. . . . it is more the general undertone of the pictures that counts. . . ."

The theme of the "lack of humanity" in Canadian painting will be taken up again and again as *Canadian Art* moves towards the present day *Arts Canada*; it is a lack of humanity usually blamed on the too powerful influence of the Group of Seven, who seem to be blamed for almost all that is bad in Canadian painting since 1920.

Bieler's article, a review of a show that was more than what Arthur Lismer castigated as "a popular review",² represents an attempt to make a literate assessment of Canadian landscape painting. But it doesn't really come close to *literature* as such, to James' "printed talk". In the many years *Canadian Art*, or *Arts-canada* has been in existence, it has published very little of that. Among the rare examples, one notices Marius Barbeau's 1946 article on Henri Masson:

On another wall of the same room we recognize samples of Masson's earlier work: the poor folk of Gatineau Point whom the flood is dislodging from their precarious holdings at the edge of the river. Furniture, belongings, even cattle are being salvaged in haste and anxiety. In this chaos even the painter has not had time to set his house in order — the pictures rather lack unity. The eye of the observer scatters its attention upon many details, to the detriment of the whole.

Also Barker Fairley's 1948 article, "What is wrong with Canadian Art?", in which he looks at what has happened to Canadian Art since the Group of Seven success:

Canadian art, after taking a great leap forward, came almost to a dead stop and has never to this day recovered the momentum it had then. Like a man, who, having jumped across the rapids, is so astonished to find that he has landed dry on the other side, say in a clump of juniper, that he does not dare move out of this uncomfortable position.

And Northrop Frye, in the Christmas, 1948 volume, talking of the northern landscapes of Lawren Harris:

In the gauntness of the dead trees, the staring inhumanity of the lonely mountain peaks, in the lowering mists along the sky-line and the brooding confusions of colour in the foreground, one can see what Coleridge meant when he spoke of the poet as the tamer of chaos.

Again, in 1964, I found in *Canadian Art* an article which might be classified as art literature: "Emma Lake Artists' Workshop: An Appreciation", by Arthur McKay. After getting in the usual digs at Canadian art criticism and pointing out that "we accept political coercion, economic domination, Coca-Cola and predigested mass communication, while we resist exposure to the more humane and civilized arts from the U.S.A.," he discusses the paradox of the success of the Workshop:

For some reason unknown to anyone, the artists have co-operated to a remarkable degree with the workshop program. I suppose Westerners have always given ear to the visiting evangelist. There are equal measures of Bible-belt conservatism and radical politics, Presbyterian sabbaths and riotous Saturday nights, wheat surpluses, film censorship and flying farmers. It's the same surreal sub-culture that elected for twenty years the most radical and courageous provincial government in the country.

This is witty, literate writing and the article as a whole is full of the kind of "printed talk" that makes for good art criticism. There is no reason why the reader of art criticism, like the reader of literary criticism, should not want to be stimulated, excited, maybe outraged, maybe amused, by what the writer has to say. Otherwise why not simply publish lists of works currently on display or statistical information about artists and their chosen media? Why try to verbalize the non-verbal *unless* one is going to treat art criticism as something more than lists or bibliographies? We don't have to agree with the critic's point of view but we would like to be convinced that he has one and is not afraid to use it! But many of the articles examined showed the writers to be men and women of no imagination, at least in so far as words are concerned. Oddly enough, this was

more true of critics who were not also artists than of the artists themselves. We shall return later to this point.

Most of the recent art criticism, however new and slick the format of *Maritime Art/Canadian Art/Arts Canada* may have become, is as easily passed over as it has always been. And the new, "international" trend of the magazine, a trend which really got under way in the sixties, will no doubt mean more articles by American and European critics and even fewer by the few Canadian critics: more articles which say "the above is a reprint of an article which first appeared in *Art News U.S.* or *Art International*" — or what have you!

Perhaps it is unfair to treat in such a cavalier fashion a magazine which has managed to stay alive so long. But for literary quality *Arts Canada* leaves a great deal to be desired. It is too serious, thinks of itself too much as "one of the necessities of life", like bread, and not as "printed talk". Thus the really best thing, for many years, is an "occasional piece", a letter written by Hugo McPherson on the royal exhibition in the Chapel at Buckingham Palace and printed near the back of the Nov.-Dec. 1962 issue of *Canadian Art*.

Up a short staircase... is a mezzanine gallery designed for an intimate view of drawings. Unhappily two corners of the balcony are occupied by illuminated showcases filled with royal jewelry and miniatures of famous and titled people. The visitors crowd about these cases like moths at the world's last two candles, and the *real* glory of the exhibition — long ranks of drawings by Michelangelo, Leonardo and Holbein — can be seen only by those who elbow their way through the queues packed against the wall.

And the worst thing, also tucked away towards the back, is a newsletter by someone who really ought to have known better:

... for sheer talent and saucy gusto the twentyish painters of British Columbia, whether they have a yen for Zen, are plumping for pop or opting for op, are streets ahead of any generation in the province.⁸

This is the ultimate fascination of the magazine — that one suddenly comes across a perceptive essay like Macpherson's (for the public and what they want are as much a part of the "Art Scene" as the artists and as valid an object for critical appraisal), or equally easily a paragraph of the worst kind of journalese in an unotherwise unremarkable and businesslike article by a man whose name is well-known in the Canadian art world and beyond. I recommend the magazine be read from its modest beginnings to its present rather slick and "sophisticated" state, as a modestly interesting historical document containing a few words of genuine worth and a great deal of banal (if usually harmless) verbal rubbish.

BUT WHAT OF BOOKS? If the one Canadian art magazine cannot truly be said to contain more than the occasional essay, article or review of literary merit, are there not some inspired books of criticism by Canadians, something by a Canadian Henry Adams, or a John Ruskin or even a Henry James? Certainly there are several authoritative books which are recognized as such — *The Fine Arts in Canada* by Newton McTavish, *Canadian Art* by William Colgate, and *A Short History of Canadian Art* by Graham McInness. There are, as well, many studies of individual artists such as Blodwen Davies' 1935 study of Tom Thomson or John McLeish's *September Gale: A Study of Arthur Lismer and the Group of Seven*. There is J. Russell Harper's monumental volume, *Painting in Canada* and a very curious book called *Great Canadian Painting: A Century of Art*. With the exception of the book on Tom Thomson and the book on Arthur Lismer, these are mainly histories, and they are important for their comprehensiveness rather than for their literary qualities. This is especially so of the first three books I mentioned. Even Harper's book, which is written with intelligence as well as knowledge, has only occasional flashes of brilliance (he can be ironic when he wants to) such as his comment on the local reaction to Emily Carr:

Long delayed local appreciation of her one-man shows in Vancouver and Victoria was some compensation for the former days when the ladies of Victoria at their annual exhibitions had hidden her paintings on the backs of screens so that they wouldn't disgrace the pretty flower studies.

Or on the late 19th century vogue for a Parisian "Art Education":

After drawing and painting for long hours they [foreign art students in Paris] had an occasional momentary art criticism from celebrated painters of the world's art capital. They advertised their prowess when they returned home, boasting they had been instructed by various famous artists, and were respectfully stared at by less fortunate fellow professionals who had only managed to receive a provincial training.

But Harper is best when he quotes from the artists themselves, and *Painting in Canada* has probably gathered together more "quotable quotes", more flashes of insight into Canadian art, artists and gallery-going public than any other book now available. Thus, Varley, in a letter to Lismer about the battlefields of World War Two:

You follow up a plank road and then cut off over festering ground, walking on the tips of shell holes which are filled with dark unholy water. You pass over swamps on rotting duck boards, past bleached bones of horses with their harness still on, past isolated crude crosses sticking up from the filth, and the stink of decay is flung all over.

Morrice on Cézanne:

Fine work, almost criminally fine. I once disliked some of his pictures but now I like them all. His is the savage work that one would expect to come from Americans — but it is always France that produces anything emphatic in art.

The acid remarks of Cruikshank in the 1890's:

Canadians won't look at anything small, and anything like crisp, constructive drawing makes them uneasy. But I have decided to do what I know, without being influenced by the opinion of a lot of farmers who can hardly be trusted to go to bed without attempting to blow out the gas.

Or a letter from Douglas Brymner to his son William:

... make one of the best paintings of, say, a girl, and simply call it *a girl*, nobody, a few at best, would care about it. But call it *Mignon Aspiring* or *Esmerelda*, a much worse work than *a girl* would sell. Some little domestic genre pieces, or some touch of humour, with a taking title, or something like *Enoch Arden Watching his Wife*, anything that people can fix a story on. . . .

It is obvious that Mr. Harper knows a well-turned phrase when he sees one and *Painting in Canada* is worth reading for this reason alone. The whole complex and everchanging "art scene" comes alive through Harper's judicious use of such quotations as those above.

Equally worth reading, but for different reasons, is *Great Canadian Painting*, brought out by McClelland and Stewart in 1966. Here we have art history and art criticism as camp literature. The tone of the book is very folksy and often facetious, and it is difficult to take the verbal part of the book seriously. Of Tom Hodgson:

His best paintings have a swashbuckling vitality. This is no more than poetic justice. Hodgson was twice, in 1952 and 1956, an Olympic paddler for Canada.

Of Dennis Burton:

as a boy he had only one contact with art magazines. They were supplemented

once a year by the Eaton's and Simpsons' catalogues. This last fact may do more to account for his later love of pictorialized underwear than all his own explanations.

Of Lawren Harris:

He was a grandson of one of the founders of Massey-Harris Ltd. and *ploughed back* [my italics] the profits from a long line of farm tools into helping painters like A. Y. Jackson get started.

And so on and so on and so on. The editors boast that "there are 106 paintings reproduced here in colour, many more than have been gathered in a single book before". One has no quarrel with this statement. It's a pity the text doesn't live up to such a "grand design". And the comments, although often amusing, are an insult to the painters whose work was reproduced. So far as I can determine this book is an example of Canadian art criticism at its "literary worst".

IS THERE, then, any art criticism here in Canada which could qualify as literature? Yes — and no. Emily Carr's journals and her autobiography *Growing Pains*, are probably the most outstanding literary works to do with art and the artistic process. And because her autobiography traces her formative years, first at Art School in California, then in Europe, and then her struggles with the "cultured" indifference of the West Coast art circles, a great deal of art criticism, in the broadest sense, is included in this book. Take, for example, her comments on European reaction to the Canadian West:

Artists from the Old World said our West was crude, unpaintable. Its bigness angered, its vastness and wild spaces terrified them. Browsing cows, hooves well sunk in the grass (hooves were hard to draw!), placid streams with an artistic wriggle meandering through pastoral landscape — that was the Old World idea of a picture. Should they feel violent, the artists made blood-red sunsets, disciplined by a smear of haze. They would as soon have thought of making pictures of their own insides as of the depths of our forests.

And on the distortion of some of the then "New Art" of Paris:

Indians distorted both human and animal forms — but they distorted with meaning, for emphasis, and with great sincerity. Here I felt distortion was often used for design or in an effort to shock rather than convince. Our Indians get down to stark reality.

She was a fierce woman and sometimes a bitter woman and she had a terrific sense of drama. It is not necessary here to dwell on the reasons for the popularity of *Klee Wyck*, *Growing Pains*, *The Book of Small, Hundreds and Thousands*. These are literature under the special genre-title of autobiography, and they are autobiography at its best. But *Growing Pains* and the journals are also full of intense, original perceptions concerning the artistic process and art in general as well as an account of her own particular triumphs and despairs. Thus they can (and should) be considered in any discussion of Canadian art criticism. Here literature and criticism meet, with the happiest possible results.

The same is true of A. Y. Jackson's *A Painter's Country*. Maybe it is because both Jackson and Emily Carr are "characters" that this is so. In spite of his famous association with the *Group of Seven* and his seeming gregariousness Jackson has always been somewhat independent (not "isolated" like Emily Carr, but "independent", which she also was). And, like Emily, unafraid to speak his mind. His autobiographical facts are very different from hers; but *A Painter's Country*, as well as being excellent reading, is also full of the same critical insights as exist in *Growing Pains*, and stated with the same originality and sometimes in the same ironic tone:

The most popular picture I ever painted was done in Quebec. Known as "The Red Barn", it is owned by William Watson, the art dealer in Montreal. Not very long after it was painted, the University of Saskatchewan wanted to purchase a couple of paintings and asked Dr. McCallum to choose them. He sent them one by J. W. Beatty and my "Red Barn." They bought the Beatty canvas; the "Red Barn" was returned so quickly it could hardly have been taken out of the case. Later the Tate Gallery asked to buy it, and our government wanted to present it to Princess Elizabeth when she was in Canada. Various other people have tried to purchase it but the owner will not part with it.

In a speech on the departure of Arthur Lismer for Africa, Jackson wrote:

The first artist who came to Canada noticed a kind of instinctive antagonism. He was a French portrait painter, who, making a drawing of an Indian in profile, was nearly scalped by the indignant sitter for making him only half a man. Criticism is more enlightened today, but not much.

And indeed it would seem that the only enlightened critics, or the only critics capable of expressing themselves in a perceptive, sensitive, *original* way, are the artists. Perhaps this is only true (if it is true) in a country like Canada where until very recently the Artist belonged to such a minority; and such a minority

in such a vast majority of hills and fields and lakes and space that he was able to observe his fellows from a kind of distance that would not be possible in Europe, say, or even in Eastern America.

Perhaps professional criticism, other than by artists, is a thing which develops slowly — particularly in the visual arts, which comes to the frontiers of literature like electricity and mains water, only after a community of interest has securely been established. At the moment there seem to be just isolated gleams of light, not real “illumination”.

Yet it may come. Jack Shadbolt, combining the roles of Art Historian, Artist and Art Critic all in one, has attempted to gather into one place a book unique I think, in Canada, *In Search of Form* — Shadbolt on Shadbolt. If it is not “printed talk” exactly (the Artist tends to lecture, not to “talk”), it is definitely a step in the right direction. Like *Growing Pains* and *A Painter's Country*, this is a remembrance of things past, but here the memories are concerned *solely* with the painter's own artistic development. What we know about him as a person is incidental, and we have no idea of what he said to anyone or anyone said to him. He presents us with the drawing or painting and then analyzes it, reminisces about it, attempts to fit it in to his general development as an artist. Sometimes he indulges in a formality of language bordering on Jargon:

[the reader] will see that I have had a recurrent pattern of going periodically in one direction toward the cosmic flux of all nature only to switch over for a period to an architectonically designed structure.

Sometimes he is too lyrical, too much the romantic (“I am nature. Nature is *me*”); sometimes too self-consciously literary in his explanations:

the starkness of the black and white statement stirred my Grecian memories where often the chalk-white piers with their white boats stood out so dazzlingly against the dark blue of the water.

He is fond of words like “lyric”, “symbiosis”, flux”.

But nevertheless here is a man who is attempting a whole book of art criticism — not really history in the J. Russell Harper sense, not really autobiography in the A. Y. Jackson sense, not either the quick, slick criticism of *Arts Canada*. That the painter he writes about is himself is probably not a good thing here. *In Search of Form* reaches no literary heights and may prove boring to those not deeply committed to an interest in individual aesthetic development. But it is the only “real” book of art criticism I came across. It is not the beginning of a literary

genre but it might be the beginning of a whole series of longer critical works on Art. Meanwhile Art Criticism in Canada may remain the last of the (literary) new frontiers.

FOOTNOTES

¹ *The Painter's Eye: Notes and Essays on the Pictorial Arts by Henry James*. Selected and edited with an introduction by John L. Sweeney.

² "It is quite easy to write a popular review (of the current RCA annual exhibition in this case). They are already appearing in the press. 'A portrait of Dr. So and So (with his history) shown by the eminent academician with his usual etc. etc. . . .'" ("The 64th Annual Exhibition of the Royal Canadian Academy," *Maritime Art*, Dec.-Jan. 1943-44).

³ Tony Emery, "Letter from the West Coast," *Canadian Art*, March-April 1965.

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WRITE ME A FILM?

*A Symposium by
Canadian Filmmakers*

INTRODUCTION

Hugo McPherson

WHAT ARE THE CONNECTIONS between writing and cinema in Canada? There is no authoritative answer to this question. Instead, there are almost as many answers as there are film makers and writers. Hence a symposium, the form most closely related to the group effort of making a film. I have not, however, taken a further step towards film: I have not asked each contributor to submit his article to a score of colleagues to have it revised, praised, condemned, cut, expanded, re-titled, or changed to another subject before it reached the page-proof (or test print) stage. That would have been too close to the real process; and of course the budget for a symposium is not a film budget.

What follows reveals the attitudes of four working film makers and writers who occupy important places at the National Film Board. Each has chosen an aspect of the relation between film and writing, and each expresses a personal

vision. So we will regard this as a *quartet*, not in musical terms, where four voices play together, but in film terms, where discordant voices achieve a special harmony or dissonance in a completed work.

In this script, Ian MacNeill, film maker, and former Director of English Programme, relates the costs of filmmaking to the individual effort of the writer. William Weintraub, novelist, script-writer and film-maker, dramatizes the four-way problem of scripted and unscripted films. Guy Glover, producer, and Director of English Programme, emphasizes the inter-disciplinary, *non-literary* nature of the film art. And Jacques Godbout, film maker, novelist, poet, and Directeur de la production française, looks philosophically at fiction and film, and finds that words and visual images—though very different media—have a common bond in *poetry*. Bon appetit! I shall add an Afterword.

UNEASY RIDERS

William Weintraub

The connection between writing and the cinema in Canada? Whither? I got some insight into this matter the other day by eavesdropping on a conversation that took place in the cafeteria of the National Film Board (or any other place where Canadian film makers gather). The conversation was between RALPH OBSOLETE, a 40-year-old film maker, and a 20-year-old colleague of his, PETER WITH-IT.

OBSOLETE: This film you're making, what's it about?

WITH-IT: Alienation. How people can't communicate.

OBSOLETE: Of course. What else is there? Who's writing your script?

WITH-IT: Script? Are you putting me on? Who uses scripts?

OBSOLETE: You're having the actors improvise, is that it? Realism?

WITH-IT: You older cats might have called it realism. We call it honesty.

OBSOLETE: What makes you think that when an actor makes up a line it's more honest than when a writer writes it? Or more perceptive?

WITH-IT: These kids aren't really actors, dad. They're amateurs. More like real people.

OBSOLETE: You mean their jaws will be more slack? While they're grunting around trying to think of what to say next?

WITH-IT: Now don't get uptight, man. I see you're still hung up on that structure thing. Well that's not where it's at. There's nothing that turns the kids

off faster than a well-made play. No, we're just going to roll the camera and let it happen. That's what the kids want.

OBSOLETE: *Easy Rider*, eh?

WITH-IT: *Easy Rider*? Are you putting me on again? The kids are *laughing* at that one. You ought to get out on the college circuit. It's really wild, man.

OBSOLETE: I'd like to read you a quotation, which I just happen to have with me. It goes like this: "The making of a film, to me, is simply the extension of the process of writing. It's the process of rendering the thing you've written. You're still writing when you're directing." It was John Huston who said that.

WITH-IT: Who's he?

OBSOLETE: He made *The Maltese Falcon* and *The Treasure of Sierra Madre* and a few others.

WITH-IT: Oh, John *Huston*. We had him in school. But that's not where it's *at*, man. That's museum stuff.

OBSOLETE: And Eisenstein and Hitch-

cock and Bergman. They all seem to think that writing the screenplay is important. Maybe the *most* important part of it.

WITH-IT: That's more of the same. Cosy stuff for Film Society liberals. Look, if you want to write, write. If you want to make films, make films. It's two different ball games. What we're trying to do is create a new, non-verbal language. That old words-on-paper bit isn't going anywhere.

OBSOLETE: Let's talk about your last film — *Opus*, I think you called it. If I remember correctly, you spent ten minutes before the screening explaining to us how you were creating a new, non-verbal language. Then we saw the film — six minutes long — and then you spent half an hour explaining the symbolism and other goodies. That was the most *verbal* goddam performance I ever saw. Is that your new, non-verbal language?

WITH-IT: I can't help it if you old folks have to have things translated for you.

OBSOLETE: What you mean is that if I had been high on acid I would have understood what those out-of-focus blurs meant.

WITH-IT: You're getting all uptight again. You would have understood if you *cared*. All you want in films is for the butler to open the door and say, "Anyone for tennis?" Anything to take your mind off what's relevant.

OBSOLETE: (*belligerently*) Unless we involve writers, we'll never have a Canadian feature film industry. God knows, we've made plenty of features, and all of them stink. That's because we've never encouraged writers — brought them along, made them feel part of film making. Instead, we've frightened

them off by creating a whole bloody mystique about film. "It's a director's medium... the director knows best... at best the writer is a necessary evil..." We resent writers and writing because deep down we know that writing is real work and directing is just play.

WITH-IT: You're hung up on that puritan work thing, man. Unless you sweat you won't go to Heaven. Why don't you relax? Roll the camera and let it happen. Let it turn you on. Don't feel so threatened by freedom.

OBSOLETE: We'll never have a feature film industry unless we do something about the writing problem.

WITH-IT: (*triumphantly*) That word "industry" gives you away, doesn't it? The hell with meaningful relevance, you want factories with Hollywood written on the chimneys.

OBSOLETE: (*weakly*) Hitchcock... Bergman... Faulkner wrote for the movies...

(*At this point, SAMUEL SAGE, cup of coffee in hand, enters and sits down at the table. He is Professor of Communications at a well-known Canadian university, and a film sage. He is 50 years old and wears a new beard and a mandala around his neck.*)

SAGE: I liked *Opus*, With-In.

WITH-IT: Thanks.

SAGE: The mosaic thing came off quite well, I thought. And there was a kind of "foreground restlessness," if I may coin a phrase. I was reminded of Oldenburg's use of mass.

OBSOLETE: (*shouting*) What about the *boredom*? What about the goddam savage bone-crushing inhuman *boredom* of these goddam youth films?

(*We notice, for the first time, that while*

the others have been drinking coffee, OBSOLETE has been nipping at a flask.)

OBSOLETE: (*screaming now*) Incoherence is *boring*.

WITH-IT: The alcohol makes them uptight. Ugly, isn't it?

SAGE: (*smiling*) You can sometimes pacify them by telling them a nice, old-fashioned linear story.

(*WITH-IT lights up a joint and offers one to SAGE. But SAGE declines, apologetically, and fills his pipe with Edgeworth Tobacco.*)

SAGE: What you don't understand, Obsolete, is that we young people see Film as part of a total Communications Picture. Subject matter is no longer in the ascendancy, no matter what your rear-view mirror tells you. If we have to try to verbalize the New Cinema's qualitative parameters for purposes of identification through *your* generation's syntax, we might call them "honesty," "freedom," "relevance," "spontaneity." But essentially, Post-Syntactic is where it's at. One grooves with the Media Revolution, or one doesn't.

OBSOLETE: Besides an inability to communicate, Sage, what other qualifications does one need to get in on the Communications racket?

SAGE: Don't you ever get tired of the old formulas, Obsolete? Time didn't come to a stop with Clifford Odets, you know.

OBSOLETE: (*drinking openly now*) For chrissakes, Sage, you're *fifty years old*! Why don't you take off that goddam mandala from around your neck and act your age!

WITH-IT: I wish I had my camera. It's happening.

OBSOLETE: (*muttering*) So the Canada

Council sends Old Sage ten thousand to explicate With-It's films. "Come all ye thesis writers..." In the nick of time, too, now that the ole T. S. Eliot lode is drying up.

SAGE: Do you really want to stop all experimentation, Obsolete? Would you have stopped Picasso in his youth? Would you have stopped McLaren?

OBSOLETE: I want to stop being bored by experiments that are unsuccessful. We used to throw those away, but now we screen them for the public. And I want to stop treating every snot-nosed kid who comes along as a genius. Nowadays everybody's a genius until proven otherwise. In my day, it used to be the other way around.

WITH-IT: (*with his generation's Love*) Never mind, Obsolete, you still serve a purpose, I guess.

SAGE: It just so happens that With-It is six years ahead of his time.

OBSOLETE: Then let's put his films away for six years and release them when people have developed the stamina to endure the boredom.

WITH-IT: They all get hung up on value judgements, these booze heads.

OBSOLETE: (*raving now*) It's me against the whole goddam Global Village! I don't *want* to sit chanting around the electronic campfire until my brain is washed away! And then, when we can't think any more—just feel—McLuhan arises, new Pope, pre-Gutenberg, pre-Luther, pre-everything, and delivers us stunned to his Jesuit masters!

WITH-IT: What's *with* him, anyway? All I want to do is make films.

SAGE: (*calmly*) Don't you realize, Obsolete, that some of the best Canadian films were made without scripts,

without writers? Documentaries, cinema vérité.

OBSOLETE: That was good in its time, but it's old hat now. You see cinéma vérité all over Channel Six. Feature films is where it's at, if I may coin a phrase. People want stories, insight into character, comments on the human condition — not talentless psychedelic blurs. Films for people, not for exegetists.

SAGE: His generation used to hear linear narratives at their mother's knee. They never got over it.

WITH-IT: He's hung up on Doris Day. *(At this point, JACK COMMERCIAL arrives, just in from Hollywood. He is a swarthy man who smokes a big cigar and has diamond rings on his fingers. He sits down, slapping an alligator briefcase on the table.)*

COMMERCIAL: Which one of you is With-It?

WITH-IT: I am.

SAGE: I am.

COMMERCIAL: It's the young fellow I'm interested in. Tell me, With-It, is it true that up here in Canada the kids ride their motorcycles in the snow? That they screw in the snow?

WITH-IT: That's where it's at.

COMMERCIAL: *(opening his briefcase and putting one million dollars on the table)* That's the picture I want. Low budget, hand-held camera, Eastman-colour. We'll call it *Hard Rider*. You interested?

WITH-IT: *(reaching for the money)* You got yourself a film maker.

COMMERCIAL: *(withholding the money)* Just a minute. What about a script?

WITH-IT: Uh?

SAGE: *(hastily)* Oh, we'll get you a script, all right, sir.

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WRITE ME A FILM?

COMMERCIAL: (*throwing them \$25,000*)
Right. Here's twenty-five for starters.
And don't forget to remind your writers that ninety per cent of today's audience is under eleven years old. We're catering to their fantasies of what it'll be like when they grow up to be teen-agers, when they can groove. Right?

SAGE: Right.

WITH-IT: Right.

COMMERCIAL: (*exiting*) It's been a real pleasure working with you, gentlemen. Let's have lunch sometime.

OBSOLETE: (*reaching for the money*)
Would you like me to have a crack at that script?

SAGE: (*rapping him on the knuckles*)
No, I think we'll get Mack the Hack down from Toronto to work on it.

WITH-IT: (*worried, for the first time*)
But Sage, what's this with *scripts*?

SAGE: (*sagely*) Now don't get uptight, With-It. Mr. Commercial needs something on paper to show the bankers, so they'll put up the money. Then you can throw away the script and just shoot.

WITH-IT: (*nodding*) Spontaneity...

SAGE: Relevance.

OBSOLETE: (*cradling his hung-over head*)
Honesty.

CURTAIN

THE FABLED MOVIE CONTRACT

Ian MacNeill

GOD KNOWS I hesitate to sully the pages of *Canadian Literature* with talk of money, but the most important thing for a writer to know about films is that they are expensive. This applies whether the film is a Communications Arts student's maiden project or a \$20 million programmed disaster like "Paint Your Wagon", for budgets are relative to the financial resources of the producers or backers. At little more cost than sweat and carbon paper you can write your imperishable novel. It may, of course, never get published, but there it is. It exists. If no one else, your friends can read it. Before a feature film — the movie equivalent of a novel — can exist, money must be found for a great many costly ingredients: film stock (about \$36

for a minute's worth of 35mm colour stock, developed and printed, but not counting materials for release printing); cameras (\$325 a day for a blimped 35mm Arriflex with standard lenses and accessories); actors (\$200 a day ACTRA minimum, including television buy-out rights in perpetuity, for a principal performer in Canada, to \$1 million plus percentage for an international star); lights (\$36 a day for a ten kilowatt lamp, of which you may need five or ten, as well as many other lamps); and other such items, including the writer's fee.

The high cost of films strongly influences the writer's rôle in feature film making. A novel may be written for love, a feature film almost always is written as an ingredient in a complex commercial

venture. Even the makers of low-budget independent films, no matter how fervently they may talk of the art of the cinema, are entirely aware of the profits that *may* be made in films. The current Golden Calf is "Easy Rider," reported to have cost \$360,000 to make, and according to *Variety*, predicted to have final gross earnings of \$60 million. You will see — or, better perhaps, not see — many imitations of "Easy Rider."

These high costs and high potential profits affect film writing in several ways:

1. Unlike novels, plays, poetry, and other forms of writing, film scripts are seldom written on speculation. They are almost always commissioned by a producer to a writer, and usually based on what is known in the industry as a "property" — a novel, short story or play, that may or may not be the writer's own. There are two encouraging signs in the Canadian feature scene. Producers are more frequently asking writers to develop their own "properties" into scripts, even though the writers may have had no previous script-writing experience. And producers are more frequently commissioning scripts from original, unpublished stories. But producers, a generally unadventurous lot, still prefer published properties, and the best way to break into film writing in Canada is to write a successful novel. If it gets film bids, sign with a producer who will let you write the script. And work through a good agent.

2. Relatively few feature films are made as compared, say, with novels published. So, the opportunities for script writers are relatively few. I know of no Canadian who makes a living from writing only feature films. But, again, there

are encouraging signs. The National Film Board, in recent years, has commissioned about a dozen feature-length scripts in English, but the Board's output of features is likely to remain fairly small. The Canadian Film Development Corporation, since it began operations in mid-1968, has helped to finance directly or indirectly the development of about 35 scripts, almost all of them by Canadian writers.

3. To complete a script to the satisfaction of a producer does not ensure that the writer's name will appear, third from the end of the list of credits (the usual place for the script-writer) on the silver screen at the Capitol Theatre. Hundreds of entirely competent, even brilliant scripts languish in producers' files and fester in their writers' minds: the right star was not available; financing could not be arranged; the distribution deal fell through; the subject is no longer fashionable. These, and many other interdependent factors, determine the "package", and production of a film depends on a suitable package being assembled. The Film Development Corporation, for example, will not put money into a Canadian producer's film unless there is also a substantial financial involvement by a film distributor. In this the CFDC follows industry practice: no distribution guarantee, no production money. In fact, the bankers to the film industry may require approval of the stars, the director and, of course, the "property."

4. The *Dictionary of Occupation Titles* (U.S. Department of Labour) defines a Scenario Writer, in part, as follows:

Writes stories, screen adaptations or scenarios for motion pictures, receiving assignments and recommendations for story treatment or theme development from Scenario Editor or Producer.

That is not quite accurate. The writer for film may also receive recommendations, suggestions ("you can ignore this, if you want, it's just a suggestion"), direct orders, or howls of injured ego from the backers, the actors, the director, the set designer, the director of photography and the script girl. Film writing is not a lonely occupation. But it has rewards which have attracted writers like Brian Moore, Mordecai Richler, Faulkner, Wallace Stegner and many other novelists. The rewards are not only financial, although film is traditionally the most lucrative market for writers.

5. How lucrative? Here are some examples:

A Canadian writer recently received \$15,000 from a Canadian producer for the screen rights to a first novel. The writer, without previous film writing experience, also contracted to do the screenplay, for \$6,000—\$3,000 for a first draft and, if it proved acceptable, \$3,000 for a final script, plus a small percentage of the net earnings of the film. (Writers often find that net earnings are highly elusive. A writer in high demand gets a percentage of the *gross* earnings.)

A good American novelist, whose books sell well, was commissioned by a Canadian producer to adapt for the screen one of his short stories that had a Canadian background. He had no screen writing experience. Film rights to the story, \$6,000. Script, \$9,000, without a producer's option to cancel at any stage, plus a bonus of 25 per cent of the original total fee if the film were distributed in the U.S.A.

A Canadian producer recently commissioned an American novelist (four novels which earned critical praise but

little money), who had done no film writing, to write a screen adaptation of a European novel. Fee: \$6,000 plus a small percentage of the net earnings of the film.

These screen writers' fees are low, in my opinion, but it depends on how eager the writers were to get screen writing experience and credits; what other film offers the first two novelists had received for their stories; and on recognition that the Canadian feature industry is very young. Credits are the trade goods of the film writer, the subject of interminable contract clauses, frequent litigation and lasting bitterness.

More like the fabled movie contract is one for a recent medium-budget Hollywood film, commissioning an experienced screen writer to do a treatment and screenplay based on a property already owned by the producer. Fee: \$150,000, paid in stages and without a producer's option to cancel. Delivery requirements: eight weeks for the treatment; ten weeks for the first draft script; ten weeks "on call" for revisions. Many of the 32 single-spaced pages of the contract are devoted to making clear that the writer retains absolutely no rights in his work even, as the contract puts it, "any so-called 'moral rights' of authors." The producers have the right, also, to "use, adapt, change, revise, delete from, add to and/or rearrange" the material in any way they wish. There even is a morals clause: "You will conduct yourself with due regard to public conventions and morals and not do anything . . . that will tend to shock, insult or offend the community or public morals or decency, or prejudice us or the motion picture industry in general."

Before you elevate your life style to

meet these standards, you should consider the more run-of-the-mill rewards for screen writers. The current ACTRA (Association of Canadian Television and Radio Artists) agreement with the AMPPLC (Association of Motion Picture Producers and Laboratories of Canada) calls for a minimum writers' fee of \$1,500 for a 90-minute film for unlimited theatrical use and one Canadian television network release. (For unlimited world television rights an additional 150 per cent would be paid.) No writer can afford to do good work for fees like that.

Compare it with the actors' minimum of \$100 a day; it represents 15 days—to write a 90-minute script. Or compare it with that \$325 a day camera; it is the equivalent of a week's rental. Producers who are quite willing to pay fairly high fees to performers or for equipment, still economize on writing. But of course it is a false economy, as many Canadian films prove. On the other hand, I have yet to see a morals clause in a Canadian film writing contract. We may be poor, but we can remain lasciviously free.

THE NON-LITERARY FILM

Guy Glover

THOSE WHO ARE CONTENT to view the fiction film as a variety of theatre are quite at ease with the notion that there is a fundamental relationship between film and literature and between the film-maker and the writer. A sophisticated variation of the "theatre" view is that the fiction film is perhaps better thought of as "operatic," with the script as a kind of libretto.

Since film deals with the moving image and is a temporal art, however, it is linked with music and dance as much as with drama, and such a link need not be merely postulated as a theory but can be observed in practice.

As various potentials for film in non-narrative and non-figurative forms are explored (documentary, *cinéma vérité*, animation—both figurative and non-figurative, etc.) it is becoming evident that, if in some types of film a relation-

ship to literature has existed, in much that already has been created, literary forms, literary elements and literary inspiration have been either absent or extremely reduced, and these non-literary tendencies appear to be on the increase.

This, of course, raises interesting and perhaps troubling questions of aesthetics, but the questions are no more troubling (or need not be) than those which have been faced by the practitioners of other media in which it is quite natural *not* to expect relationships with literature. In this connection, Fontenelle asked the classic question when confronted with a piece of programme-less music: "Sonata, what do you wish of me?"

Pre-stressed concrete can be used to build replicas of the Parthenon or Chartres Cathedral but current architectural theory and practice have found other forms for that medium. Film, too, can

be used to reproduce plays, novels or other forms of literary derivation, but it can also be used for its own properties, in forms integral to it. It is a fairly obvious fact that the film industry does not use film in this way and that the commercial film is still parasitic on the theatre, the novel and even on journalism.

Can a writer play a role in the creation of the "essential" film?

Many directors themselves note down reminders in writing which they use during filming. These notes bear no resemblance to literature and would often be scarcely intelligible to anyone but the individual who wrote them. Nor, except in dialogue elements — if these have indeed been written out as part of the film-maker's notes (Godard, for instance, does not write out his dialogue) — does any writing as such appear in the finished product.

Some writers are able to work with film directors as researchers and ideamen, helping to invent or expand characters and action (or plot). Their material is then taken over by the film-maker and turned to his ends and to the ways of his imagination. Some such role must have been played by Arthur C. Clarke who, using a short story he had written some years ago, provided the armature upon which Stanley Kubrick elaborated the visual poetry of "2001". There are whole sequences in "2001" however which came out of Kubrick's imagination and clearly do not depend upon anything that Clarke would have been able to write down on paper.

In some kinds of film, then, it appears that some elements of what a writer must deploy in writing a literary work can be used. The elements are clearly

short of full literary composition. The verbal element (chiefly dialogue) is usually of considerably less importance than in a theatrical text but, whether it bulks large or small, it is of a different texture from that found in a stage work and is such that its rhythms are achieved as much through cutting as through the speech-delivery of the actors or speakers. This suggests that writing for the film requires, first, specialized study and, finally, a working knowledge of the processes of film-making; and it must be assumed that, in many typical instances, this writing will be as "invisible" as the notations of a choreographer. In many others, equally typical instances, the collaboration of the writer will not be required at all.

The idea that a "good script" goes a long way toward guaranteeing the good film (and a bad script, a bad film) is still current in much of the commercial film industry; and thus, at a time that the "good script" has come to mean much the same as what "the well-made play" meant at the end of the 19th century, films are still produced of which their "good script" is their most fatal liability. It is significant that in the case of "big-budget" films, the script is considered a basic requirement in the search for financing and it is no less significant that "big-budget" films with their built-in notion of the script "property" as the guarantee of a sound investment, have recently been reported to be on their way out.

How do we judge good film writing? I have suggested a kind of collaboration in which the writer might work to bring a film into existence. The only way I know to judge the success of a writer's contribution to that collaboration is to

inquire if he has been invited to collaborate again.

Having written the foregoing I thought it would be instructive to look at the point of view presented in a book bearing the suggestive title *Great Film Plays* (Crown Publishers, New York, 1959). Sure enough, in one of two prefaces John Gassner writes: "We assume that there is a new literature of the screen — the screenplay. If this fact has not been widely recognized it is only because screenplays have not been properly accorded the dignity of print . . . Naturally not everything that is set down on paper is worth publishing, but it will be found on very little investigation that film writing already has substantial claims to literary recognition." In a second preface, "The Writer and the Film," Dudley Nichols, himself a distinguished and experienced screenplay writer, is persuasive in his moderation and good sense; but even he, in his final paragraph, writes "In conclusion I hope that in sketching the successive steps of making a film I have not underrated the importance of the screenplay. It is, in my opinion, pre-eminent in the field of film-making. It is the writer who is the dreamer, the imaginer, the shaper."

Many film-makers of the 60's would question Mr. Nichols' last sentence, simply because their experience does not bear it out.

Finally, if literature has an influence on film and vice versa, we should be clear in what sense that may be true. One might say, for instance, that in *Under the Volcano*, among other well-absorbed influences, Hitchcock is as powerful as Joyce or that *Gone with the Wind* is a not-unusual case of a novel anticipating a film of the same name



Goethe's Faust

TRANSLATED BY
BARKER FAIRLEY

No work of literature makes a stronger appeal to our common humanity than Goethe's *Faust*. This epic-drama, completed less than a century and a half ago and ranking as the great German achievement in poetry, addresses itself equally to young and old, whether highbrow or lowbrow, sophisticated or unsophisticated, because it turns on the basic problem of every man — that of good and evil and the search for the mastery and management of life. This version omits nothing of the original text and remains scrupulously true to every shade of meaning from first to last. At the same time it brings the poem so close to contemporary English that it reads like an English work.

Leonard W. Forster, Schröder Professor of German, University of Cambridge, has called this version 'the most humane and approachable translation of Faust in existence.'

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made some years later. Conversely, one might say that Bresson's *Un condamné à mort s'est échappé* is "Dostoyevskian" and that in *La dolce vita* Fellini demonstrates spiritual kinship with Marie Correlli. On this general level the two media might be said to interact, though obviously at a safe distance and well down in the subconscious. Sometimes however it is not in the subconscious at all: Antonioni has admitted to conscious attempts to "Proustify" his material in *L'avventura* and he is obviously not alone in this type of situation. It should be remarked that prose narrative is usually the influence in question and not

poetic works in verse — not so unthinkable a notion as the almost total absence of poetic works adapted for cinema would seem to indicate.

It is doubtful that my remarks would be read sympathetically (or at all) by the young, but it is they, in fact, who have taken up the non-literary film and have begun to use it with a freedom and purity little known in the past. Specific questions of competence and taste aside, I am content with their intuitive grasp of the "essential film" and it is with them, fortunately, that the future of the medium rests.

LE TEMPS: *La Poésie du Cinéma*

Jacques Godbout

PEUT-ETRE bien qu'avant de mourir, le cinéaste en moi étranglera l'écrivain. Ou vice versa. A moins que cette schizophrénie ne soit mon lot. Tout ce que je puis affirmer aujourd'hui c'est que le cinéaste fait vivre l'écrivain; aussi bien au plan financier qu'à celui des contacts avec la réalité.

Je n'aurais jamais écrit le roman *Salut Galarneau!* si je n'avais participé au film *A Saint-Henri le cinq septembre* qui m'amena à réaliser *8 témoins*, et à me lier d'amitié avec Maurice Nadeau. Ce qui revient à dire que le contrat social du cinéma documentaire m'a permis de signer, au niveau de l'imaginaire, un contrat de transposition littéraire. En

somme c'est à l'occasion de rencontres provoquées par la caméra que j'ai écrit, non, que j'ai nourri plutôt certains livres, certains personnages . . . Grotowski dit que l'art est d'abord une rencontre. La rencontre d'un metteur en scène avec des comédiens, avec un texte, la rencontre entre un écrivain et un langage. Certaines rencontres ne sont que des rendez-vous manqués, d'autres laissent des traces.

La profession d'écrivain n'est pas une réalité sociale: ou alors on est écrivain, scripteur, bonne à tout faire portant un tablier des dictionnaires. Le métier de cinéaste, lui, existe.

Je sais de nombreux écrivains qui rê-

vent de faire du cinéma, ou qui "pensent" cinéma. Peu de cinéastes rêvent d'écriture littéraire. Le cinéma documentaire est à l'écrivain ce que peut être le journalisme. Est-ce Moravia qui cessa il y a quelques années d'écrire pour prendre, dans le journalisme, un bain de quotidien?

Le cinéma documentaire excelle à décrire l'aliénation, et c'est souvent cette aliénation qui est à la source des grandes oeuvres littéraires. Mais il y a aussi le cinéma de fiction. Dans ce domaine, au Canada comme ailleurs, le cinéma a puisé dans des oeuvres romanesques. Mais c'est là un phénomène de rencontre qui dépasse, et l'écrivain, et le cinéaste. C'est par accident qu'un roman donne naissance à un film libre. Le plus souvent la littérature est une frontière, que peu de metteurs en scène osent traverser. Car il s'agit de faire un cinéma libre, qui renvoie au cinéma.

De même que les livres (la bibliothèque) donnent naissance aux livres, de même le cinéma est à la source du cinéma. Ce n'est pas un coucher de soleil qui engendre une peinture, mais d'autres tableaux.

L'écriture littéraire est une exploration du langage, comme on dit que les cosmonautes explorent l'espace. Il y a un espace dans les mots, entre les mots, que l'écrivain fouille (comme les lunateurs qui grattent le sol pour en ramener des pierres). Et ce voyage dans les mots, dans la magie du mot, n'est pas sans danger.

Le ridicule qui s'est emparé des analyses comparées du cinéma et de la littérature tient au fait qu'il y a eu (il y a encore) confusion de vocabulaire: on s'est mis à parler du langage cinématographique, de la grammaire du cinéma

...c'était par analogie, mais l'analogie s'est pétrifiée. Or il n'y a pas de langage ni de grammaire cinématographiques, car le langage exige des monèmes, des phonèmes, des structures, un code. Le cinéma n'est pas un langage, chaque image est unique, et si certains clichés ont fait leur apparition, ils n'en forment pas pour autant un "vocabulaire".

L'écriture veut faire dégorger les mots. Le cinéma veut faire dégorger le temps. La problématique du langage, sondée par le style d'un écrivain, donne l'oeuvre littéraire. La problématique du temps, sondée par le cinéaste, donne l'oeuvre cinématographique.

L'homme cherche, par le cinéma, à explorer le temps, avant même les 3 dimensions. De là la fascination qu'exerce le suspense (le temps suspendu). En littérature, il en est ainsi de l'espace des mots: quel est celui, par exemple, du mot: seigle? Ma première association en est une de tache jaune, puis de vent dans les damiers des champs de tabac, puis le son me suggère aigle, et je m'envole.

C'est à ce point précis que l'écriture littéraire et le cinéma se peuvent rejoindre: dans la poésie.

Le pouvoir de suggestion de la poésie peut donner naissance au pouvoir d'exploration du temps qui appartient au cinéma. Les vrais écrivains sont des poètes. Les grands cinéastes aussi. Les uns dans l'espace du mot, les autres dans le temps que fixe l'image. Pierre Perrault et Jean-Pierre Lefebvre, au Québec, sont à la fois des poètes (en écriture et au cinéma) mais il y a aussi les poètes qui oeuvrent exclusivement avec les mots ou d'autres avec le temps.

Pourquoi le cinéma est-il si souvent cité comme "l'art du XXe siècle?" Parce qu'il est né avec celui-ci? Non. Parce

qu'il est un art du temps et que la société industrielle d'abord et avant tout a fragmenté le temps. Le cinéma est une reprise en main du temps. Le cinéma n'est pas un art de l'image, ni du son, mais du mouvement en ce qu'il est un temps. Si tous les arts cherchent à échapper au temps, le cinéma lui veut et peut le dominer. Et la télévision n'est pas un art puisqu'elle n'a de sens qu'en rapport avec le temps réel (l'assassinat d'un président, un voyage sur la lune).

Et le génie de Godard aura été d'explorer le temps cinématographique en y superposant l'espace des mots, le jeu du théâtre, la lumière de la peinture: ce qui fait dire à plusieurs que Godard, c'est du mauvais cinéma.

Or, le seul mauvais cinéma est celui qui ignore que la première grande invention de l'homme, et la seule au fond puisque toutes les autres en découlent, c'est le temps. La journée divisée en parties, puis en heures. Puis les jours additionnés. Le calendrier: voilà la base de nos civilisations. Car qui divisait le jour et dépeçait l'éternité avait inventé les mathématiques, les objectifs, l'argent. La prise de conscience d'une existence autonome, l'hypothèque, la famille, la propriété, l'espace sont autant de fruits du temps. Et les arts ne sont, comme les religions, que des tentatives désespérées de contrôler le temps. En ce sens l'expression ultime de la civilisation américaine: "time is money" est la formule descriptive la plus lucide et la plus désagréable de la société post-industrielle. Mais aussi cette expression relie la civilisation d'aujourd'hui à celle qui naquit d'un bâton enfoncé dans le sable, d'une ombre portée, mesurée.

Le cadran solaire ne pouvait être utile que sous un ciel bleu. Dans les pays nor-

diques l'homme inventa des systèmes de mesure mécaniques qui se pouvaient utiliser malgré les jours gris. Aujourd'hui ce qui sépare l'occidental de l'africain, par exemple, c'est encore la notion de temps. L'homme blanc est à l'heure. Et ses heures sont comptées. Le noir et le jaune comptent en mois ou en années, ils ne parlent pas le même langage car ils ne parlent pas du même temps.

Que font les touristes occidentaux? (Y en a-t-il d'autres?) Ils échangent leur temps de vacance, leur temps de vacuité, le vide soudain dans leur temps normal contre le plaisir d'un temps exotique. Le Canadien qui va en Europe recule sa montre de vingt années s'il visite les capitales et de mille ans s'il fait les châteaux. Le Français qui va en Grèce recule dans le temps: deux cent, trois cents ans?

Les bergers que nous photographions en Espagne vivent en l'an 1440, nous sommes un instant portés vers jadis, avec un serrement au ventre et une nostalgie du temps perdu. L'industrie du tourisme est une industrie du temps marchandé: en déplaçant des hordes dans l'espace l'American Express tire son profit de la même denrée dont IBM fait des cotes. Car que sont les ordinateurs sinon les premières machines à comprimer le temps?

C'est sur la notion de temps que s'appuie l'économie du crédit, la structure des assurances, les négociations collectives de travail.

Le temps, c'est l'espace humain. L'éternité, c'est l'utopie ultime. L'amour, c'est la valorisation du temps. Le bédouin qui entassait des pierres pour se retrouver dans ses jours et ceux qui tentent de congeler les incurables jouent dans la même dimension. D'ailleurs l'ultime ven-

geance consiste à tuer, c'est-à-dire à priver brusquement du temps, ou à emprisonner, c'est-à-dire à trancher dans un temps de vie donnée.

C'est ainsi que toute l'entreprise semi-consciente des sociétés industrielles consiste à utiliser au maximum le temps de chacun. En ce sens l'invention de la lumière électrique est beaucoup plus importante que celle des armes atomiques. L'effort entier de l'économie tend vers un contrôle de plus en plus précis du temps de chaque homme. L'espace humain est ainsi érodé. Les classes moyennes qui forment la majorité démocratique des sociétés occidentales sont prisonnières d'un quotidien qui leur est débité de façon si parcimonieuse qu'elles n'ont même plus mémoire de ce qu'était le grain de folie qui peut différencier la joie de l'atonal.

La réforme agraire, dans les pays sous-développés, consiste en la répartition des terres aujourd'hui entre les mains d'une minorité de possédants. La réforme urbaine, dans les pays industrialisés, consisterait en une meilleure répartition du temps, aujourd'hui propriété d'une minorité de familles.

Les classes moyennes n'ont pas encore pris conscience qu'on leur avait volé leur temps (en échange duquel, bien sûr, elles ont obtenu des objets, comme les indigènes obtenaient des miroirs des grands navigateurs) et le sous-prolétariat est condamné au coma. Le sous-prolétariat, quand il réussit à manger, se vêtir, se loger, n'aspire qu'aux valeurs de la classe moyenne; pourtant, parce qu'il n'a pas encore réalisé le troc temps-objet à consommer, ce sous-prolétariat possède une valeur (l'espace humain) que les classes moyennes se doivent de reconnaître, avant qu'il ne soit trop tard.

Vivre, c'est consommer. Pourquoi donc

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des descriptions de "l'homme aliéné" dans la "société de consommation"? Ce que l'on perçoit confusément c'est que si vivre c'est consommer, cela ne doit pas se passer *ainsi*. La consommation aujourd'hui, dans nos sociétés du désir, est une consommation dirigée dont le principe est le suivant: occuper l'individu dans toutes ses minutes, lui échanger son temps contre un objet à consommer. Le veau tête, il est heureux, il ne voit plus le temps passer.

Les dépressions nerveuses autres que pathologiques, nombreuses dans les classes moyennes, semblent toutes trouver leur origine dans l'interprétation du temps: la femme au foyer qui croit qu'elle y *perd* son temps, l'homme surmené parce qu'il *n'a plus* de temps. L'adolescent qui refuse de se plier au temps adulte.

Car l'adolescent des sociétés primitives ne changeait pas de temps après son initiation. Et c'est pour éviter des heurts trop grands que le commerce a commencé de solliciter des enfants depuis l'âge de huit ans désormais. Ainsi c'est au sortir de l'enfance, peu à peu, que l'homme apprend à céder son espace humain.

Les premiers ministres, et leurs collègues, sont de parfaits exemples d'une aliénation de classe. Elus le plus souvent par les classes moyennes, libéraux en temps de prospérité, conservateurs en temps d'inquiétude, les hommes politiques qui devraient administrer une civilisation et ses cultures n'en ont strictement pas le temps. Car ils partagent leurs jours entre des relations électorales, il passent leur temps dans les parlements, les comités, les meetings, les diners, les enterrements, les inaugurations, les parades, les bals, et consomment ainsi de la "politique" en capsules, aussi pris et en tous points

semblables à ceux qui les ont élus. Le gouvernement de sociétés aussi complexes que la nôtre exigerait que nous élisions des hommes et des femmes à qui nous *donnerions le temps de réfléchir*. La notion du politicien-homme d'action a son origine dans les temps anciens où le chef était à la tête de la bande armée. Le vrai chef devrait être un contemplatif.

La qualité de la vie d'un peuple ne dépend plus aujourd'hui que du choix qu'il fait dans son emploi du temps.¹ De même pour les groupes: les contestataires, qu'ils soient maoïstes ou John Birchistes, affrontent la police comme jadis s'affrontaient les armées des nations. Mais il ne s'agit même pas de guerre civile: il s'agit d'exercices où la violence est une réponse au viol du temps.

Qu'ont choisi les hippies? Quand cinq d'entre eux habitent une maison et partagent quelques bouteilles, du saucisson et de la marijuana, assis tout le jour à regarder passer ceux qui ont des rendez-vous pressés, voilà cinq hommes qui désespérément cherchent à protéger leur espace humain. Ils vivent l'utopie du temps pleinement possédé, et mieux même: les hallucinogènes étirent le temps dans une dimension inespérée, *contraire* à celle qu'on tentait de leur imposer.

Qui collectionne des peintures collectionne le temps. Et les appareils photos arrêtent le temps. Et les cosmétiques maquillent le temps. La valeur-jeunesse, cliché de la publicité, à première vue semble vendre la force, la joie, la beauté; il n'en est rien: la valeur-jeunesse veut faire croire au client qu'il a le temps de

¹ La valeur de l'Exposition universelle 1967: la notion de temps était abolie. Nous avons redécouvert le temps de vivre.

consommer autre chose encore, comme la jeunesse a "tout son temps pour elle". Si l'homme est un singe nu, il porte au poignet une Timex pour, dirait Pascal, lire l'heure sans gêner ses invités, mais surtout pour se rappeler ce qui le distingue du singe: il a le temps de penser. C'est d'ailleurs en pensant qu'il inventa le temps.

Je suis loin des rapports entre le cinéma et la littérature? Peut-être me suis-je laissé emporter par les mots, c'est un défaut d'écrivain. Mais c'est parce

que je suis fasciné par le pouvoir du cinéma d'enregistrer le temps et d'en jouer à volonté, ce qui est un défaut de cinéaste.

De toute façon, ici comme ailleurs, littérature et cinéma ne vaudront que si les créateurs tentent de fouiller les problématiques propres à chacun de ces arts: et l'espace du mot n'a pas à se conjuguer avec le temps du cinéma, sauf en cas de génie, ce qui sera toujours un accident, surtout au Canada.

AFTERWORD

Hugo McPherson

THIS SYMPOSIUM — containing four statements, but lacking points of view from either established commercial film makers or youth — is only a beginning on the question posed. I would add a few comments to suggest the broader spectrum. Jacques Godbout argues that the nature of film is essentially poetic — a release from the temporal clock-watching mode that regiments contemporary life. Guy Glover's definition of the intuitive "essential film" is close to Godbout, though the emphasis is different. William Weintraub ironically reveals the gulf between the youthful roll-the-camera enthusiast and the film writer who believes in scripts; and these two characters have their individual evil geniuses — the academic swinger who is devoted to facile "communications" theory, and the commercial square who wants a script, a "property."

A significant general point is that no one today will talk about a narrowly-

confined Canadianism in film. The art is international and multi-national. Films are *documents* which people, particularly the young, "read" avidly. A Canadian film is simply a film produced by a person or group whose centre of consciousness is Canadian, though its visual idiom may reflect many influences.

But what about the *author* in relation to film? We know that Chaucer rifled Boccaccio in producing *The Canterbury Tales*, and that Shakespeare regarded any literary source as fair game for the live art of theatre. Why, then, be suspicious of film adaptations of literary works? The full spectrum is bounded by two attitudes. First, film desecrates great works of literature. Second, film must reject literature altogether; some younger film makers even argue that a university education castrates a film maker; the academic process deforms his imagination in advance.

The central fact in this conflict is that

one art cannot *record* another. The arts develop their own means and styles. Thus, for example, *The Maltese Falcon* may be a better film than Dashiell Hammet's novel; or *Wuthering Heights* (with Laurence Olivier and Merle Oberon) may be inferior to Emily Brönte's romance. But somewhere between a literary work and a film is a script or scenario. John Grierson, first Commissioner of the N.F.B., has remarked that behind every great film lies a great script. Margaret Laurence, whose novel *A Jest of God* became the popular film *Rachel, Rachel*, says that she does not care about screen adaptations. On publication day her work as an author is over. When her novel becomes a film it is a new work — the collaboration of people working in another art form.

Obviously, works of the past may undergo extreme sea-changes in their adaptation to the new audio-visual modes. But the new versions can no longer be thought of as mere frivolities. Very often a powerful artistic light burns behind the images which we see on the screen.

And that brings us finally to the idea of *auteur* films which is so strongly supported by many young film makers, and

such journals as *Cahiers du cinéma*. If the author-director-producer is to become the presiding figure in tomorrow's cinema, then the writer has indeed lost his place in the art of film. We have seen this *auteur* phenomenon frequently in the last decade; we must recognize that it implies a particular and rare kind of genius — a domination of all the elements which make a film. My own view is that such talents are rare exceptions in film making. We welcome them when they appear, but we know that the writer and the script-writer remain fundamental to the art of film.

Today, original scenarios — whether a relatively brief set of directions and bits of dialogue, or carefully finished works (as with Hitchcock and Bergman) form the most significant bridge between traditional fiction and film. The scenario writer must see and hear and taste and touch as he writes. In this sense, Ian MacNeill is close to Godbout and Glover: he has suggested to me in another context that poets have more feeling for screen writing than conventional novelists. This may be one of the reasons that more Canadian fiction has not found its way to the screen.

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NOTES ON CONCRETE POETRY

Mike Doyle

THE COSMIC CHEF GLEE & Perloo Memorial Society under the direction of Captain Poetry presents . . . an evening of Concrete . . . courtesy . . . Oberon Cement Works. "A book of poems is a damned serious affair," said Wallace Stevens. A most serious element of Concrete poetry is the verbivocovisual play. Highly experimental (still in genesis, like the human race itself) the medium involves much "playing around," but is not thereby to be lightly dismissed. Group action and manifestoes appear alongside much apparently anarchic activity. The two are related without inconsistency. As Ernst Jandl says: "There must be an infinite number of methods of writing experimental poems, but I think the most successful methods are those which can only be used once, for then the result is a poem identical with the method in which it was made."

Form-content identification is a leading characteristic of Concrete, which itself seems, in part at least, a product of that merging or fusion of art forms which has been occurring throughout most of the twentieth century. Concrete shares with other art forms a concentration on its own methods and techniques, in its case deriving from the recognition

of the narrow range of merely linear reading. Its antecedents have been traced back to Mallarmé, or even to picture-writing, the formation of the alphabet (obvious source of bill bissett's "Evolution of Letters Chart," *Cosmic Chef*, p. 8). Those intimately involved in the movement, however, are quite clear that it is a new departure, with its own character and originality. Dom Sylvester Houédard, a leading English Concretist, specifies: "true poesia concreta got viably geboren in mental symbiosis at ulm meeting in 1955" (*TLS*, August 6, 1964, p. 696). This date is widely accepted, so the movement runs parallel in time with the activity of the Black Mountain poets, Beat poetry and "found" poetry, sharing with all a sense of the poem as thing-in-itself rather than representation or copy.

But what is "true poesia concreta"? Rich in antecedents in both literature and art, the movement had separate, widespread beginnings in the late 'forties and early 'fifties (Belloli in Italy, Gomerlinger — whom Emmett Williams calls "the acknowledged father of Concrete poetry" — in Switzerland, Fahlström in Sweden, Diter Rot in Iceland, the Darmstadt Circle — which included poets of various nationalities, and — perhaps most

energetic of all — the Noigandres group in Brazil). Further, there are at least two separate main impulses among Concrete-ists, described by Mike Weaver as “expressionist” and “constructivist”.² Pierre Garnier, the French Spatialist, represents the first impulse (see Stephen Bann, *Concrete Poetry: an International Anthology*, London, 1967, and particularly the tone of Garnier’s comments on his own poems in Emmett Williams’s *An Anthology of Concrete Poetry*, New York, 1967); Bann cites the architect-poet Mathias Goeritz (German, resident in Mexico) as a type of the constructivist (see the examples, one fashioned in iron, in Williams’s anthology); “luz” (light) is included in Bann:

[illegible]

The "expressionist" Concrete poem resembles the work of "literary" poets such as Ted Berrigan in that its structure/texture is arrived at intuitively, in *process*. The "constructivist" poem is generally devised according to an a priori scheme (such schemes in themselves being based on a variety of principles.)

To a great extent, the material of Concrete poetry is language — words, letters, syllables, involving a conscious preoccupation with linguistics and semantics. Perhaps the most widely-known manifesto is the Noigandres group's landmark "pilot plan for concrete poetry",

according to which first emphasis is on "graphic space" (not strongly characteristic, on present evidence, of Canadian Concretists.) Beyond this first emphasis, all depends on "spatial or visual syntax", the mode of entry being analogical rather than discursive. Thus, we are taken beyond Olson's "composition by field" into what Weaver calls a "micro-aesthetic of perception". The perception involved is not (usually or primarily) of the understanding, not metaphorical or philosophical, but is aesthetic and sensory, spatio-temporal and immediately dynamic. Words are not employed, as customarily, in the service of description or causality. The Concrete poem is to be judged entirely in its "opacity" (to use a Poundian term), in what is there to involve the senses, although the Noi-gandres group claims that, in it, verbal and non-verbal communication are absorbed into each other.

Gomringer, from the start, recognized the anti-linear nature of Concrete, calling his own poems in the medium "constellations". With perhaps a fine sense of irony, he introduced the technique of "inversion", or spatial arrangement of the poem which allows it to be "read" (experienced) towards the same centre but from more than one direction. He saw the technique as involving "one of the intellectual principles of existence" (thesis-antithesis). Regrettably, *The Cosmic Chef* contains no clear example of inversion, but a good one by Nichol himself may be found in Mary Ellen Solt's *Concrete Poetry: A World View* (Indiana U.P., 1968), the finest Concrete anthology to date (see fig. 113, "love").

Where Gomringer's "constellations" are basically visual/constructivist, the concerns of the Noigandres group are per-

haps more complex. For one thing, while they reject direct message communication as an art activity, they nevertheless insist on the nature of language as communication by words. In general, the Brazilian sense of "poesia concreta" is a step nearer the ideogrammic structure of, say, Chinese. As implied in Fenellosa's *The Chinese Written Character as a Medium for Poetry*, the ideogram is ultimately and necessarily causal and connective, even though the connective element is greatly diminished. Yet the Brazilians have also moved further away from language than has Gomringer. Two poems in *The Cosmic Chef*, from David Aylward's *Typescapes* (p. 34, p. 71) have little obvious connection with Concrete poetry as language. (I find p. 34 one of the book's most satisfying.) In the mid-'sixties, Pignatari and a fellow-Brazilian, Luiz Angelo Pinto, proposed a theory for the Semiotic poem. They broadened the concept of language to include the way in which any set of signs is used by any individual in any (single) circumstance, thus in a sense returning to the poet's archetypal function as both "namer" and "maker". Aylward's pieces are like this, but are limited to visual/sensory response and do not require lexical keys like those provided by Pignatari, Pinto and the British Concretists, Ian Hamilton Finlay and John Furnival. Semiotic poems may be experienced both as examples of "nova linguagem" and as immediate visual presences.

Aylward's work, together with bp Nichol's (the hand on p. 37, p. 57, p. 66), affords little or no opportunity to "read", but should be allowed to act related to the plastic poems of the Japanese Kitasono Katue (Pound's friend Kit Kat) and to Garnier's rejection of

the traditional structures of literature, his sense of cosmic space, his perception of words as concrete phenomena and of their "topography" (an approach akin to Gaston Bachelard's *The Poetics of Space*, to phenomenology, to Roland Barthes — a starting point for *The Cosmic Chef*, see p. 7 therein). Garnier, indeed, declares that the poem should not be "read," but should be allowed to act upon the perceiver, first as an entity and then discretely. Garnier insists on the importance of "surface" (Poundian "opacity"), proposing a mystique of the holiness of things-in-themselves.

From Gomringer's recognition of the "play" element in Concrete, to Garnier's sense of its cosmic responsibilities, the medium is widely embracing. Even the most expressionist Concrete poetry is anti-rhetorical, a common aim being to discard worn-out language, forms, grammar, syntax. Visual rather than mental, Concrete is yet centrally concerned with word-structure, thought-structure. Thus Gomringer is able to emphasize order and organization as important aspects of it, to perceive it in terms of architecture. Max Bense sees the contrast between literary and Concrete as being one between sequence and design, and declares Concrete's primary constructing principle regarding words to be the "perception of their togetherness". This "togetherness" is the meaning of a Concrete poem; content is form. Thus John Riddell's comic strip "Pope Leo" (*The Cosmic Chef*, pp. 13-17) is satisfyingly dexterous, but seems at best impure as an example of the medium.

In some respects *The Cosmic Chef* is confusing. Its visual quality cannot match Solt or Stephen Bann, but it has the immediacy of typewriter and manu-

script. Then again, some of the items included do not seem to be Concrete poems (though, obviously, I have not succeeded in providing a single clear definition of "the Concrete poem". This does not seem to me possible at present). Nelson Ball, to take one example, is a fine sensitive poet, but I would not have seen his work as Concrete, nor would I see Seymour Mayne's "Pompass" (p. 48), which is like a fugitive piece of Henri Michaux, as having an obvious place in *The Cosmic Chef*. Both, however, are more than welcome.

Real "live entertainment" is here to a degree not often found nowadays in more conventional anthologies. As sheer "play" my fancy is tickled by bp Nichol's "Semantic chaos equals moral anarchy" (p. 36), and by the visual jokes of bill bissett and J. R. Colombo (p. 50, p. 57). A typical "cement works," the book is a fascinating amalgam of personal anarchies (handwriting, private jokes, Rid-dell's "tragedy") and standardized constructions, typographically based.

bill bissett's *STH STORY I TO* is a rich book, full of *om*-like, anti-thought chants ("o lord of all creation it is only to live."). He asks:

is it such
a big deal to be
ready for the blossom
of the future changes seed
now

and exhorts: "do more, from th heart out." But he is not hortatory, preaching, or asking for critical response. He offers a surface, not food for thought, the clear sound of a bell, a declaration: "th ancient lord of the universe asks you to be." bissett's Zen-like poems reject penetration. He offers, too, Goeritz-like constructions, some of which (for example,

the page involving "v" and "x") are foci of meditation. Attractive and substantial, the book is given its coherence by an underlying mysticism.

Maxine Gadd's *Hochelaga* "grabs" me, but has almost nothing to do with Concrete. She has skill, intensity, and a curious, still, formal, sense:

he
 so cold and clean, his eye so grey and clear
 his skin so cool and pale, a little smile
 my dove hop down, o
 nothing ask, only you lie there
 and let me, let me

Bertrand Lachance makes interesting shape poems, particularly "in the concrete forest," "only child flashing thru" and a vulture-like airplane. His more "literary" work such as "the whores of granville st" tends to be rather tedious. Can't think of anything, right now, I want to say about Ken West's work. During his short life, d.a. levy was an energetic, prolific, sensitive poet. He deserves someone's troubling to gather all his many small press publications together and summing up for him, and us. From what I have seen of it, blewointment press produces a higher proportion of good lively work than most, including the Concrete scene as a central part of its concerns.

That scene today is still not finally clear. Perhaps it will become so when the two lines of development, expressionist and constructionist, fuse together? Both lines share one healthy objective, the continuing task of purifying "the dialect of the tribe(s)". Even the expressionist Concrete poem serves to control, rather than to indulge, the emotions. Even though some so-called Concrete poems are anarchic (or perhaps just hopefully liberated) the medium, at core,

seems firmly based on rationality. In the face of a torrent of self-indulgent ego trips, its firm link with reason may make it durable, and of continuing value to our life.

¹ The books which prompted these notes are: *The Cosmic Chef: An Evening of Concrete*,

edited by bp Nichol (Ottawa: Oberon Press); bill bissett, *S Th Story I To*; Ken West, *Wire*; Maxine Gadd, *Hochelaga*; Bertrand Lachance, *Eyes Open*; d.a. levy, *Red Lady* (all Vancouver: blewointment press).

² Mike Weaver, "Concrete Poetry." *The Lugano Review*, Vol. I, no. 5-6, 1966, p. 100-125.

BIRTH OF THE BUTTERFLY

Robert Harlow

THESE NOTES are personal, set down with the hindsight not available to me during the dozen years I spent with the CBC in a job that allowed me some access both to the production and the executive sides of its operation. I must say, too, that I do not share Max Ferguson's romantic view of the Corporation (*Here's Max*), nor am I able, for temperamental reasons, to share Frank Peers' classical and scholarly approach (*The Politics of Canadian Broadcasting*). A beginning, then, might be to restate what most of those who read this already believe: the CBC was a good idea. The proposition that all public radio and TV frequencies should be used for profit and the perpetuation of private points of view is not a tolerable one. So, even at a time (now) when the CBC has become a \$160,000,000 giant, in which rather inexpensive brains jockey for petty power and ways to keep it, there is still a real case for its continuance, though not, perhaps, in its present form.

Another beginning, and this closer to the subject (the CBC's influence on

Canadian letters) might be this: a country already blessed with good writers may use any new medium well (witness Germany, France, Italy, England, where the best authors participate with distinction in all forms of expression, and where the media use their works with a real sense of contributing to a cultural heritage). Good writers will enlarge a country's consciousness and widen its horizon of expression even under adverse conditions. The CBC, however, was created at a time when there were virtually no useable literary talents in the country to contribute to the new public medium. This situation was made more complex (and the situation is still with us today) by the fact that most of the audience that potentially good writers might have had was reading, watching, listening to the products of other talents from other cultures. Remember too that the CBC did not grow from fertile ground but was created by legislation to satisfy an intellectual need. The Corporation's service to Canadian letters was born in triple jeopardy: no writers, minimal audience and small local experience.

In the beginning and before the war, announcers, so the legend goes, wore evening dress to read the news. Singers did Edwardian recitals. Musicians thumped through junior symphony repertoires. Variety shows extolled the virtues of Empire. And actors and producers and writers did the best they could, imitating Arch Obler and BBC light drama. No sense of panic: it was enough to be alive from coast-to-coast.

During the war, Dan McArthur founded a news service that still has traditions and real virtues; the Stage series began as a medium for dramatists, Ira Dilworth's Wednesday Night began to function, and a good, if sometimes over-anxious, Public Affairs department emerged. Perhaps this department more than any other felt the brunt of the CBC's *de facto* policy not to create a climate where good writers and producers could work out well in advance of the public's expectations. It tried, and thought that this was what it was doing, but it found out how wrong it was when it ran headlong into that dark tunnel labelled "Tell It Like It Is" from which it never really emerged. Neither the Corporation nor its member departments were prepared for, or understood, the gap between the new age born in England and America on the one hand, and the Canadian public and its parliament on the other.

So, during its first twenty-five years, the CBC's character was at best avuncular and stuffy; at worst it served then as it does now, only as an instrument of public policy. Like the CN and CP, Air Canada, the pipelines and, sometime in the future, a national power grid, the CBC quite simply helps tie Canada together. It was, and still says it is, devoted

to entertainment, information, the encouragement of Canadian talent and the fostering of a Canadian identity. For a long while, CBC staff people believed these were not mere words and tried to act accordingly. It would be difficult to say now what new beads the CBC tells when it says its private novenas at annual executive conferences. Perhaps there are no new ones; perhaps "give the people what they want" still salves as many consciences in the CBC as in the U.S.A. And no one seems to understand that to follow this slogan renders the public network superfluous.

Yet the CBC had a kind of golden age. And during that time—for a decade or so after 1950—it produced enough good programming to gain a place in the hearts of my generation if not in those of any other. Still, the talent it fostered was seldom literary. In fact, even during those better times, the CBC, despite its liberal image and stance, was anti-literary. The reason is simple; it sought to support men-of-letters as other corporations support *their* idea men: as instruments of its own corporate means and ends. Thus, what writing talent we produced in the fifties wrote for a Canadian version of Grub Street. Perhaps this would not have mattered, except to the taxpayers, if there had been anywhere else for real authors to go. We had then no theatre, no adventurous publishers, few magazines. Certainly the CBC could not have done it all alone. Publishers and a viable theatre are necessary to create a literature, but I don't happen to think this lets the CBC off the hook. While writers were not thrown to the dogs who can compute with the speed of light the lowest common denominator of public taste, they were up against what

was necessarily an institutionalized taste which tended to recognize only certain modes of expression and could only tolerate a low level of artistic consciousness. These modes and levels were defined by a programme policy which perpetuated the taste of a corporation that seldom knew what it would do to foster a literature, but which was always quite clear what it wouldn't do, as outlined in Government White Papers and various executive directives, all conceived and written with hellish good intentions.

There are points here which must be sharpened. There *was* a kind of Golden Age. The CBC was able to do a fair job of recruiting after World War II. In 1948 the recruits were avant-garde. Those who are left have moved up in the Corporation; they are still avant-garde — in terms of 1948. A second point: the Golden Age was given its original impetus by A. Davidson Dunton, a man who rightly felt that the CBC's mission was not necessarily to be popular. Alphonse Ouimet, who succeeded him, was pressured to take the opposite view. Or perhaps it came naturally to him. Great ages sometimes come to a close on the heels of a rousing speech. M. Ouimet's speech was to the National Convention of the Canadian Chambers of Commerce at Halifax in 1957 where he declared, with emotion, that the CBC wanted to be loved. If a moment were to be marked when the CBC died as a literary possibility — indeed, as almost any kind of culturally useful possibility — that moment would be the most likely choice. No literary (or cultural) force can be *loved*. When it becomes beholden it ceases to breathe its own air.

A still larger point must be made. Because the CBC did not establish an inde-

pendent definable tradition (as with News) *in collaboration with* emerging writers, it has been unable to remain in contact with the young and vigorous. Nor, because it never had an independent vision, has it been able to establish an audience which will — or can — tolerate the incivilities of real creativity. Its true audience is now at the movies, and it is loved as much as any broadcasting outfit is ever loved by an audience of older apathetics, of whom not a few have been taught to be colonial Americans, the very thing — rightly or wrongly but ironically — the Corporation was set up to prevent. And this is an indictment the CBC could have escaped only by understanding the necessity of being deservedly unloved a good deal of the time.

Doing violence to manners, mores, to conventional wisdom and philosophy, to everything but life itself is basic to any publishable literature. The CBC's point of view on this matter was solidly corporate. It produced (and still does), sometimes shyly, sometimes with fanfare, a little electronic music, an occasional ballet, an eclectic original play here and there throughout the winter season. In short, these gestures are not a usual thing and the result is rather like suddenly seeing your mother walk down Main Street with one breast exposed. It's shocking, so shocking that it's impossible to say whether it's a good breast or not. A lot of breasts have to hang out before compassionate judgment is even thinkable.

In Europe, for example, Larry Kent's *High* and Maurie Ruvinsky's *Plastic Mile* have, I'm told, been broadcast on TV. Without speaking of the merits of either of these feature films, the point must be made that neither of them could possibly

be broadcast on the CBC. In Europe, time has been available for all kinds of art, and in sufficient bulk for it to be accepted as relevant by its audience and appraised as part of a normal schedule of programmes. This will not happen in Canada now. The moment during the fifties when the tradition could have been established which would have made the CBC a real influence for good inside the literary scene is gone. The Corporation opted for almost total pop and pap, and a sycophant's relationship to Ottawa's politicians. To begin now would require a revolution which no one has the stomach for, or the psychic energy to produce. The potentially good men hired fifteen to twenty years ago are long since gone. The small uprisings of the sixties were made by trendy popularizers of small originality. They might have done some good — kept the battle going — had there been leadership at the department and executive levels, but by that time there was no one of strength or stature left. The image of the Corporation became, quite naturally, the butterfly.

My small part in this losing game was played out during the years about which I have been speaking (1951-64). One of the black comic aspects of the CBC's history during that period was that a good many production people sensed what the priorities should have been. We knew that we did not need press officers, but good programmes that led the public's taste. We did not need systems and procedures men, personnel people, hundreds of head office drones and emissaries proving Parkinson's Law while ostensibly satisfying M. Ouimet's obsession with re-organizing and re-organizing again the superstructure of the Corpora-

tion. We did not need supervisors supervising supervisors supervising supervisors until reality became power instead of programmes. And we did not need to have to think that executive personnel were the enemy. What we needed was the sense Dunton had given in his time that someone was leading us who could handle the people in Ottawa and elsewhere who believe that new experience is always obscene and the CBC is a left-wing plot. But even under Dunton we had failed to make contact with the clear-eyed among the young. And this was a kind of slow suicide. The job of adjusting our priorities was never done. The CBC simply grew old and died. Even this kind of suicide is a betrayal.

If the CBC had ever really met the Canadian writer it would have been in one of three areas: the dramatic, the documentary, or the literary. In the beginning, there were neither the creative nor the production talents to make these forms viable. The CBC functioned at the level of a local Little Theatre group where social position and some small "showbiz" experience fostered careers far more quickly than was good for the fledgling network. There came a sense of Establishment that did not leave the Corporation until hiring for television was in full flood. When I joined the CBC there was really only one rule; in essence it was "let it be in good taste." One didn't ask what good taste was; one knew or wasn't hired. You can run a tight ship if everyone knows what everyone else is thinking and, what's more, believes it. It gives a fine sense of mission (which the CBC often had), but literature out of such environments tends to be Kiplingesque at best. One must ask questions, voice real complaints if there

is to be any forward movement. There were, of course, slips, moments of consummate frustration when one of our own went beyond the bounds, as when Dan McArthur wrote his famous memo to Management headed "Up Shit Creek Without a Paddle." But these things were handled quietly; Dan's career levelled off abruptly. He eventually became someone's Executive Assistant. He was one of a handful without whom the CBC would have really come apart.

Another was Andrew Allan. If there is a first name in Canadian post-war drama, his must be it. Without his work before, Stratford could not have survived its beginning. We are indebted to him for erudition, professionalism, a sense of style and mission and a heightened consciousness of what had to be done. Perhaps what he didn't know was the short time there was to do it in. By the time TV came along he had established the first possibility of a Canadian drama, but then both time and continuity ran out on him. Drama was to be big in TV, and without the experience we gained in radio. Television was new, different. Somehow, somewhere a new god was to reveal a shortcut to literary creation

through the use of dials, knobs, lights, lenses. No one touched with only monaural experience would be able to see the grand design or be let in on the new cosmic secret. The natural laws of a new creative universe were to be delivered, but the celestial mail got held up in a permanent snow storm and we've been suffering ever since from what those bright young things, so recently auto-beatified, recoiled in Sheridan-esque horror from: radio with pictures.

Andrew Allan was the first and the last inside the CBC with a practical, aesthetic vision of the possibilities of a dramatic literature, and the power to put it into effect. I am not naive enough to think he could have saved the situation. My point is that had we allowed ourselves a sense of continuity and built on the only dramatic tradition we ever had, TV drama might have become original instead of minor, eclectic and irrelevant to what we as Canadians are. With leadership we could have forced our almost thriving dramatic literature. As it was, instead of encouraging and conspiring with young writers to subvert its audience to consciousness, the CBC, along with Stratford, conspired

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But the drama is difficult and treacherous; it is a form where the writer has to share control; fashion and "creative" directors tend to take over the inexperienced. Perhaps a more viable form for new talent is the documentary. This form is, in one sense, pre-fiction. In another, it can be used as a form for fiction. But no matter how hard one tries it can never just report. It always tells, and in the telling it attracts meaning willy-nilly. But in Canada, our most known saying, the one that is in the bones of every one of us, is that our history — our experience, everything we do — is dull. The CBC believed that too and in this area, where it should not have failed, it did. A CBC documentary was a *serious* proposition, conceived along the lines of a *Paris Review* interview: the interviewer was to be knowledgeable, pertinent, polite and anonymous. Radio journalism never really progressed beyond this: the idea that a documentary, no matter about what, was, in fact, a document, a forging, if you'll allow the reference, in the smithy of someone's (the broadcaster's) soul, "the uncreated conscience of the race." No one had actually heard the order, but all of us knew it: documentaries were to be objective. History, experience contemporary and otherwise, expired wanly in 15, 30 and 60 minute chunks as anxious executive ears measured carefully whether equal time were given to every point of view.

Yet history in its broadest sense — the sense of a culture *doing* — is pre-fiction and necessary to fiction. It is the great instigator of literature, as in Tolstoy and

Faulkner and Ford Madox Ford. It is, to switch images, our national wilderness where writers, if they are to be writers, must slash out their individual ways toward identity, and even sometimes towards truth and beauty.

But literature — as distinct from history — is mostly writers writing alone in unguarded moments about how it is to be alive and have to die, and in this ultimate area the CBC hardly made contact at all. Canada in fact, has managed to run a broadcasting corporation for a generation without any real writers, without a Gunter Grass, a Vesaas, a Dürrenmatt, a de Mandiargues. We were bound to produce a McLuhan. Our medium had to be the message: there was no other.

There have, of course, been programmes for writers on radio. During the last sixteen years *Anthology* has broadcast stories and poetry once a week. I was in on its birth, along with Robert Weaver and, if I remember correctly, Helen James.¹ It should have been part of a beginning, but it is nearly all there ever has been on a regular basis. We should have gone on creating more and more ground for writers to live on. One wonders what would have happened if we had bought a half-dozen novels a year from young writers and had them read in nightly instalments in the place of late evening concerts of recorded music. Often the CBC has spent four or five thousand dollars to produce dramatic adaptations of novels old enough to be in the public domain. To buy the rights to a new, unpublished novel of average length, and to have it narrated might not have cost more. I mention the novel for a reason: the trouble with Canadian would-be writers has been that

they have not been able to go any distance. Authors of stature are twenty-book men who have gone long and deep into their consciousnesses and to the roots of their experiences. The novel and the full-length play are the major forms of written expression that allow this ability to go a distance. When that ability matures a literature of substance is born, an identity is found and a confidence is fostered both in those who write and in those who become their audience. When would-be authors are asked only to write short, there is little impact and small discovery. A whole culture suffers. This insight should have been reflected in early CBC programme policy (as it was in music, opera, or the presentation of adapted literary works from other countries and times). Probably our books would have been bad to begin with, but perhaps no worse than some of our commissioned symphonies, operas and films.

The fact is that the one thing the CBC had to do, if it were to be a success, it did not do: it did not provide an outlet for a literature that may have spoken to the Canadian people. And that

is one of the reasons why the Corporation is dead to the generation that is about to take over. They literally do not know that the idea of the CBC ever existed, they do not know how it was betrayed, and I think it matters little to them now. The new writers are writing short for a dozen good little magazines, and long for *Anansi*, and *Oberon*, and *Sono Nis*, and *Prism International* and other small but important presses. They are making films on their own, and setting up theatres in back rooms and even on the streets. The next few years may, I think, be a wonderful time for Canadian letters, Trudeau and inflation willing. Yet, I can't help but feel, at this distance from that other time ten and twenty years ago, that the new magazines and the new presses and the new theatre and the new writers would have been with us a lot sooner if the CBC had not conned us, diverted us, and then failed to understand and act upon the most important part of its mandate and public trust.

¹ So, to complete the record, were George Woodcock and Joyce Marshall. [Ed.]

opinions and notes

THE ORGANIC AESTHETIC

Sir:

George Bowering's opposition to the "Northrop Frye school" of Canadian poets, as expressed in *Canadian Literature* 36 ("Why James Reaney Is A Better Poet"), results from his adherence to the aesthetics of organic form. For the adherent of organic form, the successful poem is the verbal *equivalent* of a given experience. While for Frye the poem bears hypothetical relation to experience, for Bowering the poem embodies experience directly. Implicit in Bowering's emphasis on the honest communication of personal experience is a view of his own verse as a salutary antidote to the humanism of the nineteenth century. The poet who, without religious or mythological props, finds in his day-to-day experience sufficient value to render life worthwhile is, Bowering suggests, surely preferable to the poet for whom experience is worthless unless it can be fitted into some universal system, some grand mythological framework. For Bowering, Northrop Frye, with his theories of literary structure, seems to make poetry unnecessarily complicated. It is, after all, so simple. Let us be open to experience and record it honestly. This is enough.

Frye himself, of course, would see the organic form aesthetic for what in fact it is: a convention. Where earlier poets pretended to be the media of an inspiring muse, the adherents of organic form claim

to be the media of their own experiences, writing being essentially the discovery of a form which fits a particular experience, rather than an imposition of "ready-made" forms and symbols on the poet's material. But the poet's ordering of words inevitably involves a certain betrayal of the experience to be conveyed. Language is not a mirror, it is a makeshift tool of communication, and poetry differs from discursive prose by its heightened attention to language. This attention inevitably distorts the intended message, or, more accurately, transforms the message into something quite different from what the poet originally had in mind. It is in this modification that the poet's creative capacity resides and that his true discoveries are made.

What primarily concerns me, however, is the moral implication of Bowering's organic form aesthetic, specifically in relation to that pessimistic view of modern man so well exemplified by George Grant. In this view, man is progressing to a total mastery of nature in which the mind, the genes, and the very soul will be harnessed for the purpose of even greater advancement. In the name of man's continuing advancement all manner of atrocities are speciously justified. Hence not only Vietnam and its prototypes, but also the extermination of all life-forms which do not subserve the end of progress.

Many see Frye's theory of literature (and thus presumably the Frye school of poets whom Bowering attacks) as contributing to this destructive "progress". Grant, for instance (in *Technology and Empire*), regards Frye's attempt to make of literary criticism an autonomous, objective discipline as a betrayal of the humanities to the sciences, and thus to

the general drive of technological advancement. In his article, Bowering echoes this view by suggesting that Frye's critical theory takes the humanity out of poetic expression and leaves only a pedantic machinery of symbols.

However, it is not Frye, but the adherents of organic form, who, in their aesthetics, manifest most clearly the influence and effects of progress-worship. If, after all, the authentic communication of experience is all that counts; if non-literary experiences do not derive their worth from their relation to absolute standards of value, nor literary experiences from their relation to some vision of life in the corpus of literature as a whole (that is, the *myth*), what is the object of life or of poetic activity? Surely it is to live merely for the sake of living, to verbalize merely for the sake of verbalizing, and to progress technologically merely for the sake of technologically progressing. Taken alone, the last idea appears frightening, the second silly, and the first somewhat attractive. But the three ideas are inextricably linked and are thus all equally intolerable.

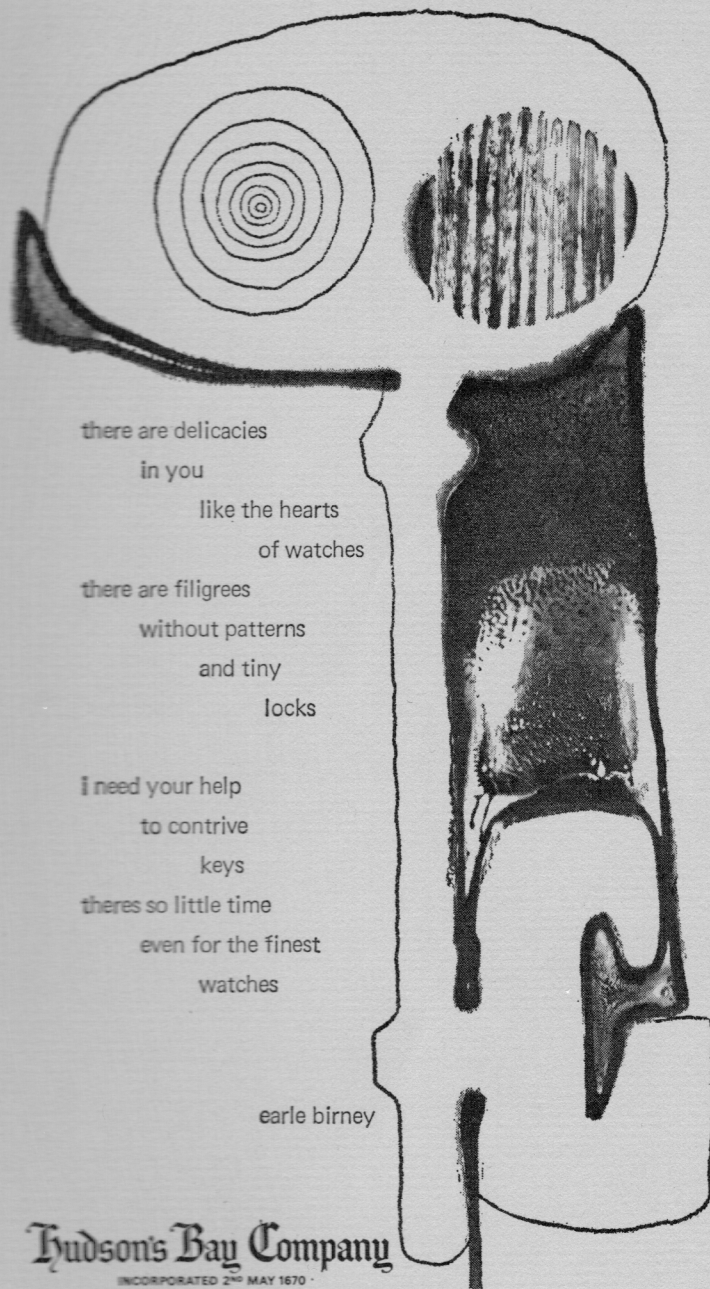
From this perspective the naiveté of Bowering and other organic form campaigners becomes clearly apparent. For they exemplify both in their theory and in their writing the effects of the very process which they claim to deplore. Who has railed more loudly than George Bowering against J. Edgar Hoover, American imperialism, Vietnam, etc. etc. etc.? Yet Bowering, in his aesthetic theory and practice, demonstrates himself to be the unwitting product and indeed supporter of the very things he attacks. I suggest that, in this, he is typical of his school.

LLOYD ABBEY

ON THE VERGE

***** *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, Volume II, 1701 to 1740. Edited by David M. Hayne and André Vachon. University of Toronto Press, \$15.00. There is a notable increase of density in the second volume of the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. Volume I embraced the centuries from the arrival of the Vikings up to 1700; Volume II covers a mere forty years from 1701 to 1740. Still the French presence is in the ascendant. Of the 578 people included, 440 acted out their lives in the French provinces of North America, 36 were Indians and the remaining 102 were a mixed collection of Newfoundlanders, English, New Englanders and Hudson's Bay men. But their presence shows the extent to which, along the Atlantic coasts and in sub-Arctic waters, the grip of Britain on North America was gradually closing; the next volume will undoubtedly see the balance in nationality shift decisively. The standard of the entries remains high, and the longer biographies are often essays of considerable import. Where necessary, moreover, the editors have gone outside Canada for writers, and only occasionally does one feel that they have chosen a tired veteran "expert", where a younger and more originally minded scholar might have made a better job. The volume is accompanied by a useful essay by André Vachon on "The Administration of New France", and an invaluable glossary of Indian tribal names current at this period.

*** J. L. HENDERSON. *John Strachan*. University of Toronto Press. \$4.50. This is the first of a series called Canadian Biographical Studies which is linked with the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*. These studies — brief in form — are intended to present basic biographies of important figures in Canadian history who have received insufficient attention. No serious Life of John Strachan — first Bishop of Toronto and a great political figure in his time — has appeared since 1870, and the curious rigidity of personality projected in Professor Henderson's highly condensed biographical essay is perhaps the explanation. Strachan was not one of the more engaging personalities in Canadian history, but he was one of the more important, and a modern study had long been needed. Given this fact, the main disappointment about the present book is that it is so short, and that it really penetrates so shallowly behind the granite carapace under which Strachan lived. G.W.



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