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ASPECTS OF LAYTON

Articles

BY PATRICIA KEENEY SMITH, ELIZABETH WATERSTON, RUDY WIEBE, LAWRENCE W. JONES, ANDREAS SCHROEDER, WILLIAM H. NEW

Translation

BY JOHN GLASSCO

Review Articles and Reviews

BY MIRIAM WADDINGTON, DOUGLAS BARBOUR, MATTHEW CORRIGAN, ALAN SHUCARD, PHYLLIS GROSSKURTH, AUDREY THOMAS, RUDY WIEBE, RODERICK HAIG-BROWN, KEATH FRASER, A. W. PURDY, DONALD STEPHENS, BARBARA THOMSON GODARD

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contents

U.B.C. MEDAL FOR POPULAR BIOGRAPHY, 1970

THE QUANTITY OF BIOGRAPHIES submitted for this award in 1970 is not as great as in the past, but the quality is better than last year. What books were published in this genre in 1970 were on the whole good, solid pieces of work, though some failed to entertain and others to inform. The paucity in numbers suggests that — for 1970 at least — biography has lost its formerly secure position as one of the most acceptable forms of history and literature in Canada. One hopes this trend will not continue.

Last year the Selections Committee commended Faber & Faber and the University of Toronto Press for the new directions they have set for Canadian biographies. This year the Committee would like to salute the Macmillan Company of Canada for turning out more good biographies, year after year, than any other publisher in Canada. The winner of the 1970 University of British Columbia Medal for Popular Biography is Macmillan's *The Boy from Winnipeg*, written by James H. Gray. This volume is an excellent statement of Canadian — more specifically Winnipeg — social history. It is much more than an autobiographical account of the life of James Gray; it rings with historical authenticity. Coupled with Gray's *The Winter Years*, published by Macmillan in 1966, *The Boy from Winnipeg* gives a study in depth of a man's reactions to life around him. Few writers commenting on the 'twenties, 'thirties and 'forties can match Gray's wit, his perception of what was actually going on around him, and his presentation of attitudes and facts. The Selections Committee is happy to commend James H. Gray for the winning of this award.

D.S.

editorial

NEW TRENDS IN PUBLISHING (2)

HAVING FOUNDED House of Anansi, and having in the process created a facility of a kind Canada has never had before for publishing experimental fiction, Dave Godfrey moved on to establish, with two partners, the more politically-oriented publishing house called New Press — or, to use its own typographical style — new press. When it was first announced, and the founders made their smiling debut in a *Time* report, new press took the stand for Canadian nationalism. At that time I put a testing question to see just what intellectual rigidities this might conceal. Dave Godfrey assured me that the definition of nationalism was in no sense restricted; an anarchist regionalist, for example, would not be turned away.

And it is this malleable, undogmatic quality that I find the most attractive quality of new press. Its partners are businesslike, but unpushing. Indeed, the only letter they failed to answer was that in which I talked of writing a piece on their work, and asked for information. Other publishers would have tumbled over their own ankles to answer. new press merely ignored the request, and one sensed behind the ignoring less a radical independence than a gentlemanly disinclination to carry too far the imperatives of trade.

When I consider the pile of new press books which lie before me — by no means a complete batch since some have percolated to reviewers — I am rather amazed that a publishing house which sets out with such an apparently narrow intent could be so catholic in its actual productions.

To begin, there is no evident attempt to restrict the range of publication to the political and the polemical. The most impressive of all new press books to date has

been Dave Godfrey's first novel, *The New Ancestors*, a book of such quality that one feels a kind of awe at the thought of what his next may be. All the assurance, the accomplishment far beyond promise that went into Godfrey's volume of stories, *Death Goes Better with Coca Cola*, are here magnified into a fictional edifice in which hallucination and reality reflect each other in an extraordinary feat of experience transmuted.

The one disadvantage of having published *The New Ancestors*, so far as new press is concerned, is that in imaginative quality, in power of writing and in sheer intelligence, it overshadows everything else the house has yet produced. And this even though the press's few books of verse, picked by the editors individually because they like them, we are told, have certainly been above the recent Canadian average. The best of them, even better than Henry Beissel's *Face on the Dark*, is Charles Wright's *The Grave of the Right Hand*, and this, incidentally, is a book by an American poet who appears to have no Canadian links — a sign, if we needed any, that new press's nationalism is no kind of acrid xenophobia.

But fiction and verse remain the smallest group of titles in the list of new press's publications. It includes as well such curiosa as the *Canadian Whole Earth Almanac*, a fascinating compendium of rustic campishness which every quarter provides a mass of information on the "natural life", collected with an enterprise in research and an efficiency in collation lacking in most actual rural communities; indeed, I suspect its main public will be among urbanites who still dream of going to the land or — as I do — remember with mingled nostalgia and disgust their own failures in the simple life.

If only the straighter books that new press publishes had the originality and charm and occasional startling good sense of the *Whole Earth Almanac*! Perhaps I have been unlucky in the examples that have kept their places on my editorial shelf, but even if these are not the best, they obviously represent what new press's editors think is worth publishing. And some of them are mediocre by any standards. Comparing *The New Ancestors* with a clumsy chunk of partisan propaganda like Ed Broadbent's *The Liberal Rip-Off* or a stodgy piece of thesis-writing like John W. Warnock's *Partner to Behemoth: The Military Policy of a Satellite Canada*, I can only feel astonishment at the editorship that can produce all three from the same house.

It would of course be unfair to condemn all new press's publications other than fiction and verse on the strength of the most unattractive. I have just finished reading Margaret Daly's account of the CYC, *The Revolution Game*, and that strikes me as excellent radical reportage. But it *is* above the average, and to

balance it there are too many pieces of well-meaning bookmaking of a kind that has lately become over-popular in Canada — the volumes written by a group and always sagging towards the lowest level of competence, such as *Why Wilderness*, a turgid symposium on an impeccable cause, and *Pollution Probe*, which affronts the intelligent reader with its condescending and jargon-ridden presentation.

If such books are examples, we do not yet appear to be developing the tradition of polemical writing which Canada so notably lacked in the past and which is a symptom of emerging political maturity. Yet new press could be a veritable school of such writing, if only its editors would set out to revive in Canada the true craft of pamphleteering. The political pamphlet is a form which has its own laws and rewards. It is characterized by a conciseness of form, an economy of verbiage and a simplicity of statement which demand strength of opinion and do not evade literary grace — as the example of such noted recent pamphleteers as Bernard Shaw, George Orwell, Herbert Read and Aldous Huxley has demonstrated. The relentless lecturing of the thesis-maker, the chaotic rambling of the symposium partakers: these have no place in the art of pamphleteering. Indeed, one of its attractions lies in limitations which the real pamphleteer accepts with the same joy as a Welsh poet writing to an elaborate formula for an eisteddfod. In the classic ages of the pamphleteers — and the Thirties was probably the last of them — the custom was to fit pamphlet lengths to the size of sheets of printing paper; the preferred lengths were 16, 32 and 64 pages, and the art was to get all one wanted to say into one of these lengths. Anything over 64 pages was regarded as over-expansive, and the real pamphleteers despised the writer who needed more space to express what he meant with force and clarity and with enough well chosen supporting facts and quotations.

Cheap modern printing techniques have their advantages, but they also mean that many books which should never appear are published, and that subjects which demand the clear and economical statement of the pamphleteer are submerged in volumes of 200 or 300 pages, lost in tedious argument and pointless detail. I hope new press continues to give free rein to novelists and poets if they are as good as those it has so far published. But it really should get its polemicists into trim, and nothing would be better, I suggest, than a series of pamphlets on urgent Canadian issues, with a 64-page nozzle that would make the writers build up their eloquence under pressure. G.W.

IRVING LAYTON AND THE THEME OF DEATH

Patricia Keeney Smith

IT SEEMS GROSSLY CONTRADICTORY to associate a vigorous and volatile *enfant terrible* of Canadian letters with the subject of death in any remote way. Layton himself, however, is the first to admit that there is an obvious, profound and multi-faceted connection between death and the image of the sun which persistently and provocatively animates his poetry. The Layton individuality — his restless energy, his warrior words, strong verbs and startling metaphors, constantly wrestling with meaning, actively and obstinately as life itself, their "panache and chutzpa," to quote one review of *Selected Poems*, is a function of his basic relationship as poet and man to the force of death. Strife, to adapt a comment of Kaufmann's upon Nietzsche, is a feature of his absolute. The constant tug of war between life and death, between creation and destruction is the very definition of life. Layton sees life as a series of contesting opposites, all variations of the basic tension. Poetry is his expression of the contest, and he identifies poetry as " . . . an ironic balance of tensions."[1] For Layton, the life force or creative process is possible only through some form of death.

Looking at the bulk of Layton's poetry from this point of view, one discovers in it a compelling story, the final chapter of which reveals a creative giant, closely related to the Nietzschean "overman," for whom "the will to power," which also underlies all life, is possible only through death. The two writers meet at many other points, both imagistically and philosophically.

Of course, the realm of nature exemplifies the creation-destruction cycle at its most innocent, at its purest. That Layton takes his initial impulse from nature is

evident in many poems, the most obvious being a kind of "nature" poem, deftly handled, that usually provokes questions about his role as creator, or about the condition of art itself. "Red Chokecherries" serves to illustrate with fiery urgency a process of destruction that is both recognized and anticipated.

> In the sun
> The chokecherries are a deep red.
> They are like clusters of red jewels.
>
> They are like small rubies
> For a young queen who is small and graceful.
> When the leaves turn, I see her white shoulder.
>
> They are too regal to eat
> And reduce to moist yellow pits.
> I will let the air masticate them
>
> And the bold maggot-making sun.
> So I shall hardly notice
> How perfection of form is overthrown.

The particular life of cherries is brief, perhaps a summer's length, perhaps a day's; it is also beautiful and intense. The fruits perish when they reach perfection. The sun that nourishes them also destroys them. Nature's procedures are self-sufficient. Sun and air perform the inevitable. The extermination of any organic thing is the dissolution of an individual form of nature into her undifferentiated life-death cycle. Man, however, tends to complicate matters.

The world of art is alluded to in the word "form." Art, the hopefully permanent legacy of man, art as well as nature, is subject to continuing change. This is not an easy premise for man to accept, and yet it is based on one magnificently simple principle, stated now by Nietzsche: "Everything that is generated must be prepared to face its painful dissolution . . . , because of the constant proliferation of forms pushing into life, because of the extravagant fecundity of the world will,"[2] that is the creative principle. Thus, as the perfection of natural form is overthrown constantly, art repeatedly crumbles back into life.[3]

The irony of this fact for Layton is best expressed in a group of poems which may be called the "graveyard poems," the most outstanding of which is "Côte des Neiges Cemetary."

> As if it were a faultless poem, the odour
> Is both sensuous and intellectual,

Layton expresses sneering distaste for monuments — graves *and* poems. He is

exultant with the knowledge that they cannot last but must dissolve back into the flow of life. There are no permanent structures. What the poet understands over and above the insult to life sustained by senatorial statuary and wasting mausoleums is "... our mortal tongues furred with death: / A ghost city where live autumn birds flit." Birds over a graveyard, this image for life's irrepressible upsurge through death is triumphant. Graveyards as human monuments represent death and life; but they also insure life through death. Hence, they constitute an "Undying paradox!" in which Layton can rejoice as a man and as a poet.

Because death is not, for man, the pure process it is for nature, some of Layton's "nature poems" point to man's complexity, and to his consequent dilemma, more than they do to nature's simplicity. "One View Of A Dead Fish" contrasts the difference between nature and man with telling precision:

> Had it been a drowned child
> it should have owned some proof
> of birth, of sagacious forbears
> for this neutral water:
> someone to mourn, a name.
>
> But being a rotting fish
> its fins, a red streak in the crumpled
> water, mattered to no one
> nor the white
> of its decomposing beauty.
>
> Ludicrous its solemnity
> on the throbbing water.

One feels the poem's pain, only in its allusions to man, whose consciousness of the anonymity of death, and of its ravages, brings him a terrible awareness of suffering, a feeling of uncomfortable ambiguity towards an oblivious nature.

Another group of poems deals with the old age and death of persons for whom Layton has a particular and passionate love — his mother, "Keine Lazarovitch," his father, "Death of Moishe Lazarovitch," an old Spaniard, "Ballad of the Old Spaniard," and a very old woman, "To a Very Old Woman." These people are as vividly and often violently as much a part of the life force as the leaves on trees. Usually they have lived vigorously and so have long courted death; when it finally takes them, they treat it as rudely and familiarly as they might treat an old lover. Those are the people to whom there is no need for Layton to preach life, but from whom he learns it. "Gift," however, provides an exquisitely *understated* rendering

of the poetic association between the audacious simplicity of old age and the implacable march of the seasons.

Under the despoiled tree,
her park seat
soft with golden leaves,
the wrinkled
disconsolate woman
crimsons her lips.
A breeze
detaches the last
red leaf
and lays it
at her feet.

The gestures in the poem are delicate, but they are also ruthless. Nature and the old woman provide each other a fittingly lovely elegy for the annihilation that cannot be stopped.

EROTIC LOVE, too, involves a creative death. Layton's love poetry typically develops what Nietzsche calls the creative " . . . Eros . . . " to be found where "The male insect sacrifices itself to beget offspring, and thus to achieve a form of immortality . . . (in) . . . rebirth."[4] "Winter Light" is a love poem whose very title announces its duality. Light in Layton's poetic is most often the light of fire and sun, while winter is negation. Love includes both. Shiva, the startling manifestation of love, is a more accurate symbol of both the creative and destructive powers of love. Shiva dances in creation and this startling form appears where the poet creates, in his bedroom and on the streets of his neighbourhood, Somerled Avenue. An almost cosmic joy is caught in the exuberant image of a million roosters crying up the sun. Yet, Dionysian ecstasy is premature, or perhaps immature. For both Layton and Nietzsche, the true Dionysian spirit includes Apollo the giver of forms, the maintainer of harmony. "Winter Light" ends in Apollonian serenity: "at night when we embrace / we hear the silence of God." It is not often that Layton leaves his sun behind, but the final lines of this poem bring a brief serenity with the night, a momentary respite from life's constant clamour, a glimpse of the eternal order in the cosmos.

"Thoughts in the Water," while not strictly a love poem, is blatantly sexual and . . . put[s] into opposition . . . " the basic forces of female fertility, or formlessness,

and the intrusive male intelligence. It identifies drowning as a prelude to rebirth and so is an important development in the evolution of the creator, or "overman." The poet's voyage of self-discovery is a symbolic drowning and is depicted in this poem as sensual abandonment and then as savage sexual rape. The warning blow strikes in the third stanza:

> I feel
> her deep vibrations as if a seaplane
> had plunged his ruinous shadow
> like a sword through her coiling body.

She has been taken by sheer and wilful force; the weapon used is murderous. She has been truly ravaged. At the same instant, her brutal lover has been thrust from her: "I fall from her clasp, shuddering, / a senseless interloper, afraid . . . " He pays the penalty of sexual union — everything for a brief instant, and then nothing: "see I shall rise on the water / drowned, and dismally rise . . . " He is drowning; his body rises and falls on the waves. In the rising is implicit rebirth. New and vigorous life is the result of sexual spending. The Nietzschean sense of drowning is the experience of the Dionysiac state. It is a continuing delight in the generation and dissolution of forms of life that leads to an intuitive understanding of " . . . the eternal condition of things, . . . "[5] Eli Mandel describes the action "Thoughts in the Water" in similar terms: "If the poet drowns in the female element, that happens because, though he is the formative principle, she is the generative one."[6]

The poet, in his celebration of the life force, must also experience the death which it brings. He celebrates nature, the Dionysiac reveler, and suffers the passionate death of disintegration. Good poems rage and burn " . . . all things . . . " This is the kind of death described by Layton in most of his poems about poem-making. Their central figure can be identified as Layton's version of the noble savage embodying " . . . a wonderful sensuousness, . . . rich uncorrupted instincts, . . . exuberant rhythms.",[7] or as the Nietzschean " . . . primary man . . . ",[8] close to nature. The Dionysiac man is the " . . . enthusiastic reveler . . . a prophet of wisdom born out of nature's womb; a symbol of the sexual omnipotence of nature."[9]

If the creative artist experiences the death of the Dionysiac, he also experiences the death of the Apollonian. In order to create his poem, the poet must finally differentiate himself from nature, abstract himself from the flux of time. He must, that is, contain primitive energy by means of the Apollonian powers of form, and

for an instant outside of all quotidian reality, experience the death of an absolute. This fusion is best expressed by one of Layton's own poems, *Esthetique*: "Out of . . . burning comes / Mozartian ecstasy leaping with the flames." Hence the poet suffers. Cognizant of the antinomies of his own existence and compelled to wrestle with them, he is "A quiet madman, never far from tears . . . " His defeat and rejuvenation is conveyed by the one image. He lies within nature, experiencing the very heart of its paradox for him:

> I lie like a slain thing
> under the green air the trees
> inhabit, or rest upon a chair
> towards which the inflammable air
> tumbles on many robins' wings . . .

With "The Birth of Tragedy," Layton perceives a unity through opposites, "tree, mould on tree — ". He sees in nature's pattern of life and death his own death and rebirth through poetry. As Mandel puts it, "Poetry appears, then, as a kind of death because, just as 'Living things arrange their death,' 'seasonably' or in the 'fruition' of poetry, so poetry too 'composes' its own death,"[10] of perfect forms or "flowering stone". The gods who can "sustain . . . " the antinomies of existence, " . . . passionate meditations", are finally the gods of a Nietzschean creator, Dionysiac man himself, and for Layton, the poet.

LIKE BLAKE, Layton identifies the zombies of society in terms of its restrictive structures: school, church, state. Such institutions prohibit strength and joy, instinct and passion, and so prevent any kind of creative activity. It is not surprising to find in Layton's poetry that many people exemplify for him a mode of living most accurately described as death-in-life. On his value scale, this state excludes both significant life and significant death. A life of any quality must support the tension between life and death, since the more intensely life is lived, the closer death is. "Against This Death" dramatizes the importance of these concepts. Death-in-life is depicted in the first stanza as " . . . respectable / death", "served up / like ice". It is "slow, certain". By contrast, vigorous death, which presupposes vigorous life, is a function, in this poem, of the flesh, the life of nature, of erotic love, and of the artistic imagination. Layton's long list castigating society's deadbeats, from "sterile academics" and ending with "social workers and psychiatrists", is now a familiar one. "Woman in the Square" and "Westmount

Doll" deride sexlessness. "Bishop Berkeley Goes to Bed" is one of his most succinct and effective satires on the evils of intellectualism. "Sheep, Me, the P.M., and the Stars," and "Paging Mr. Superman" prove to be consuming satires on the ridiculous ignorance and the gullibility and weakness of modern man.

One of the most memorable images, however, of the superman who combats such withering anonymity is contained in "For Mao Tse-Tung: A Meditation on Flies and Kings." Christianity is, for Layton, chief among life-deniers and this poem proves to be one of his most effective indictments against its emphasis on piety, humility and other-worldliness. It fiercely dramatizes the creator as a revolutionary figure deriving strength from his isolation, and wielding a reckless and passionate cruelty before him which will "Smash insects . . . ", "Feast on torn flowers. . . . ".

Thus we come directly to the question of whether and in what manner man abuses his power over life and death. Man, as he destroys merely for the sake of destruction, is revealed by Layton in poetry of scathing social comment, concentrated in his two books, *Periods of the Moon* and *The Shattered Plinths*. Man gropes, for the most part, in a dismal chaos of war, sickness and sadism. Even Layton's sun image, normally radiating with meaning as the creative eros of the universe, becomes enfeebled, devoid of its power. Any affirmation of cruelty or suffering by creative man is remarkably absent in these books.

This is not true of those poems illustrating the deaths inflicted by man upon nature. Such poems express Layton's "most important working out of a murderous desire . . . "[11] Here, according to Layton, man has a terrible responsibility for he takes advantage of an innocent victim who also provides the artist with his basic impulse to create. Psychologically, then, man's perversity is comprehensible. Yet, the creative superman must affirm the most despicable act of his corrupted power, in order to convert that power to its creative potential. So, through such fine poems as "Bull Calf" and "Cain," man struggles mightily with his primitive instincts, is humbled to see how base they can be, and is finally reinforced for an eventual triumphant act of creation. Man's instinct to destroy need not destroy him.

"A Tall Man Executes a Jig" completes, in one of Layton's major poetic achievements, Layton's poetic story of man as he responds to death. That story turns out to be about man as poet, and ultimately, of course, about Layton himself. It takes us through various experiences of man, as a living death himself, as the murderer of both himself and nature, and as the victim of his own creativity in which his destructive powers are affirmed in the "Joy, and fullness of feeling,

that is the core of the creative mystery." This poem sees man and nature joining together in creation through death.

The "tall man" is, of course, the potential creator. The poem takes us through the deepening levels of his meditation when he questions traditional modes of suffering — pagan, Christian and Hebrew. While retaining all three, he transcends each of them in a series of richly subtle transitions, sweeping them together in an orchestrated movement in which the strident tones of the primitive creator mingle with the tragic and triumphant strains of the informed creator in perfect and beautiful harmony.

Man is at first at one with nature, feeling the sun and grasses, hearing the sounds of birds and flies. Attempting to identify the flies, who begin to distract him slightly, he concludes only that they must represent the frenetic energy of life itself: "Nervous dots". He still maintains unity with nature. Slowly, he begins to differentiate, to theorize. However, man's theories are inefficient to deal with life forces, and so, according to Layton, are his abstract forms. Mind versus matter produces the " . . . savage nightmare" of a Euclid. Nature then intrudes, and the "tall man" is assaulted by the tiny insects. They leave their "orthodox" unrest to become imprisoned in the hairs on his arm. Their energy has been orthodox for them, their transformations effected by the natural forces of sun ("jigging motes") and wind only. Thus, even though they are now restrained, they cannot be changed from what they are — chaotic energy. Yet, this early attempt to form the formless prefigures the role of the creator. Immediately, in fact, the "tall man" feels imprisoned like the flies, an insect only, in the thick grasses and flowers, and he begins to recognize, not only the enormity of his task, but its monumental importance. His potentiality as creative man — artist, philosopher or lover — is predicted in the references to Donatello, Plato and the universal lover in Stanza III.

However, such power is as yet unsubstantiated possibility only. The "tall man" has evolved no aesthetic structure out of nature, and the flies still swarm "Without sense or purpose . . . " to become "Meshed with the wheeling fire of the sun". The sun image also suggests the extent of man's power, its ambivalence in both making and taking away, and the suffering to be paid for that power. The reference to the dying sun as a " . . . god . . . " not only implies the eventual evolution of the "overman" who must "go down" before he may rise enriched, but also the death of all orthodox gods and hence of Christ. The sun bleeds to death in a memorable image symbolizing both the blood of Christ which, for Layton, has failed to redeem man, or even, for that matter, to recognize man, and the

violent blood sacrifice of the creator who must first destroy in order to realize the "Ambition, . . . " of his creative imagination, his " . . . pride, . . . " in his human magnitude and the " . . . ecstasy of sex". Blood alone is no salvation for man, nor is a spiritual ethos, and Layton's disappointment in Christianity is captured poignantly in a few lines:

> He stood still and waited. If ever
> The hour of revelation was come
> It was now, here on the transfigured steep.
> The sky darkened. Some birds chirped. Nothing else.
> He thought the dying god had gone to sleep:
> An Indian fakir on his mat of nails.

That he accepts this failing is evident in the very duality of the sun image, particularly as it leads him directly in Stanza V to examine for validity the Hebrew tradition symbolized as mountain peaks abruptly piercing the sun. So, the poem returns to human terms, as Layton points out the great relevance of the Hebrew tradition which, in its wait for a redeemer, seems to epitomize man's long suffering. Yet, the purpling hills are " . . . silent as time," and the creative man must find his own answers.

The direction now is downwards, and the "tall man" drops the " . . . halo / Of mountains, . . . " as emphatically as he doffed " . . . his aureole of gnats . . . " The object of the remainder of the poem is a snake, perhaps the only true inheritor and preserver of the earth. In its death, and in particular the "tall man's" dying with it, the snake represents the wisdom of the earth. Its temptation is ultimately a temptation to knowledge, for in life it had been:

> The manifest of that joyful wisdom,
> The mirth and arrogant green flame of life;
> Or earth's vivid tongue that flicked in praise of earth.

It is the culminating symbol of Layton's many creature deaths and man's complicated relationship to those deaths. "Your jig's up; . . . "is a death knell for the snake as well as an anticipation of the man's necessary death. The sun has become "A blood-red organ in the dying sky", a shrunken phallus, an image of exhausted energy. The frantic daylight energy of nature has subsided. Night is coming on. Symbolically, the "tall man" is about to discover his own darkness through which he will be reborn in his own light, in this case, the transformation through him of nature into art.

Beside the rigid snake the man stretched out
In fellowship of death; he lay silent
And stiff in the heavy grass with eyes shut,
Inhaling the moist odours of the night
Through which his mind tunneled with flicking tongue
Backwards to caves, mounds, and sunken ledges
And desolate cliffs where came only kites,
And where of perished badgers and racoons
The claws alone remain, gripping the earth.
Meanwhile the green snake crept upon the sky,
Huge, his mailed coat glittering with stars that made
The night bright, and blowing thin wreaths of cloud
Athwart the moon; and as the weary man
Stood up, coiled above his head, transforming all.

For Layton, the story must never end; he does not accept final solutions, even artistic ones, for the condition of art is its constant destruction and renewal through time, and while he lives, it seems he will write. Hence, the life-death cycle, with many stories yet to tell, seems an appropriate metaphor, both for the author's activity and for his continuing output, whatever its subsequent directions are likely to be.

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[11] *Ibid.*, p. xxii.

IRVING LAYTON

Apocalypse in Montreal

Elizabeth Waterston

MONTREAL IS A GOOD MOTHER for mystics. She presents essences: serenity, brassiness, squalor; slum, cathedral, suburb; glare of neon, gloom of mountain, slime of waterfront. She is "full of perverse appetites / devout, beautiful / cobras in the snow, / white foxes, priests' surplices".

But Montreal, having bombarded the senses with experience, presents multiple ways of imaging the stimuli. Double-language signs act as the inescapable reminder to every child that there are at least two ways of naming everything in the city. If the growing child in Montreal is Jewish, he will add two further languages as the channels for his sense of the world — Yiddish, the mamma-language, and Hebrew, the language of ritual and learning. And if the young man is a poet, tending to concentrate with extra sensitivity not only on the world about him but on his own response to that world and on his own power to express response, he will be encouraged by such a city as Montreal into a readiness to work through symbols. For here is the manifest city of dreams. Here is the city that corresponds to a sociologist's archetype, a city of visible levels and limits, of discernible hinterland and heart. Such a city reinforces the poet's anagogic sense of the oneness of the world of dreams and the world of experience.

In several major poems, Irving Layton has moved from mystic contemplation of a moment in his experience in Montreal into a powerful universal vision. Sometimes he swells into the fury of an apocalypse. (Such a fury burns in "Improved Binoculars"). Other poems (such as "Reconciliation") begin "betwixt the harbour and the great Crucifix", but lead to a delirium of love rather than of destruction. In "I saw a faun on Somerled Avenue", he presents a comic subur-

ban fantasia, with a wry aftermath. Finally, in recent years, he has reduced the turbulence of Montreal to a memory of the city, seen from far away ("On this Far Shore"), or remembered as a vast echoing emptiness — a memory that brings "joyful peace and wonder" ("Silent Joy").

Now that Layton has left Montreal, both physically and poetically, it is worth taking a look at his work to date, to see what he has made of the city — and what it has made of him. In *The Whole Bloody Bird*, Layton has structured an entire volume around his sense of place. Notes or observations crystallized from his travels lead to a set of aphorisms, and finally spin off into poems; the whole process begins each time with response to a particular locale. So too, in the main body of Layton's earlier work, the process of poetic refinement — from fact to idea to poem — begins most often with a particularized sense of place. And the place, for the younger Layton, was Montreal.

IRVING LAYTON'S earliest volumes *Here and Now*, *Now is the Place*, *The Black Huntsman*, *Cerberus*, and *Love, the Conqueror Worm*, exposed the zones of Montreal life that would stir the young poet. De Bullion Street, shoddy habitat of rouged whore and transient soldier, "rich / Suburban Westmount that squats upon a slum" ("Excursion"); Mont Rolland, the Laurentian antithesis to the daemonic city-centre; St. Helen's Island, a place of nightmare memory to "Odysseus in Limbo"; McGill, where Apollonian values are desecrated in "Philosophy 34"; "the lighted cross / that shines steadfast upon the city / with the faith of its shareholders" ("Compliments of the Season") — these are the places named in the earliest poems.

But it is in "Reconciliation" that Layton makes his first full use of the city. This poem notes the physical poles of height and depth. In a sweeping vision it sees the wintry tensions of Montreal, the antithetic whiteness of fox furs and surplices, the Cross on the mountain suggesting both suffering and light, the perverse appetites for devotion and for beauty. Yet the city, in winter, conciliates and cancels these oppositions:

> Betwixt the harbour
> And the great Crucifix
> the snow falls
> white and astringent.

The poet finds in this Montreal a metaphor for human oppositions:

You are like my city
full of perverse appetites . . .

He concludes the poem with a brilliant consummation, both personal and civic, a "double marvel":

and in the tinfoil air
I doubly marvel
that after estrangement
should come
such fine unhoped-for
delirium.

In 1954, '55, and '56, volumes repeat the range of place references, but change the emphasis, and change also the metaphoric application of Montreal places to human problems. In *Cold Green Element*, *In the Midst of My Fever*, *The Long Pea-Shooter*, *The Blue Propellor*, *The Bull Calf*, and *The Improved Binoculars*, certain place names sharpen the poet's focus on Montreal's centre. He introduces "The Main Street that leads to the Mountain" (in "Personae"), the Westmount of "Lacquered Westmount Doll", Place d'Armes, where the poet, turned statue, witnesses the terror of the city (in "God, when you speak"). This focus on the centre of Montreal is climaxed in "Winter Fantasy".

"Winter Fantasy" specifies "the explosion of Peel and St. Catherine" as the scene of a terrifying vision. The choice of this down-town corner, rather than of the mountain or the slum, reflects the poet's growing sexual tension and his dread of that fury, the modern woman. Peel and Ste. Catherine: an intersection deeply symbolic. Peel, the business street, male, English-speaking, leads down to Windsor Hotel and the Canadian Pacific Railway Station, or up to McGill University; Ste. Catherine, the glittering French and feminine street of shops, moves beyond Eaton's and Morgan's to The Gayety, Dupuis Frères, and the Church of Ste. Marie. Of course the intersection is an explosion! Yet here the poet pitches his poem, under green neon signs. Here ghosts arise, ravens shriek at the poet's "distaste for winter", and at his dread of the frenzied shoppers and of his consuming spouse. Against the terror of this hectic and love-lost corner, the poet raises his hand.

. . . raising my hand . . .
I made lo! the Cross which inflames our city
plunge hideously through the electric air
and turn into windowlights which glowed only
through the recollection of former brightness.

The Cross here, I think, implies the persistence of form (whether religious, marital, civic, or commercial). The city inflamed by this cross is a purgatory. In this city, tramcar and newsvendor, cigarette butts and shawled women are all variant versions of the motif of reduction and abandonment and wastage. All are shells, all are like the "white columns of lost & found". And all accrue at the "explosion of Peel & St. Catherine". In the down-town centre of Montreal Layton finds a symbol of his emerging vision of modern marriage.

The snow-covered mountain can still offer a momentary panacea. "Mount Royal" presents a vision of delight and affection. On the mountain the fast-moving skis and the shouts of the skiers lead the poet from his "litanies of sorrow".

> Approach, fill your pockets
> with so much free affection;
> praise this mood
> more fragile than a poet's oath.

Further poems from this period specify and respond to the Montreal suburbs. Here the city's map becomes a medium for social rather than for personal revelations. In "Lachine, Que.", blast furnaces and red-brick houses of the workmen's suburb lie "glistening / at the foot / of the highway". In Côte St. Luc, early morning peace and construction, children's dreams and quiet study all jostle for room in the poet's mind, against memories of

> the black bitter men —
> my kin —
> the inconsolable, the far-seeing
> ("Early Morning in Côte St. Luc")

The poet is uneasy and hostile in the suburbs. "One of the better suburbs of Montreal" furnishes the ironic scene of "Me, and P.M., and the Stars". The poet passes on the word that God is slowly decomposing, leaving only an odour "in the better churches of the city".

Those "better churches", and their secular equivalents, are specified, and rejected also. Notre Dame Cathedral, "this immense and ugly edifice" houses incongruously the statuettes of Ezekiel and Jeremiah, "incensed", captive in the spidery church. "Drunk on McGill Campus" again mocks the University as dessicator of joy; "University Buildings" add the "pale yellow, geometric" hives of Université de Montréal to the picture of institutional failure. "Pine Avenue Analyst" briefly

and sardonically adds the Montreal address of the modern psychiatric priesthood.

The specific localism of these poems, however, was being supplemented in the mid-'50s by a more universalized poetry. The down-town street of "Composition in Late Spring", the tenement room of "Eros Where the Rents aren't High", the suburban garden of "Summer Idyll", the burning orphanage of "Improved Binoculars" — these scenes, though redolent of Montreal to the Montrealer, are really without specific placing. They might map *any* modern city.

There are, however, two poems of around 1956 which show an important transition in Layton's response to Montreal in particular. The first is "Spikes". This strange poem begins in a night without moon or stars, when "suburban windows gleam like tombstones". The poet, meditating on this dark city, "sullen and arbitrary", finds a new message of continuity, in spite of death and difference, from father to son. He puzzles over his child's level glance, wondering if he has won this peace for his child through his own encounter with the city; because

> so often with white face I have wept
> in your great empty pall-black squares.

The poem ends with this memory of emptiness at the heart of the labyrinthine city.

The second poem, "Boardwalk at Verdun" looks outward, away from the city. Here at the riverfront,

> birds
> fly far out
> over the water; and return.

So too the hot citizens on the Verdun ferry, the swimmers, the gulls, the insects, move out over the water. The diver "plunges knifelike to sever his roots". The poem is a meditation on motion and pattern. Beyond the meditation hovers the awareness that Montreal *is* an island, rimmed by possibilities of escape.

FOR THE TIME BEING, Layton remained in Montreal, writing in 1957 and 1958 a bitter series of poems on tension in marriage, hostility within the community, bickering among poets. The poems collected in *A Red Carpet for the Sun* end with a repeated rejection of the city — every city.

> And leaving the city for the country
> and man's ungovernable appetite

for malice and his evil wit,
I am more at home among dead moles.
("Warm Afterdark")

He moves (in "For Mao Tse-Tung") to a "remote and classic lake". He leaves only the façade of himself painted on "Venetian Blinds" ("bought from a merchant corner Craig and Main"). He rails at Westmount for bepraising false poets ("Transmogrification"). Then from this cluster of hostile poems a new Montreal place-name emerges: "Côte des Neiges Cemetery". Layton of course had written effectively about a cemetery in the earlier poem "Cemetery in August", but now the cemetery is named, and the poet fixes on the tomb of "Moise Wong, alien / and quaint among French Catholic names". "And this formal scene is a kind of Poetry", he notes — a poetry, we feel, peculiar to this alienating city.

Sociologists tell us of the death of modern cities: the loss of symbiotic interplay of regions and biotypes, the loss of ecosystem. Layton, poetically, is reflecting the general malaise of all modern cities, and adding his own baffled sense of the unreadiness of Montreal to find a place for him anywhere in its great concentric circles from summit to suburbs. In early poems he had ranged from the heart to the hinterland of Montreal and back, in flickering but passionate response. Now he was finding the sense of flexibility and renewal lessening, both in the city and in himself. Increasingly this city seemed "tomb-oriented" (in Lewis Mumford's phrase). For a poet — even a poet who would include "cemeteries" among the "List of my Delights" (*The Whole Bloody Bird*) — the cross of death as a civic nucleus could no longer vitalize the city, or the poem.

But beauty to be beauty
should be flawed
not dead.

Our last glimpse of the city in this group of poems is caught from the Lookout (in "Mute in the Wind"). Here, beneath the cold white balustrade is stretched a bleak canvas of snow, marked "*perennis*".

THE POET BEGAN his travels: to Rome, to Paris. *The Swinging Flesh*, and *Balls for a One-Armed Juggler*, mark his first travels, physical and mental, away from Montreal. He took with him Canadian touchstones. In "Piazzo San Marco" he hears echoes from Ste. Agathe, and from Belmont Park. When he returned, he sprayed place-names in sardonic profusion: Hampstead,

where the "bored young wives" use their convertibles, and where eloquent bankers offer patronage; Victoria Square, where the stony Queen turns her back on manly reality; Ruby Foo's, where Yom Kippur Jews from Côte St. Luc, Hampstead, and Town of Mount Royal do their "Stocktaking on the Day of Atonement"; Desjardins; Sherbrooke Street, where tourists stare (in "The Architect"); the Oratoire St. Joseph (in "Agnus Dei"). It seems as though the first trips abroad had confirmed Layton in his poetic method, confirmed him in the feeling that the very particularized allusions to Montreal places would serve to create a symbolic map of a recognizable city of modern consciousness. The map is surveyed now in a consistently ironic tone.

Abroad again, and new poems celebrate Spain. El Caudillo, Alicante, Denia: these are the place names of the 1964 poems of *Laughing Rooster*. They are capped, however, by the fantastic return to Montreal in "I saw a faun on Somerled Avenue". Somerled is a long, broad, colourless, duplexed and triplexed street, leading west through Notre Dame de Grace (pronounced uncompromisingly by English-speaking Montrealers "Notter Dam de Grass"). Somerled leads not up to the mountain but to West Hill High School and to the new suburbs "out" in Côte St. Luc. On such a street, all Montreal's people, menacing to a poet, appear: the disc jockey, the insurance agent, the social worker. But a wintry miracle of poetry occurs. A sparkling faun, prophetic, rejuvenates all values. "Even professors of Englit / when they pranced on the same spot sparkled." But the faun is killed, melted, buried, and the poet adds

> I . . . closed the window
> on some broken stars
> and made myself a cup of tea.

So much for creativity and spontaneity in the suburbs. Briefly, in "Winter Light", the faun's mood of shimmering freedom and brilliance is recaptured. Here passion, rather than poetry, fills the suburban street with an affirmation of the possibility of peace and joy:

> Shiva dances on Somerled Avenue
> and in our bedroom
> A million roosters cry up the sun;
> at night when we embrace
> We hear the silence of God.

Further trips to Europe in 1968 brought disillusioned awareness of the "shat-

tered plinths" of human ideals. In this awareness the suburban promise of Somerled faded. The poet turned to the bitter lessons of Israel for his next poems.

He saw still from that far shore "the great city I love and hate". "On this Far Shore" presents a reprise of the mood of "De Bullion Street". Brutality, repulsion, outrage — with these the poet tries once more to shock the conformists out of civic pride. The sounds of De Bullion Street, the stink of its garbage pails, have their persisting equivalents:

> . . . the brutal cries of hunger and love . . .
> and foulness that like an escaping gas
> issues from the defeated and the sick.

The rouged whore, young soldier, the Oriental, the shipjack of De Bullion Street, are replaced by a more bourgeois, and perhaps more perverted cast of characters:

> Boy-lovers, typists, thieves, professors:
> they jostle each other in restaurants.

But the source of the poet's ironic disillusionment is now not merely local, but universal. In "De Bullion Street", the reptilian street invaded and perverted virgin consciousness. In the late poem, memory is invaded ultimately by the sound from the sky ("where poetry is") of an Israeli youth on a propaganda mission, dropping a Torah from a helicopter, "on the small stones". The city of the youthful poet thus remains in the maturing consciousness, but fused now with universal contemporary distress and confusion.

But finally, in 1969, Layton came back to a memory of his city in "Silent Joy". "The great empty pall-black squares" seen at the heart of the city in "Spikes" now are remembered as a cathedral. The snow of early poems is gone; vines grow instead. The old menacing lanes, as of the De Bullion district, are cooled by shadows. In cemeteries there is a hum of persistent though meaningless life.

> Remembering
> St. James Street, Sunday mornings
> — a vast empty cathedral,
> my footsteps echoing in the silent vaults
> rooms on quiet afternoons, alone
> or with one I love deeply —
>
> shadows, cool and long, in hot lanes
>
> insect-humming cemeteries

and light dripping from vines
in globules of rose, of pale-green

I am so utterly filled
with joyful peace and wonder
my heart stops beating . . .

The gentle light in this poem is a fitting conclusion of the long, varied series of poems filled with the lights of Montreal. The series had begun with the vicious red lights of De Bullion Street:

Below this broad street inverted bell-jars
Hanging from wooden crucifixes drop
Tiny moons upon the shaven asphalt.

Then Layton had moved to dim the lights of suburbia, in "Me, the P.M. and the Stars":

The windowpanes yellow with warmth and light
made a perfect target
for a piece of coal embedded
in the white and innocent snow.

He had watched the city in flames through his "Improved Binoculars":

Then the dignitaries rode across the bridges
under an auricle of light which delighted them,
noting for later punishment those that went before.

He had rejoiced in the "melting-butter sun" in "Composition in Late Spring", but had recognized that in "Lachine, Que.,"

the skies
crimson with sunset
disappear
into blast furnaces.

But in retrospect it seems he had caught best the "light show" of Montreal in "Winter Fantasy". In the last prophetic stanza of that fine poem, the hectic neon of the city, and the inflaming Cross, were replaced finally by a calmer glow:

All night, all night, the autos whizzed past me
into heaven, till I met men going there
With golden nails and ravens whose wings
brushed the night up the tall sides of buildings
and behind them in the morninglight the windows shone
like saints pleased with the genius that had painted them.

PASSAGE BY LAND

Rudy Wiebe

I NEVER SAW A MOUNTAIN or a plain until I was twelve, almost thirteen. The world was poplar and birch-covered; muskeg hollows and stony hills; great hay sloughs with the spruce on their far shores shimmering in summer heat, and swamps with wild patterns burned three and four, sometimes five feet into their moss by some fire decades before, filled with water in spring but dry in summer and sometimes smoking faintly still in the morning light where, if you slid from your horse and pushed your hand into the moss, you could feel the strange heat of it lurking.

In such a world, a city of houses with brick chimneys, telephones, was less real than Grimms' folk tales, or Greek myths. I was born in what would become, when my father and older brothers chopped down enough trees for the house, our chicken barn; and did not speak English until I went to school, though I can't remember learning it. Perhaps I never have (as one former professor insists when he reads my novels); certainly it wasn't until years later I discovered that the three miles my sister and I had meandered to school, sniffing and poking at pussy-willows and ant hills, lay somewhere in the territory Big Bear and Wandering Spirit had roamed with their warriors always just ahead of General Strange in May and June, 1885. As a child, however, I was for years the official flag raiser (Union Jack) in our one-room school and during the war I remember wondering what it would be like if one day, just as I turned the corner of the pasture with the cows, a huge car would wheel into our yard, Joseph Stalin emerge and from under his moustache tell my father he could have his farm back in Russia, if he wanted it. Then I would stand still on the cow path trodden into the thin bush soil and listen, listen for our cowbells; hear a dog bark some miles away, and a boy call; and wonder what an immense world of people — I could not quite imagine how many — was now doing chores and if it wasn't for the trees and the

curvature of the earth (as the teacher said) I could easily see Mount Everest somewhere a little south of east. Or west?

My first sight of the prairie itself I do not remember. We were moving south, leaving the rocks and bush of northern Saskatchewan for ever, my parents said, and I was hanging my head out of the rear window of the hired car, vomiting. I had a weak stomach from having been stepped on by a horse, which sounds funny though I cannot remember it ever being so. Consequently, our first day in south Alberta the driver had me wash his car and so I cannot remember my first glimpse of the Rocky Mountains either. It was long after that that anyone explained to me the only mountain we could see plainly from there was in the United States.

But sometimes a fall morning mirage will lift the line of Rockies over the level plain and there they will be, streaked black in crevices under their new snow with wheat stubble for base and the sky over you; you can bend back forever and not see its edge. Both on foot and from the air I have since seen some plains, some mountains on several continents; jungles; the Danube, the Mississippi, even the Amazon. But it was north of Old Man River one summer Sunday when I was driving my father (he had stopped trying to farm and he never learned to drive a car) to his week's work pouring concrete in a new irrigation town, that we got lost in broad daylight on the prairie. Somewhere we had missed something and the tracks we were following at last faded and were gone like grass. My father said in Low German, "Boy, now you turn around."

I got out. The grass crunched dry as crumbs and in every direction the earth so flat another two steps would place me at the horizon, looking into the abyss of the universe. There is too much here, the line of sky and grass rolls in upon you and silences you thin, too impossibly thin to remain in any part recognizably yourself. The space must be broken somehow or it uses you up, and my father muttered in the car, "If you go so far and get lost at least there's room to go back. Now turn around." A few moments thereafter we came upon a rail line stretched in a wrinkle of the land — the prairie in Alberta is not at all flat, it only looks like that at any given point — white crosses beside rails that disappeared straight as far in either direction as could be seen. We had not crossed a railroad before but the tracks could no more be avoided here than anything else and some connecting road to the new town must be eventually somewhere beyond.

In that wandering to find it is rooted, I believe, the feeling I articulated much later; the feeling that to touch this land with words requires an architectural structure; to break into the space of the reader's mind with the space of this western landscape and the people in it you must build a structure of fiction like

an engineer builds a bridge or a skyscraper over and into space. A poem, a lyric, will not do. You must lay great black steel lines of fiction, break up that space with huge design and, like the fiction of the Russian steppes, build giant artifact. No song can do that; it must be giant fiction.

The way a man feels with and lives with that living earth with which he is always labouring to live. Farmer or writer.

THE CRUISING AUK AND THE WORLD BELOW

Lawrence W. Jones

GEORGE JOHNSTON is surely an anomaly among the present generation of Canadian poets. His work defies classification, refuses to fit any of the dominant patterns such as that of metaphysical exploration (as exemplified by Margaret Avison) or that of verbal and intellectual subtlety (as exemplified by Stanley Cooperman), yet in its own curious way it is every bit as effective. It is also, for the most part, a more truly "Canadian" poetry than that of his contemporaries in the images it evokes and the way of life it describes (a fact which must please Mr. Johnston's militantly pro-Canadian colleagues at Carleton University).

Although much of *The Cruising Auk* (1959) and *Home Free* (1966) is about the city of Ottawa and its people, George Johnston consistently finds elements in our country's capital (as does Raymond Souster in Ontario's capital) which are symptomatic of some confusing, often sickening tendencies in urban life. It is this which places his work outside the pale of the merely "regional". Evidence of this is perhaps the very popularity of *The Cruising Auk*, which, for a collection of poetry, has sold rather widely across Canada and is presently going into its seventh printing.

However, for those of us who know George Johnston it is perhaps difficult to square away his incisive poetic comments, his function as a cultural seismograph, with the man himself. For he is both a scholar of some repute (his translation of the Old Norse *Saga of Gísli* was published by the University of Toronto Press in 1963) and a Quaker whose views on pacifism are both well-known and well-

exemplified by his life. The scholarship would seem inimical to the folksy charm exuded by his lyrics (although not to the starched black humour which underlies them); the pacifism, although it appears in many of his poems ("Under the Tree" in *Home Free* is the best example, "War on the Periphery" and "The Hero's Kitchen" in *The Cruising Auk* being others), would seem out of keeping with his unrelenting attack upon certain types of people. But Johnston manages to avoid either unsophistication or blatant indictment by a technique most often used in fiction — that of the microcosm.

The world he portrays, taken *in toto*, is a self-enclosed one. The people who populate it and the actions which take place in it are *reflections* of the real world, as though the poet were making his observations from the surface of a pool, which means that things are often grossly distorted, grotesque, absurd. Like the goldfish in "Life from a Goldfish Bowl", the poet himself "notes the goings-on with goggle face/ Of all the world around about in air", and draws for us a serio-comic picture of its insanities. I would like to look briefly at this micro-cosmic world Johnston details, at the almost Swiftian satire which arises from his portrayal (which has its undercurrent of serious commentary) and finally at the peculiar style the poet employs in order to frame his lyrical pictures.

The first striking thing I notice about Johnston's world is the presence in it of a great number of weird people. Their names are chosen with Dickensian care: Mr. Goom, Mr. Boom, Mrs. McGonigle, Mr. Murple, Miss Decharmes, Mr. Byer, Dr. Gay, Joad — the list seems endless. And most of them seem to be less individuals than personifications of traits which belong to identifiable groups in our society: middle-class businessmen, spinsters in their second childhood, giggling young things, bachelors who seem to be eternally out "on the town". In "Escape", for example, we hear of a belated affair between the conscience-stricken Mr. Smith and the vulture-like widow Mrs. McGonigle:

> Fleeing from Mrs. McGonigle, Mr. Smith
> Took refuge in a public telephone booth
> Whence he rang, as he always did, forthwith,
> The gospel tabernacle, home of Truth.
>
> Mrs. McGonigle meanwhile searched the streets
> Asking herself as she did so why she did.
> His life with her she knew was a nest of sweets
> From which he beat it, now and again, and hid.

The poet, tongue-in-cheek, sums up the situation neatly:

Truly a man is never lonely here
And least of all at the moment of wild escape
In the telephone booth, a moment of bliss and fear
Between this world and the next, between fire and rape.

The last line of this poem is evidence of a technique George Johnston constantly uses in evoking his microcosmic world — the inflation or elevation of the inconsequential and seemingly ordinary. The denizens of his world become mock heroes and heroines. In "Fun" we clearly see a parallel with the story of Snow White; Elaine "sleeps in her maiden bed" while across the street the seven boarders dream about her. In "Music on the Water" a modern-day Cleopatra

comes in her little boat
When the air is warm on the smoky river, afloat,
Making her presence felt in her flickering oars:
A journeying wound between the fragile shores.

Nights of splendour she's been to splendid men,
Swallowed them whole and spit them up again,
After which they've forgotten her perhaps —
As though she might have remembered them, poor chaps.

Rather than an Egyptian lullaby, the song she sings is a "Pentecostal hymn."

According to which Earth's glories are rather dim
Whereas the rewards of the just are very bright;
Low kind of song, but it serves her turn all right.

Some of the poems' titles even reflect this mock-heroic dimension. In "Queens and Duchesses" the subject is the promiscuous life of one Miss Belaney who "doesn't remember who kissed her last/ But he did it good, all right" but around whose head shines a "haze of gold". If Miss Belaney's pleasures make her a queenly sinner, Mr. Boom is "A Saint" because

his sufferings
Put him in the know of things,
Teach him what is what and what
In spiritual things is not.
And when he looks upon us all
His heart contracts into a ball
Which is the perfect form of grief;
Its perfectness provides relief.

In these cases and so many others we are confronted with recognizable character-types whose attitudes toward life are satirized, never directly condemned.

The activities in which these delightful people engage, although utterly human, even mundane, are also blown out of proportion. In "Art and Life" the poet describes the artistic ablutions of Sadie McGonigle who has

> spent the afternoon with suds and water
> And creams and mud; her lines and points are put
> And every inch is tender to the view —
> Elegant work of art and artist too.

but who has dressed up only to be undressed:

> Sweet love, that takes a master piece like this
> And rumples it and tumbles it about,
> Why can he not be happy with a kiss?
> He turns the shimmering object inside out
> And all for life, that's enemy to art.
> Now where's your treasure, little scented heart?

Again, in "Mail-Order Catalogue" the comprehensiveness and unfailing regularity of the contents cause the poet to remark that

> In spring and fall, when serious young men
> Comfort themselves that all that lives must die,
> Tax and the teeming catalogue again
> Come round, and give mortality the lie.

The same kind of satire can be seen in "Mrs. McGonigle on Decorum," "Home Again" and "Dust," and it brings to mind the sardonic humor with which James Thurber always viewed domestic life.

SIGNIFICANTLY, much of the activity so satirized throughout Johnston's poetry is city-related. For, as I mentioned earlier, the city is really the cosmic entity which the poetry reflects. Occasionally this is obvious, as in "The Alderman's Day in the City" and "Love of the City". In the former the fairy-tale pattern of the poem almost, but not quite, covers up the fact that this lazy city official is lining his pockets at the city's expense:

> Up at his desk the alderman
> Wags with his tar-warm feet;

He puts his boots in the city
Whose own back yard is sweet.

In the latter the poet makes a more general comment about the artificiality and the suffocating nature of urban life. In this city that has "moved us in",

The yellow sky comes down and fills the room;
Dirt on the floor is kind, the walls are kind,
Everyone's kind to us wherever we go.

And the poet asks the rhetorical question:

. . . truly when death comes where will he find
A better room than here, better arrangements,
More courtesy, more eager friendliness
Than in this excellent street-scattered city,
This home, this network, this great roof of pity?

Clearly, there is a serious side to all of this Thurber-like lighthearted satire. There is always a meaningful comment made by effective satire or parody, and it seems to me that George Johnston is very concerned about the passivity of people in the urban *mileu*, about the non-commital nature of people's lives in the city. There is a general feeling of helplessness conveyed in Johnston's descriptions of his McGonigles and Murples, a feeling which comes across openly only infrequently, as it does in "Flight," where the poet watches a crow taking off from one barren tree in search of another:

Caw! he cries, as though he knew
Something worth his while to do
In an empty tree elsewhere;
Flap! he takes his blackness there.

Me too! I would like to fly
Somewhere else beneath the sky,
Happy though my choice may be
Empty tree for empty tree.

Much the same feeling is articulated in the final stanza of "In It", where the poet declares:

The world is a pond and I'm in it,
In it up to my neck;
Important people are in it too,
It's deeper than this, if we only knew;

Under we go, any minute —
A swirl, some bubbles, a fleck. . . .

The submission to the "destructive element" which is implied here may come in the form of routine drudgery which holds us captive in the city's grasp. This is the problem with "The Queen of Lop" who

works all day at a big machine that lops and lops and lops;
At five o'clock she does her face and the big machine it stops;
Home again on a public bus she goes to her little flat,
Cooks a chop and forgets the lop and the wash-up and all that.

Even in her dreams, as the poet tells us later in the poem, when she tries to find some vicarious excitement in "a boat on the ocean dark and queer" she finds that "the big machine is aboard the boat" — there is no escape. Not only is there this routine of the work-a-day world, but there is the smug complacency of the settled routine of marriage, as we see in "Domestic":

A man should build himself a house and put himself inside
And fill it full of furniture, and get himself a bride
To fill it full of cooking smells and pickle smells and wit
And all in pleasure breed it full and make a nest of it.

The repetition of "full" here only serves to emphasize the emptiness of the way of life being described. Likewise, the mock-heroic nature of Johnston's people serves to point up the unheroic, unchallenging nature of their lives, which is perhaps the whole point of the satire.

In any case, if this reading of much of *The Cruising Auk* is correct, we might ask whether the poet suggests any alternative to the frothy existence he portrays. While it is not the poet's function to offer solutions to society's problems (indeed, poets are notoriously bad at that), I think George Johnston suggests at least one possibility: that we need to consciously seek our *own* freedom from slavish routine, perhaps by the use of our imagination. In "This Way Down" the poet admits that "my roof is wide to Heaven" and asks the vital question: "Why am I not then airborne?" This is where the cruising auk of the title poem comes in. The bird is simply a symbol of the imagination which has freed itself; his virtue is that he *is* airborne, and this is why we must "rejoice in him, cruising there". We must strive to extricate ourselves from the life which the bird sees as he looks down upon us:

Our unheroic mornings, afternoons
Disconsolate in the echo-laden air —

To change this life, the poet seems to be saying (as does Raymond Souster in "Good Fortune" in *The Colour of the Times*) we must take charge of our own lives rather than waiting passively for something to happen. This much is clear, I think, in the final poem in *The Cruising Auk*, "O Earth, Turn!" which I quote here in its entirety:

The little blessed Earth that turns
Does so on its own concerns
As though it weren't my home at all;
It turns me winter, summer, fall
Without a thought of me.

I love the slightly flattened sphere,
Its restless, wrinkled crust's my here,
Its slightly wobbling spin's my now
But not my why and not my how:
My why and how are me.

Ways in which we may exercise our whys and hows are suggested in some of the more serious lyrics in *Home Free* (a book which has unaccountably not lived up to the promise or popularity of its predecessor). In the stylistically-superb "Under the Tree," for example, we are exhorted to recognize our complicity with the judge and the rest of society when a man is condemned to hang. "We hardly know each other," says the poet, "But here we meet, under the hanging tree." In subsequent sections of the poem various individuals and groups are described — the judge himself, religious people, the condemned man's relatives and friends — and we can see how each of them avoids having to *think* about capital punishment. The religious folk justify the hanging by soliciting the will of God, by placing their emphasis upon the "mean and casual" murder itself and not upon what led up to it; the man's aunt and his erstwhile cronies drown any serious considerations in small talk, in "notions soaked in beer." Finally, the poet says, we must consider the paradox that although the Earth is the "pit whence we were dug" it is also by necessity "the garden in which we grope/ For love."

In the book's title poem, "Home Free", Edward is given a chance to break the bonds of a deadening life, but refuses to take the chance:

> Edward sweats for a fortnight, the salt is in his shoes.
> Who knows about angels until he hears the news?
> Who knows about gardens until he smells the pit?
> Edward is holding a pass, and he's afraid of it.

What Edward cannot understand is that the world is a garden only if you make it so in spite of the ugliness; in "Love in High Places" he prays that

> in Canada there must be
> Somewhere
> Surely a pleasant, sheltered garden,
> Green and fair,
> Maybe even way down in the city
> In its own air,
> Where there would not be births or dreadful pain,
> And fun
> Would have no exquisite hook inside it;

Edward does not feel himself part of what the poet calls elsewhere (in "The Creature's Claim") the "creatureliness of Earth", and so in the final poem in *Home Free* we find him "asleep where brown stalks fuss and wave/ And a squirrel has planted oaks beside his grave."

Although the poetry of *Home Free* is not generally as effective as that of *The Cruising Auk* — Johnston seems much more at home when dealing with his little microcosmic world of Murples — all of the poetry is consistent in style. Unlike other Canadian poets, Johnston eschews experimentation with rhyme and phraseology. But the very presence of rhyme and regular metre gives emphasis to the routine he often describes. Occasionally he resorts to couplets, as in "A Little Light" in *The Cruising Auk*; but most common is the rhyme scheme a-b-a-b and its variations, which is apt for what Johnston has to convey. Where the poet is most inventive (and here his vast knowledge of the history of the language is useful) is in the matter of diction. He is fond of creating words to match sounds — as seen in the "kechunk" of anchored boats in "Poor Edward" or the "kaplink" of falling hairpins in "Dust," and of simply creating words to fill his lyrical needs: "gogglesful" in "Elaine in a Bikini" and "emplaned" in "Dust". Often, slang is used to give a clearer idea of the level of life being described:

"neither I suppose I ain't" ("A Saint"), "no dice" ("Domestic") and "shot down" ("On the Porch") are examples.

I began by saying that George Johnston is an anomaly among Canadian poets. But as I have tried to point out, his is a unique kind of poetry with its own values, with its own valid statement to make. Taken together, the poems of *The Cruising Auk* remind us of the urban dilemma we are faced with and with which we must cope. The symbolic people and events in George Johnston's little world shed light on their counterparts in our real world. And we are forced to ask ourselves, as we watch the auk cruising overhead: "Why am *I* not then airborne?"

THE POETRY OF GEORGE JONAS

A Critical Map

Andreas Schroeder

There is no conflict that love or bullets
Could not resolve in time.

George Jonas ("Peace")

INVARIABLY, the greatest literature is one of attack; one has only to begin naming authors from the top of the alphabet (Benn, Brecht, Beckett, Broch, Baudelaire, Breton, Camus, Cortazar, Céline, Dostoyevsky, Dürrenmatt, etc., etc.) to realize that harmony and equality in literature are at best stylistic elements, at worst the worm of paralysis gnawing at the base of irreconcilable issues. The technique of assault is the result of, or partner to, the tremendous amount of energy released in a great work of art, either as a result of the artist's desperation over his suspension between the two extremes or poles of a given argument, or his fury at realizing the equal validity of any two contradictory statements. In short, everything *is* and *is not*; a premise that has driven many an artist to metaphysical (and often physical) suicide.

A Canadian poet whose literature stands as a distinctive example of such energy is Hungarian-born George Jonas, presently a drama producer and script editor for CBC Radio in Toronto, author of *The Absolute Smile* and *The Happy Hungry Man.*

What strikes one first about the poetry of George Jonas is its quiet but almost malignant tyranny, directed simultaneously at himself, his reader and those who populate the spaces around him. As if to clear the stage before the battle, the first poem of *The Absolute Smile*, "For the Record", sets the record straight:

I think that I live in a street
Where the evenings are decidedly darker,
A citizen of what is said to be a country,
In the year nineteen-sixty-four.

All the snow melts around April,
In August there is nothing to wait for,
The Fall is established in November,
January is mostly Winter.

A woman claims to be my wife
On the strength of which she lives in my house.
But I am also dangerous to some animals
And have at times been observed to eat them.

I have little to say about the structure of society,
There may be certain letters to write occasionally,
Certain amounts to pay when they become due,
But it is against the law for some people to hurt me.

In view of this I continue to lead
What I am told is an existence
Weeks ending in Sundays
Unasked questions scrupulously unanswered.

The bleakness, an important part of this poem as well as many others in Jonas' books, here tends to function both as a twilight backdrop against which the "facts" of the poem are paraded, as well as a depressant to reduce the impact of several scarcely-veiled threats which will become open declarations of war later in Jonas' verse:

But I am also dangerous to some animals . . .
But it is against the law for some people to hurt me. . . .

The bleakness will remain a constant, however, changing in shade (though not in identity) only occasionally when Jonas offsets his viciousness with an insolent laughter or sarcastic spoof.

By way of further introduction Jonas (in the second poem of *The Absolute Smile*, entitled "Introduction") sketches a quick rough outline of his own person, just enough to give the reader an indication of his "qualifications" and his point of view:

. . . Easy to hurt by silence and by sound
I, as most men, increasing and alone

Grow horrible, and search in my wound,
From live trees cut a crutch on which to lean.

Springs are incidental to what I have become
And Winters affect me not at all:
I keep alive by breathing and in some
Ways I resemble myself even more.

I murder in the inside darkness, I
Have learned to slice an apple and not touch it;
The universe recedes in disarray
I sit in metal towers and I watch it.

But I'm making a note of things I do not like
And I do not like anything. Today
The notes are multiplying in my scroll of black
You are in it, so is she, so am I.

(TAS: p. 3)

In this poem, along with a reinforcement of the threat, we find the first sign of its opposite, the vulnerable side of the man:

Easy to hurt by silence and by sound . . .

This side will be exposed repeatedly throughout Jonas' verse, though as a rule it is found lying behind heavy barricades or guarded by a well-aimed covering fire of abuse or laughter. Its discovery, however, is an easy task, for Jonas has no intention of hiding his feelings; he is simply unwilling to sell those he has on the open market in pre-packaged clichés which wouldn't fit them in any case. There is a ruthless "honesty" about his poetry that precludes all sympathy, pity or Freud. Jonas makes no excuses and seeks no justification for his actions. I will have more to observe about this point later on.

I have said that Jonas' poetry is a poetry of attack; as such it makes frequent use of the element of surprise. Often a poem leads off in low-key fashion, progressing from the playful to the insolent to the cynical to the blatantly nefarious. One reads along the lines of what appears to be a relatively peaceful poem, actually entitled "Peace", and suddenly finds one has strayed unwittingly into a dense patch of vicious observations:

I wish to make a positive statement
Of happy hunters returning from the woods.
Wardens of dwindling flocks, serious concern
Dwells in their moist and beautiful eyes.

There is no conflict that love or bullets
Could not resolve in time.
Gardens are carefully planned. Long rows of roses sit
In all directions around any house.

There is always a period of peace
Between two blows, when a smiling landscape
Surrounds with blue light the resting warrior.
The raised arm hardly shows among the ferns.

At such times rabbits jump out of their trenches
And stand listening at the entrance of the field.
Worms pop out of the ground in open amazement,
Sharp-beaked birds freeze unfalling in their dive.

The moment is guarded by dustbins along the streets
Of low and crippled suburbs where later
Children come out of hiding and women pause for breath.
Hate, suspended, sways gently back and forth.

Rats are pacing the floor, thinking,
A loaf of bread cuts itself into warm slices,
A glass of milk travels to India,
Warships lean on their guns and close their eyes.

The beauty of such moments is hardly useful
Except for the purpose of missing a heartbeat,
As old men sit at tables, ready to talk.
For there is nothing to talk about.

(TAS: p. 5)

The "period of peace between two blows" might well describe the time between Jonas' first and second book publications; the second blow, entitled *The Happy Hungry Man*, is a progression of offhandedly laconic, often faintly desperate thoughts and "irrelevant" stage directions punctuated by sudden, coolly sarcastic, indifferently snide and ruthless comments:

Outraged
executives caught in air raids
Whimper in the most gratifying way

Conquering crews in capsized tanks
Burn for some time and grow very peaceful

Nor is it necessary to look for the spectacular
Small tumours mollify malignant old women . . .

(HHM: p. 37)

We will have many more opportunities to see this side of Jonas' thoughts; what may now be important is to determine just what sparks this disillusion, this isolation:

Moses and I
Must have climbed different mountains
Or must have been advised by a different god
For look at the writings on the rocks in my hand:

It seems I may not respect my parents
Or my neighbour's right to the things he believes he owns,
Or the lives of those I consider to be my enemies.

Before you begin to envy me
Remember only this:
My god's bidding is as remote from my nature
As your god's is from yours
And I find his commandments
As difficult to keep.

(HHM: p. 34)

The poet is forced by the dictates of his own nature to live in the very teeth of all accepted (normal, usual) moralities, all understood corollaries of conduct and belief:

Being alive you will be disappointed
By disappointing your nature
Or being disappointed by it;
Whether you're finally awarded or avoided
Whether you're looking for caresses or for kicks.

Being a woman you'll often be confronted
By confronting your sex
Or being confronted by it;
Whether you're called, challenged or comforted
Whether you're looking for caresses or for kicks.

But being alone, you'll nevertheless be tempted
By tempting your own self
Or being tempted by it;
Whether your emotions are accomplished or attempted
Whether you regard yourself as owned or rented
Whether you're looking for caresses or for kicks.

Yeah, well
who will know if we ever meant it
Whether we played the game or threw a fix
Whether my lines were loving or pointed
Whether we were looking for caresses or for kicks . . . [1]

With Jonas it is virtually impossible to tell whether he "played the game or threw in a fix." He is too self-conscious an artist to be hog-tied by simple, quick-drying solutions, and too conscious of being conscious to trust himself even when he thinks he is being honest. He realizes that a man defines himself as much by his imagination as he does by his instinctual impulses:

Coming from the tribe
In which angels abide
I always told the truth
When I thought I lied . . .

(TAS: p. 61)

This thoroughgoing suspicion of himself is one which every conscious man eventually faces as a major issue, and in Jones' work this distrust is paramount, being the source of both his laughter and his refusal to take himself overly seriously. Hence the attitude, tone and point of view in his work. But what snaps such a comment back into balance is the ruthlessness of which such a man becomes capable, once freed of this cumbersome sense of self-importance. Suddenly anyone, anything can (must) take on whatever degree of importance he chooses to attribute to it; everything becomes the helpless plaything of the man who is no longer a slave to faith or belief (conviction). Such a man chooses (or is forced, by his very suspicions, to choose) his religions and morals with all the carelessness and passing interest of a bored tyrant, who may, at any given time, decree that such and such a thing or idea be henceforth sacred, killing those who refuse to bow or attempt to disagree.

Such an insolence, inevitably, breeds both raw violence and jagged despair, but since the public arena of Art demands formality, these must be chiseled and shaped into a more manageable construction. An indication of this is found in *The Happy Hungry Man:*

I know it is easy to exaggerate
The importance of any event in childhood
I mentioned the whole thing in ( )
And instead of dwelling on it I will
Continue with some light

Subversive verse
Trying to make despair respectable . . .

(HHM: p. 50)

"Trying to make despair respectable" is thus part of the objective of Jonas' verse, but the word "respectable" in this context does not imply making it acceptable to the world at large. It means attacking this despair even while acknowledging its power and presence, even while admitting one's own vulnerability to it. It means all-out war, not only with the reasons for despair, but with the reader who has the audacity to watch the fight. But this act of war is not to be confused with an act of hope. Jonas has no hope, in fact, refuses to accept such a crutch even if it were logically possible. It is the hopeless condition of a Sisyphus that makes his condition "respectable", that demands of us that we "imaginer Sisyphus Heureux".

Therefore, Jonas has no use for peace. The concept is treated in his poetry at various times as either impossible or to no point:

Peace herself will come
Peace herself will come
Peace herself will come tonight

She will take off her clothes
She will take off her clothes
Naked she will lie with me in bed

And nothing I do will change me
And nothing I do will change her
And by morning the night will be over

("An Intercourse With Peace," TAS: p.34)

The same thing goes for love. Damned by his nature to live a life which upends all the commonly accepted forms of feelings, he finds himself incapable of more than the mechanics of them:

Through some chance mutation
Poor G.J. has no organ to love with
The way he sees with his eyes
Tastes with his tongue
Thinks with his mind
Screws with his penis
Scratches and bites with his nails and teeth

But having the urge to love

He tries loving with his eyes
His teeth and nails
His mind tongue penis
And it still surprises him
That he's not quite satisfied . . .

(HHM: p. 28)

The result is that both the poet's actions and his person appear to have become inhuman. He has come to the point where even God cannot help him, for his minimum requirements for a satisfactory life have become so large that even God cannot afford to give them any longer:

Of course, there will be a few even (God) cannot help.
A few who are unable to find a place in this soap opera of a world
Misfits, who are not at home, no matter what,
In this fat, happy, cause-and-effect, give-and-take universe
A few vicious saints who want all or nothing.

(TAS: p. 7)

This is the essence of an uncompromising view which gives Jonas' poetry its "monstrous" effect, its insolent yet unflinching demands which, finally, are those of a man who plays his stakes dizzyingly high, plays the game to win, hands down. Total destruction, the other alternative, has nothing to do with losing. A man who has the nerve to risk so much so ruthlessly no longer fits into the category which includes losers. And so Jonas draws his conclusions:

I try but I cannot confirm or deny it
I can do nothing to prove or justify it
I could apologize but after all
I am not even certain that it is my fault.

I do not know what to make of inhumanity
Beyond sharing and understanding it,
Inflicting it and having it inflicted upon me
Every day usually before noon.

And I have slowly come to the conclusion
That I am not a very personal thing,
My food has also known the pleasure of eating,
And some say my own soul could go on living without me.

(TAS: p. 56)

His realization is reflected in his description of the people around him. A woman becomes little more than an enumeration of parts, functions:

> On occasion, a pair of thick ankles
> And tidy breasts sit with me in the car
> And the mind runs sharply through its ducts
> And tall trees whistle by . . .
>
> (TAS: p. 24)

or, in "Eight Lines for a Script Girl":

> I almost know you now. You are your name,
> The substance of your skin, the movement of your eyes,
> The line of your lips, the texture of your hair,
> Your phone number, the colour of your voice.
>
> You are your breast's shape, the full length of your limbs,
> You are your smile, your nailpolish, your dress.
> Later I'll know you more. Still later
> I'll know you even less.
>
> (TAS: p. 30)

A striking resemblance between Jonas' condition and the one described by Camus in his "The Myth of Sisyphus" may be relevant here. In the section "Absurdity and Suicide" Camus discovers:

> Men too, secrete the inhuman. At certain moments of their lucidity, the mechanical aspect of their gestures, their meaningless pantomime makes silly everything that surrounds them.

The leap from this position to the Absurd in Jonas' books is extremely short. Several sections of "The Happy Hungry Man", written in a child-like lilting rhythm, seem to spin off into an absurd joke; the flippant, almost cursory quality of many of Jonas' poems carry this frame of mind to a number of quasi-hilarious, quasi-deadly-serious conclusions, all of them characteristic of the "bored tyrant":

> The happy hungry man believes in food
> The happy homeless man believes in a home
> The happy unloved man believes in love
> I wouldn't mind believing in something myself.
>
> (HHM: p. 9)

or:

At present I still have
A choice of deaths,
I could, for example, die of a difficult disease
For medical science and I could
Die for a stranger who has never learned to swim.
I could also die for the Queen.
These are quite honourable deaths
But they don't appeal to me.
I think I'll die for Barbara.

(TAS: p. 25)

This concerted suppression of all undue sentimentality accounts directly or indirectly for much of the power of Jonas' work. As such it appears to be very much a part of Jonas' nature, and it is certainly part of the reason why he never actually *complains* in any of his poems. Jeers, yes, or provokes, but never complains. In a recent letter to J. Michael Yates (Aug. 13/69) he refers half-jokingly to an entertaining little "level system" which he uses to describe various types of people and their attitudes about living; his own attitude becomes clearer here:

> ... It is not a value system; the four levels of which it consists do not form an ascending scale, but could be described, using Shakespeare's works as an example, as follows. Level one is people who like Shakespeare as a matter of course, because his greatness is taken for granted the same way as winter's snow or summer sunshine; level two is the people who *dislike* Shakespeare for the same reason: that is, because they quarrel with all the obvious facts in life and challenge in the most serious and humourless manner everything that seems to be part of the human condition. Level three is the people who find Shakespeare delightfully funny, because he is really a scream, just too much, camp if you will, but who are nevertheless enjoying him fully in this fashion. Finally, level four are the people who really know that Shakespeare is indeed a great writer having come to this conclusion after independent study and experience.

Jonas goes on to say that he is himself a "level three" person, which is certainly in keeping with the mood of his poems, give or take a few grimaces. The comic element in his verse helps save it from coming to idealistic conclusions he cannot seriously accept in any case. There are, in fact, no solutions anywhere — only re-locations of the constantly inevitable nonsense:

It makes no sense, yes.
There's no good reason for it, no.
So don't believe me, don't.
Say it's a passing mood.

Go on, ship wheat to Asia,
Clear slums,
Redistribute wealth,
Rehabilitate prisoners,
Liberate the oppressed,
Educate the ignorant,
Construct a condition of justice.

But Asia won't be full until Europe goes hungry,
Slums will relocate themselves,
Wealth will find its own level: a slope
Which it seeks with the physical force of water
And just as relentlessly
(But don't believe me)
Don't believe when I say
The prisoners will become jailkeepers

And the jailkeepers prisoners,
Don't believe me when I say
Your teachers will spread ignorance
And your scientists destruction.

"What would you have us do then?"

I would have you do exactly what you're doing:
Clear slums,
Educate the ignorant.
Liberate the oppressed.

Oh, it makes no sense, I admit,
There's no good reason for it, no.

(HHM: p. 51)

Predictably, critics have complained about the no-exit signs in Jonas' poetry. They have found it too difficult to stomach a poet who not only recognizes that his demands on the world around him are unjust, but refuses to apologize or accept the customary guilt for an anti-social stance:

I try but I cannot confirm or deny it
I can do nothing to prove or justify it
I could apologize but after all
I am not even certain that it is my fault.

(TAS: p. 56)

The closest that Jonas ever comes to an apology is in a poem ironically entitled, "Apology":

I cannot be shown
I cannot be shared
No one can learn me.

I am not what I say
I am not what I do
I am not my friends.

I die too fast
I am born too often
No one can talk to me twice

I am not at home in my skin
I do not sit like a spider
At the centre of my nerves

Mirrors do not reflect me
Sound waves do not bounce off me
I am not revealed in my dreams.

No explanations,
No affiliations
Nothing.

Without inlets, from a distance,
I can only be punished
I can only be forgiven.

(TAS: p. 59)

In another letter to J. Michael Yates, Jonas comments on his position in this regard. He refers here to the condescension of critics who attempt to treat him as a moral cripple:

> ... The condescending part I am used to; it is the normal reaction of a "feeling" person toward an "unfeeling" one. If you make the mistake of seeing the world objectively and in some kind of perspective (and yourself too since you are part of the world) you will be accused of — or at best forgiven for — your "attitudes" since most people, being healthily subjective, cannot conceive of a cast of mind which (to use a simple example) can regard its own desires as unjust but still not feel guilty. Most people either believe that what they want is right, or they have a conflict. They can't imagine a person not equating his own desires with universal justice, unless he feels remorseful and beats his chest. The absence of this beautiful defense mechanism that permits most people to think that they rightfully own what

> they would like to have is interpreted, depending on the temperament of the critic, either as pure evil, or nihilism, or as an attitude, something in the nature of a noble fantasy . . .

and comments on the "two contradictory" statements:

> . . . If I were to tell someone that I prefer brief relationships to marriage because women are different but wives are the same, they would accuse me of facile cynicism and of treating women as objects. The fact that I could tell them the same thing about men being all different but husbands being all the same wouldn't pacify them; and since it is not my problem anyway I won't tell them. Neither will I tell them that the very opposite of what I said (to stick with the same example) is also true; you can never learn anything about marriage in general, only about marriage with Miss X, Miss Z, or Miss Y. If I told them both, they'd ask me how I reconciled the two statements, to which I would have to say that I haven't the slightest intention of reconciling two contradictory statements both of which are true. They can be true without reconciliation, which is one of the things that makes my life very sad without making me worry about my sadness in the least. I might cut my throat one day but I can't pretend that it's important . . .

If there is any doubt about the mood, the tone and the attitude of Jonas' work, I think this terse comment dispels it. It is both an explanation and a caution not to fall into the critical trap of attempting to neutralize Jonas' poetry by "looking heavenward and pronouncing that the world will be better for this criticism." Jonas makes no pretense of rebuilding the universe he has destroyed, nor does he show any desire to see anyone else do it for him. In a reaffirmation which is almost manifesto-like, Jonas sums it up in a poem entitled simply "Twenty-Eight Explanatory Lines":

> Whereas I do not deny
> Anything I may have said before
> Let me add: ultimately
> I have less and less love
> And I'm saving it more and more.
> Let me also say that no one ever came near me
> Even of the few who tried
> And if I had a fault, well, it was mine
> And I was wrong by right.
> Not proudly, not asking to be excused
> And not even to set the record straight
> I say this merely to say it.
> For soon I will believe in myself
> And think that the food I eat is mine,

Mine are the women I enter
And the list of my assets will grow longer
As I grow shorter on time.
No complaints, but I want to live
And there is only so much life
And I cannot share it with anyone
Having an obligation to myself
To play it safe.
Soon, I know, my eyes will deepen
My nostrils will open wide
I will be happy, happy — and even now
Nothing could happen to you
That I would not take in my stride.

Notes

[1] This poem, contained in the original manuscript of *The Happy Hungry Man,* does not appear in the published version.

[2] All references to THE ABSOLUTE SMILE are referred to in this essay as (TAS: p.); references to THE HAPPY HUNGRY MAN are listed as (HHM: p.).

[3] Correspondence listed is from the files of J. M. Yates.

CAROL COATES CASSIDY AND THE FORM DISPUTE

William H. New

NO-ONE WHO NOW READS the early issues of the *Canadian Poetry Magazine* can be insensible to the apparent 1930's proliferation of redoubtable poems by ladies with three names. Writers like Anna Letitia Wales, Maisie Nelson Devitt, and Jessie Playfair Bickford sprinkled the journal's pages with sincerity, piety, and (when World War II demanded it) a rather conventional-sounding patriotism. It is work like theirs that had inspired the anonymous Scott-like "God Bless the C.A.A.!" in *The Canadian Mercury* in 1929:

> Rosie wrote some little rhymes
> For the *Birdseye Centre Times*:
> Gushing friends did then explain:
> "This will surely bring you fame!
> You must join the C.A.A."

By September 1945 their pseudo-Romanticism gave the *CPM* a reputation for having a "Keats-Shelley complex", a charge which the new editor, Watson Kirkconnell, attempts at once to refute. O. W. Macdonald, who had started the attack (in the *Canadian Author and Bookman*), wanted another Kipling or Service after all, and by implication Kirkconnell dismisses *their* work as "doggerel". The *CPM*, he adds, has printed some *experimental* verse, and (quoting Croce) insists that "Art is form and nothing but form."

Neither the charge nor the defence was particularly novel. In the December 1928 issue of *Canadian Mercury*, for example, Leo Kennedy had quoted S. I. Hayakawa's barbed classification of Canadian poetry as "Victorian, Neo-

Victorian, Quasi-Victorian, and Pseudo-Victorian" and himself called for "a Canadian Whitman, . . . a man of his genius and spiritual breadth" to "correctly interpret the whole Canadian consciousness." Just as Kirkconnell's statement prickles with thorny problems involving the difference between the form of art and the form of doggerel, so Kennedy's raises some question as to how to define "correct". But in talking of "spirit" and the "whole consciousness" of a people, he allows art to be made up of more than simple external structure. Which could take us back to sincerity and patriotism again, although — if injected with the genius of a Whitman — probably of an unconventional kind.

A. J. M. Smith's rallying cry in the unused preface he wrote for *New Provinces* in 1936 to some extent bridges the gap between Kennedy and Kirkconnell. Speaking for Pratt, Scott, Smith, and Klein as well as for Kennedy and himself, he characterizes their purpose as one of "attempting to get rid of the facile word, the stereotyped phrase and the mechanical rhythm", and of "seeking, as the poet today must, to combine colloquialism with rhetoric." Spirit and structure are to come closer, in other words, to being united and indivisible. In the particular form of a given poem will be embodied the sensibility it attempts to convey, and thus, antedating McLuhanism, the rhetorical medium becomes at least part of its colloquial message. But if the method is mechanical and the home truth trite, or if the rhetoric is shallow and it still characterizes both technique and idea, then no correspondence between medium and message will salvage a poem from the junkpile. Archness and artificiality do sometimes afflict poems by Smith and Scott, but it is the other disease of being possessed by stereotypes that makes the work of Anna Wales, Vesta Pickel, and Jessie Bickford so much less artistically adept.

That both camps should find in the *CPM* an outlet for their work is paradoxical itself; that E. J. Pratt should as editor allow it even more so, for as his own writing testifies, he respected his craft. In the second issue of the journal (April 1936), he enunciates his editorial policy: for "tolerant consideration of genuine poetic effort and against identity with any form of aesthetic whether old or new." He was against only "fatuous sentiment", in fact, and the July 1936 issue elaborates:

> Rhyme and metre do not make a poem; they produce nothing but doggerel. The real flesh and blood of poetry lies in turns of phrases, vivid images, new and unusual thoughts and manners of expressing them. A good poem is good because it is an unusual, imaginative, arresting way of writing English. We do not speak in poetry, except at rare moments; and if a poet writes so simply as to give the effect of spoken language, that effect is all the more startling and novel.

In the 1960's such an assertion sounds slightly weary, and perhaps even in 1936 the schoolmasterish tone reflects Pratt's tiredness with the excess of two hundred manuscripts he read every week. What it also does, however, is indicate one of the reasons for the apparent gentleness with which Pratt exercised his acceptance policy; what interested him about a work was not its intellectual toughness or its stanzaic structure but its lines, its imagery, and its individual phrases. A single striking epithet was taken as the promise of a poetic talent, and thus redefined, "form" — whether intentional or accidental, germane to the poet's ideas or unrelated to them — proved a touchstone to merit once again.

To see Carol Coates Cassidy's name in print is at once to suspect her of the same poetic sins as all the other tripartite ladies, and to read Pratt's May 1940 review of her Ryerson chapbook *Fancy Free* (1939) — in which he finds her "free of cliché" — is to suspect him of his accustomed generosity. But such a judgment here would be a distortion. Though never a polished writer, Carol Cassidy did possess a talent for poetry, and Pratt was quite justified when he accepted her work for its occasionally arresting line and its frequent ease with imagery.

Her career, however, was short-lived, beginning with undergraduate verse she distributed among friends in Vancouver about 1930 and lasting into the 1940's. Since then she has effectively disappeared (into English progressive-educational circles), and is not even mentioned in the recent *Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature*. The omission is a genuine oversight, for particularly during the first decade in which she published, her work represented a definite experimental departure in verse form in Canadian poetry. From 1925 on, F. R. Scott and A. J. M. Smith had attempted to free Canada of poetic lushness; Raymond Knister and (later) Dorothy Livesay had discovered ways of uniting the lyric voice with a social conscience. But in Carol Cassidy's work there operates an exotic imagism that came in part, no doubt, from the American movements of the 1910's and 1920's which intellectually influenced Smith and W. W. E. Ross as well. It emerged also from her emotional sensitivity to the exactness, spareness, and diminutiveness of symbol that characterized the art of her native Japan. "Form in poetry . . . is moulded by content — also by the environment of the poet," she states in her foreword to *Fancy Free*, and the culture that prompted her best poems was Oriental.

Born Alice Caroline Coates, in Tokyo, the daughter of an authority on Japa-

nese Buddhism, she returned there in 1930, with her photographer husband Eugene Haanel Cassidy, and stayed in the country till 1937. *Fancy Free* illustrates the influence of Eastern "poetry, painting, flower arrangement", and again the Foreword expresses the author's intention and expectation:

> Eastern art excels in suggesting what it does not say. Therefore a ruthless selection of significant detail is of paramount importance. A poem may consist of less than a dozen expressions, yet the imagination and the technique which inspired their choice and execution are calculated to create an illusion of the whole through an illumination of the part — an illusion extending far beyond the confines of the actual presentation.
>
> The function of the reader, therefore, is an active one — to become a creator, to compose, so to speak, the sestet to the sonnet the artist has started for him. This is done by reflecting with more than usual care upon the tonal and rhythmic qualities of every word, savoring to the full each literal and emotional connotation.

Her aim is overt in "Gift", where she expresses the desire to bring to the reader "only a poem, / exempt from the bonds of time and space, / infinite and everlasting", and the effect is uninspiringly flat. The platitudinous abstraction encourages only a weary reaction, and the timeless, spaceless illusion for which she strives eludes both her and her readers.

Curiously, it is those poems more specifically founded in the immediate that transcend space and time. Influenced by the haiku, they work with precisely observed details which, perceived as images, communicate more than their literal meaning. The imagery of "Japanese April", for example, is quite conventional:

> April Earth,
> a spring bride,
> with cherry petal confetti
> to congratulate.

Yet tightly controlled, as here, it reaches out beyond the stereotype to express a sense of delicately recurring beauty. The control lies in the form. Letting the image stand unexplained in one part of the poet's method; maintaining tone through internal vowel harmonies — here, in the *a's*, *e's*, and *i's*, circling at the end to the same sound with which the poem begins and so aurally reinforcing the idea of recurrence — is another. "Korean Dancer", though longer, uses a similar assonant technique. Beginning "A white miracle of motionless satin", it closes this way:

dips and streams,
flirts, exults, despairs,
till suddenly fluttering, abandoned falls
a symbol of coquetry completed.

An ominous gong crashes the clapping
across a stage searching for light.

The psychological and political implications of the final two lines give the poem a depth and humanity that phrases like "white miracle" do not at first lead us to expect. The personification of the scarf in the catalogue of verbs also might seem a little stale — yet it is that kind of animation which allows the last two lines to work symbolically as well as pictorially. It is a human situation, not an inert one, that the poem is about.

Political situations motivated the writing of quite a number of Carol Cassidy's poems, but abstractions generally take over from images in them, to their detriment. Excerpts from "Four Poems: Bushido, 1937" will illustrate. The second part of the sequence, entitled "Troop Train", opens with an intentional tonal flatness that admirably conveys the poet's horror at the blind power of a war machine:

On the day of the tiger,
twenty-six cars packed with khaki bodies
ride out into the rain-soaked night
to be shot.

The bodies cheer,
wave paper flags and sing —
sing on their way to be shot.

The repetition later gets too easy, however, and Part III adds, cloyingly, "But I must still the protest in my throat". Part IV, echoing the initial rhythms of Masefield's "Cargoes", returns briefly and effectively to the theme of the war industry:

Fifty-four bluejackets
in neat white boxes,
shipped home from Shanghai
ready for burial.

But when the poem, striving for climax, proclaims "what heaviness they hold", we are removed again from the illusion of the image and thrust uncomfortably back into the world of the stock response.

DURING WORLD WAR II itself, Mrs. Cassidy's publications were privately printed — *The Tale of the Celestial Tea Pot* (1943), or the brief mimeographed excursion into fanciful drama called *The Jade Heart* (copyrighted by the Junior Leagues of America Inc. in New York in 1946). Rather like "The Emperor's New Clothes" in tone, combining a sense of comedy and a verbal rhythm, its social moral is less pointed and less clear. An emperor banishes a poet; the emperor's daughter grows up and falls in love with the poet, who (magically) is connected with the return of a jade ear-ring that her brother had tried to steal from her years before and had lost; the self-exiled brother returns as a prisoner; and the playlet ends happily when the emperor recognizes his prodigal son and allows his daughter to choose her own husband. The jade ear-rings and a migrating wild goose are recurrent images to argue the necessity for the poet's vision in the modern world, but neither the method nor the message is particularly fresh, and the Orientalism is by now an encumbrance rather than an ornament to her style.

When she turns directly to the war, her poems are even less successful. Like so many Canadian writers, she was committed to the cause and aghast at the destruction of lives, and her poems split in two directions — to the hyper-patriotic ("Open wide the airways of the world") and the maudlin ("Is that Human Lives Limited? / May I speak to God, please? / . . . yesterday I lost my son. . . . / I must have another.") Objectivity was hard to achieve, and the controlled distance that imagism demands is lost even from the following excerpt from "May 1941":

> . . . in the brain,
> guns thunder the minutes down,
> and marching feet
> trample the ecstasy of May.

All these verses are contained in a handsome hand-printed volume (reviewed favourably both by Pratt in the *CPM* and by E. K. Brown in *UTQ*'s "Letters in Canada 1941") published by the Caronell Press in Toronto and variously titled *Poems* and *The Return and Selected Poems*. Besides the new works, it reprints pieces that had appeared in journals like *Chatelaine* and *Canadian Forum* as well as the *CPM*. Several were to be printed again in *Invitation to Mood* (1949), and except for a few privately distributed volumes and whatever verse Mrs. Cassidy may have written since, this constitutes her complete canon. The best works among

them remain those that capture images, and in individual lines she again reveals her craftsmanlike commitment to the beautiful in Japanese culture:

> the fingers of a flower master
> coaxing a chrysanthemum
> to lift its tired head —
> (The Return)

> Stare straight up through the incredible blue
> to see the oblique wings of a bird
> slicing the sky
> (Summer Reverie)

> . . . against the ice-stencil of a window,
> one leaf, a green flame,
> leaping from a dry and brittle stick.
> (The Flame)

> The day, brittle with ice,
> snaps underfoot
> (First Flight)

But her rationalizing defence of such a commitment still intrudes into her work; poems that could stop with an image go on to explain it, and the initial effect is undermined. Though the poet affirmed that the reader should also be creator, rarely is the promise fulfilled. Possibly because the journals in which she published so demanded, her poems generally end up insisting on a particular response in an unsubtle fashion.

THE PROBLEM can be approached in another way by looking again at the critical pronouncements of the *Canadian Poetry Magazine*. Pratt's eclectic policy is reaffirmed in March 1943 when W. E. Collin translates Guy Sylvestre's article on Saint-Denys Garneau:

> Poetry is the art of signifying, by means of words, bearers of rhythm and image, what things say to our faculties of knowledge and love taken in their totality. That which makes poetry art is essentially the creation of a beautiful intelligible form; what distinguishes it from the other arts is its own peculiar means of expression: the human word animated by its essential rhythm and delivering fancies conceived in the mind and heart.

But running counter to it, though apparently not in direct conflict or open dispute, were two other critical attitudes. The first is that represented by Clara Bernhardt's statement in December 1939 concerning the poet's function: to make a reader *see*, like the blind man in John's gospel — the good poem will have "an idea or thought", "emotion", "music", and be "sincere". (It is this concern for sincerity which seems to have guided the naming of the "prize" poems in the journal each year. The sentiment expressed seems to have been more important than the quality of the line.)

The other attitude is couched in Watson Kirkconnell's assertion in September 1944 that the magazine "will now carry articles on form and poetic law." The word "law" is the troublesome one, for by June 1945, under the guise of continuing Pratt's policy, Kirkconnell turns to attacking Spender and Eliot for "lawless originality", "novelty without clear significance". As a result, with the rules thus effectively decided in advance, experimentalism fades; sentiment again takes over from verse quality; and (for all the resurgence of fresh talent that appeared while Earle Birney was editor from September 1945 to June 1948) the future character of the journal was set. Vanity presses started to advertise in it, and with their vacuum seal of approval, the *CPM* ceased to be a significant voice.

The exact direct effect of such a dispute on a writer like Carol Cassidy is impossible to gauge, yet it is obvious that her own writing falters because of just this internal conflict. The cause of form is espoused, while the poet gives birth in the same breath to the "preaching", the "stuff of prose", that during Birney's editorship, Charles Bruce's "Remarks on Verse" vehemently decried. When Ryerson brought out *Invitation to Mood* in 1949, nothing much had changed. The occasional sociological poem like "Black Reverie", about Paul Robeson and race prejudice, is interesting for its concern, but even that expresses a conventional "white liberal" position, and the poem (like many others in the book, "inviting" a particular "mood") seems in retrospect a little highflown.

Repeated here, too, are several pieces from her 1941 volume which indicate an attempt to arouse jocularity, but their mood is one less of humour than of unfulfilment. "Humour" is "the Alchemist" in "Parting", for example, but the love poems are wry. "Meeting", similarly, begins equably enough:

> The other side of argument we shall meet again,
> I know,
> after the silence.
>
> With what speech shall I greet you then?

a laughing quip, perhaps,
or a level maxim to formulate the spirit's unity?

But it goes on to plan the other person's glacier-like response before it happens and — therefore — to formulate an equally glacial reply. Hence there is no real humour and no release.

"Greeting Card" expresses most directly the poet's wish:

Upon the chaste scroll of the New Year,
I would inscribe for you
with bold and flowing strokes,
the Good Luck symbol,
and with full brush delineate,
the ideograph of Laughter.

In the light of other poems, that "*would* inscribe" takes on the tone of powerless desire rather than firm intention; contentment seems beyond reach, and in the last poems of the book, all of which seek transcendent revelation and use phrases like "the path to peace", "the karmic toll", and "the Cosmic Will", the poet's need for a "symbol of the Infinite" within which to walk *embraced*, *aware*, and *circumscribed*, is palpable. In a poem like "Museum Piece" lies her only apparent answer:

On the ancient fresco from the monastery of the Joyful Conversion,
are schoolboy names, scribbled with surreptitious brush,
upon the sacred folds of Buddha's robe.

Brought now to the World of the Western Sun from far Shensi,
how curious that the mischievous have achieved immortality
beside the sublime!

Here the poet still wavers, however, between a relaxed acceptance of the fact and an almost Calvinist upset that it should be so. The poem itself gains from such ellipsis, but as an eschatalogical answer it would obviously prove within this frame of reference uncircumscribing and so unsatisfactory.

Quiet and deceptively atonal, the poem is one of the best of her later works, but during the 1940's when the poetic climate in Canada changed so radically, she ceased being an innovator and her position among Canadian writers considerably waned. The qualities for which A. J. M. Smith included her "First Flight" in his first *Book of Canadian Poetry* (1943) were not developed, and from subsequent editions she has been excluded. For all her commitment to imagism, she was never really able to reconcile language and perception in any

consistent way. Her doctrine of poetic form did not in her own writing withstand the pressures of conventional techniques, and so — like the journal that discovered her — she was capable of uncritically publishing some amazingly flaccid lines. Other times she pared her words down till only illusive images remained; by bringing them together she could illuminate the world she saw, and suggest in a few details the larger issues that she accepted as infinite and human truths. "Today I am a god," she wrote in *Fancy Free*, "for I have made a universe with flowers." On rare occasions it was so, as when in *Invitation to Mood* she asks "Would you with boundaries bind the subtle spaces of affection?" and answers:

> Sooner count sand,
> crack stars,
> or garner moonbeams in a sieve.

At those times, however uneasily, she became the poet she had the talent to be.

Consolatory Epistle to Généreux Labadie, Esq.

Who Complained that his Talents and Verses Received no Reward from the Government

Joseph Quesnel
translated by John Glassco

O thou who, otherwise unknown, dost merit
The fame my pen shall cause thee to inherit,
Thou who dost droop, poor prisoner of the times,
Labadie, 'tis to thee that I address these rhymes!
Aye, when I see thy Talents all unnoticed
I echo and approve thy scorn and protest,
And do agree we Versifiers offer
A most improper subject to the scoffer.
My friend, I know thy halting, homely muse
For pompous eulogy gives no excuse;
But after all, the gifts thou hast were meant
To be sustained by such good government
As — when it classifies the human race —
Should always put the Poet in first place:
And this of ours, my friend and similar,
Has never known how valuable we are.
— O shame indeed upon this land: to see
The poor reward of men like you and me!
Like me, whose verse, whose music and whose wit
Should make my name illustrious, I submit,

Yet who must live in lowly village[1] pent
Quite unrewarded by the Government;
Like thee no less, who for thy daily bread
Must daily sell thy Muse's maidenhead,
And must at dinner-time remark with rue,
"This is my breakfast and my supper, too."
  Thus are we quite passed over and disprized,
Our wit and genius go unrecognized,
And on the List our names are never found
When Governmental jobs are passed around;
Whilst many a man — their names I will not mention —
Thanks to his name alone, enjoys a handsome pension.
Who *are* these fellows? Some are military men,
Thoroughly unfamiliar with the pen,
Who find, because a bullet broke their leg or arm,
The State will lodge and feed and keep them warm;
Or else they're notaries, prothonotaries,
Clerks, judges, doctors, even apothecaries!
For on the list of pensioners, you know,
All trades and all professions make a show —
Except the Poet's. What a curst injustice!
Ill fortune, for our sins, hath cruelly thrust us
Into a land whose people have no taste,
Or what they have is squeamish and debased:
They'll praise a soldier who has courted death;
The breathless poet merely wastes his breath.
— Shame on our land! What lessons hence will draw
Th' Algonquins, Topinambous, Iroquois,
Who, though devoid of letters and of arts,
At least allow a man to show his parts?
Why, do *they* not revere their sorcerers,
Their tumblers, prophets and astrologers?

Survey the world, from Lapland unto Ind,
And wit is honoured everywhere, you'll find,
Except in Canada, whose graceless brood
Withholds from talent even a livelihood.

My own experience is the bitter proof:
Exiled from France and my ancestral roof,
I made my way to Canada, and here
Was welcomed with all manner of good cheer:
I'd no complaint. But — music? Oh, the pity!
At table, naught but some old drinking ditty;
In church, two or three worn-out old motets
Sung to a gasping organ out of breath.
Oh, hideous all. So, for my soul's release,
See me composing music! First, a piece
For some religious business — grave or gay?
Was it, or was it not, for Christmas Day?
I can't remember; but I mixed up wholly
Gaiety, pathos, sweet, sour, melancholy,
Through every flat, sharp, natural ran the gamut:
Never before was I so brilliant, d--- it!
And what was the result? Why, in a rage,
They said my airs were fitter for the stage.
One swore the service almost made him dance,
Another urged I be sent back to France;
Everyone fell upon me in a rout;
The Sex joined in (especially the devout):
"Good God," said one, "this irreligious din
Would lead the Saints in Paradise to sin."
"O Christ," another said, "when the notes swell
'Tis like the imps at loggerheads in hell!"

'Twas then, apprised of Novelty's reward,
I saw my hopes all going by the board.
— Well, to the ear (if at all delicate)
My music, shall we say, *is* rather flat:
But did they want a Handel, a Grétry?[2]
By God, then, they must find him oversea!
And my own little public work, I thought,
Deserved a better public than it got.
Say, artist, what's the hardest sentence known?
To be applauded by your friends alone.

So I abandoned this ungrateful style.
But my reverses, working up my bile,
Only increased the thirst for deathless fame:
Still, by my talents, I would make a name!
My gifts I questioned and assessed again,
And then an Opera[3] issued from my brain,
And then another. Two of 'em — no less:
"They'll speak of me for once and all, I guess.
Everyone shall acclaim and cosset me;
But I will build upon my modesty:
Honours shall rain upon me, day by day,
But like a King I'll give them all away."
I've told thee how I (in my simple way)
Built all my hopes upon an opera.[4]
Well, it appeared at last. — O happy night!
Only an author knows such keen delight.
They laughed, and laughed, and laughed. But that was all:
No tiniest crumb of praise did me befall;
And worst of all, the beauty of my verse
Earned not a syllable in the newspapers!
So, make yourself a literary whore,
Go rack your brains to please the theatre-goer:
He will applaud you, yes; but of his troop
Not one will offer you a bowl of soup.

Thou see'st, dear Labadie, my cursèd fate,
And how it is our duty, early and late,
To rail against our wretched lot, and rightly.
Only complain beneath thy breath, and lightly,
And if they laugh at thee — why, be not sad:
My own reception, see, was just as bad.
Yet I affirm my play was excellent,
And if it gained no proper compliment
Why, 'tis because the literary gift
Receives, in Canada, the shortest shrift.
— I know *thy* verse so miserably goes
The reader might as well be reading prose;

Yet, were't a hundred times more boring still,
It should have payment from the public till.
But no! Soon as I speak of thee, my friend,
Fountains of laughter to the roof ascend;
A rhymester, eh? No, they prefer, by far,
A master mason or a man of war.

Let me repeat the phrase that Boileau made:
The saddest occupation is the poet's trade.
But let us not be too downhearted: see,
We both are writing for Posterity.
Others, 'tis true, have lived to see their story
Inscribed on tablets of immortal glory:
Gresset[5] and Despréaux,[6] fêted and famed,
Saw, in their day, their genius acclaimed;
Du Belloy, Ronsard, Racine and Molière
Were petted, paid and crammed with costly fare;
Whilst we, yokefellows in this land together
Whose spirit is as icy as its weather,
See both our talents frozen by the times.
But future readers shall acclaim our rhymes,
Shall laud my prose and love thy versicles,
Seeing our beauties through new spectacles.
This vision of the future I can see,
And prophesy such fame for you and me
As shall make us renowned through Canada
And hailed from Vaudreuil[7] to Kamouraska.[8]

AFTERWORD

JOSEPH QUESNEL (1749-1809) cuts an unusual figure in the early cultural history of Lower Canada. Born and educated in Saint-Malo, France, he passed an adventurous youth as a naval officer, visiting India, Madagascar, West Africa, the Antilles and Brazil. In 1779, while in command of a

vessel illegally running arms and supplies to the American revolutionaries, he and his ship were captured by a British man-o'-war and taken to Halifax where, somehow — apparently through the influence of General Haldimand, then recently appointed Governor of Quebec — he became a naturalized British subject. After a trip of exploration to the Mississippi he settled in the village of Boucherville, on the south shore across the river from Montreal, where he managed a general store, became prominent in local politics and rounded out his activities by writing music for the Church and plays and comic operas for the Montreal theatre (against which the redoubtable Bishop Plessis was constantly fulminating), as well as poems and occasional verse for the newspapers of the day.

As an accomplished musician, playwright and man of the world, a dedicated anglophile and Royalist, he was inclined to look down on the people among whom he had at last cast his lot. This attitude has been requited by most French-Canadian critics and literary historians, who have shuffled him in among the *primitifs canadiens* and *auteurs microscopiques* of the early nineteenth century, thus most unfairly downgrading his talent. He certainly does not deserve to be ranked with the Bibauds, Mermets, Aubins and Deromes who were his contemporaries. His poetic style, though leaning almost too heavily on Molière, is elegant, ironical and graceful; his genius was for good-natured satire controlled by a fine sense of form; he was perhaps the most farflung metrical disciple of Boileau.

Of Généreux Labadie, the addressee and stooge of this *Epître consolatrice*, nothing is known except that he was a highly respected schoolmaster of Verchères, Que., who in 1797 composed a ten-couplet French version of *God Save the King*, and who was described by Huston in *Le Répertoire National* of 1848 (where the *Epître* first appeared in book form) simply as "*mauvais poète.*" Lacking any sample of Labadie's own work, we have no way of verifying this judgment.

For the French text of the following poem, and for biographical details of Quesnel himself, I am indebted to Michael Gnarowski, who is presently preparing a selection of Quesnel's poetical works for publication under the auspices of the Lande Foundation at McGill University. For the notes on his career as a musician I acknowledge with thanks the help I received from Helmut Kallman's *A History of Music in Canada* (University of Toronto Press, 1960).

J.G.

Notes

[1] Boucherville, Que.

[2] André Grétry (1741-1813), one of the founders of French comic opera. His *Richard Coeur de Lion* is still performed.

[3] Quesnel wrote at least four "operas," *Lucas et Cécile, Républicains français, L'Anglomanie, ou Le Dîner à l'anglaise,* and *Colas et Colinette, ou Le Bailli Dupé.* These were in fact drawing-room comedies in prose, interspersed with arias sung to an instrumental accompaniment, but apparently without overtures.

[4] Probably *Colas et Colinette,* his finest work, first performed in Montreal in 1790. It was successfully revived by the CBC in December 1968, with Pierrette Alarie in the leading role. The influence of J.-J. Rousseau's *Le Devin du Village* (1753) is noticeable throughout the composition.

[5] Jean-Baptiste Gresset (1709-1777), a popular poet and playwright, now almost forgotten.

[6] Cognomen of Boileau.

[7] Village on the Ottawa River a few miles west of the Island of Montreal.

[8] Hamlet on the south shore of the St. Lawrence, about 25 miles south-west of Rivière-du-Loup.

review articles

POET WITHOUT MASKS

Miriam Waddington

R. A. D. FORD, *The Solitary City*. McClelland and Stewart. $4.95.

IT IS REMARKABLE that, in R. A. D. Ford, Canada should have an ambassador who is a poet. It seems somehow over-cultivated, non-tribal, and nineteenth century European rather than stylishly global — or what is even more ominously stylish these days — continental. The link between government and poetry is usually found only in emerging cultures where writers have been able to combine revolutionary politics and public office without apparent harm to their art. I am thinking of Aimé Césaire of Martinique who celebrated his country so magnificently in his poem *Return to my Native Land*, and of China Achebe with his stories about the African spirit. These writers were and are lovingly engaged in defining their own cultures in spite of being surrounded by older, richer, and possibly more complex ones.

Ford of course is no revolutionary; a historian by training, he became an ambassador even though he happened to be a poet before the days of poetic residencies and college casebooks. Because he has lived so much of his life abroad — as Canadian ambassador to Yugoslavia, Colombia, the United Arab Republic, and now the U.S.S.R. — he writes out of a kind of cosmopolitanism or internationalism that Canadians don't easily recognize or accept. Internationalism in art and scholarship, as I have recently discovered, usually refers to what's going on in the United States and Britain, and not to what's happening in Russia or Brazil. When we are actually confronted with a writer who has assimilated a culture other than the American or British, and whose work shows it, the experience is so unfamiliar that we are either uninterested or pretend that it hasn't happened.

This unfamiliarity applies especially to Russian (and other Slavic) poetry which is almost the polar opposite of modern American poetry. The sense of *human* community, however achieved and however illusory, still informs Russian poetry (as Ford's translations show) and the belief that life, hope and wholeness are not all used up yet, lends vitality to the languages. Where real sorrows, hungers, deaths and injustices exist, and people haven't been stunned, drugged, shamed and lulled out of their ability to feel and recognize them, poets don't have to invent monsters, or label their myths, or justify madness or lean over abysses for one more look at their own reflections.

Before discussing Ford's poems I have

to say that I am very much against poets publishing their translations of other poets along with their own work. From my own experience I know the kind of identification and intense imaginative effort which has to go into translation. All the same, translations ought to be published separately. They do not belong to the translator, and Ford's new book consists of thirty translations and thirty-seven original poems. Many of the translations have previously been published in periodicals. They are certainly worth gathering together but since I cannot read the poems in their original Russian, Serbo-Croat, or Portugese (there are also three translations from the French) all I can say is that Ford is, to his credit, one of the few poets who at least knows the languages he translates from, and who has lived in the countries where the poems originated. This means he brings far more contextual understanding to his translations than those poets who work (in teams and with immodest blindness) without such knowledge.

Possibly because Ford has lived so long in exile, the language he uses for his own poems has taken on a deliberate and sculptural quality. It is austere and careful, sometimes laboured, has large, slowly-achieved outlines, and when it moves, a lot of emotional weight goes into it. He compresses "... the flash of truth across / The eye And the sudden coming down to earth / And the world squeezed into a word or two."

Ford's concerns are social and psychological; he is absolutely honest without being confessional, and he is completely unsentimental. He often has awkward moments — mostly in the area of expression — but he never has false ones. He doesn't imitate anyone and is curiously free of American and British influences, and he doesn't bother much about keeping his eye on the public. He's no actor, no mask-wearer. He treats his reader like an equal without trying to either enchant or outwit him. When he gives us Chile he does so without dipping into the costume box or resorting to special lighting. Brazil's rivers are dry as death "... there is nothing left / But dust on the bare earth / An *arroyo* of the heart."

Disaster and self-destruction lurk everywhere; they may even be interchangeable:

> And behind the mist I see
> Black waters with the look
> Of invitation to disaster,
>
> Or self-destruction — in our
> Days it is all
> The same

Death is inevitable, but because it is real, it may be melancholy or tragic, but never gloomy or depressing. Only fake death and suffering are gloomy and miasmic. Ford accepts that even for the poet, "horizons are not limitless." Life is circumscribed, unyielding to the human will, and unmalleable by the dream: "closed and barred are all the doors." At best, life is filled with unanswerable questions:

> how much can one
> comprehend, include in a glance?
> How much of love and death intrudes?
> Is snow-blindness perhaps a fault
> And the images of these years of glass?

Snow-blindness; we carry with us the faults and limitations which our environments have built into us. Ford's environment is both inner and outer — social, physical and psychological. Hemisphere is part of it, climate and specific location another. Not surprisingly, climate is the

source of many of Ford's images; it is the presence in his evergreen forests and frozen clearings:

The silent tree of evening
Smudged on the plain,
Through its falling leaves
A faint funereal song.

And trembling you fear,
As I do, without reason,
The entrance unperceived
Of the cold season.

Climate also serves to diagram the psychological gap between human feeling and action, between imagination and what is possible:

Like words of good intent
The desperate drops of rain
Never reach the ground
But disappear again
Into the acrid clouds
Into the years of drought.

Ford sees dissolving structures everywhere; faceless souls, systemless hearts, earthquakes, love's upheaval and a future "Barren in the night / Burnt across with fear". His is a locked world, capable of being unlocked briefly by the "testament of love". Yet he is able to remain somewhere in the poetic centre of stillness, fully aware and finding value in survival. His learning of the languages of other poets has certainly enlarged his vision, toughened his mind and softened his heart. He has written some grave, beautiful, deeply honest and haunting poems; but I wish he would come home where the summers are longer, and where time is getting shorter.

THE COMMON CRAVING

Douglas Barbour

ROSE ROSBERG. *Trips — without LSD*. Fiddlehead Poetry Books. $2.00
ROBIN MATHEWS. *This Cold Fist*. The Author, Carleton University. $1.00
MALCOLM MILLER. *The Kings Have Donned their Final Mask*. Tundra Books. $2.95
PATRICK LANE. *Separations*. New/Books. $2.50
RICHARD GELLER. *Iowa*. The Cummington Press. NP.
DOUGLAS LOCHHEAD. *A & B & C &*. Three Fathom Press. NP.
GAIL FOX. *Dangerous Season*. The Quarry Press. $2.50.

THE ONLY THING these seven books have in common is their appearance in this review; and the common craving for our attention that they display in a wide variety of covers, bindings, types and poetics. But only a few are able to hold that attention all the way through. Most of them fail to do so, for reasons that should become clear below.

Rose Rosberg is an American and I am led to wonder why Fred Cogswell should practically initiate the Theodore Roberts Fund series with a book by a non-Canadian. I don't want to be overly prejudiced about this, and if it were a collection of outstanding poems I wouldn't make a sound. But there are a number of Canadian manuscripts seeking publication right now that are as good as or better than *Trips — Without LSD*. This is not to say that these poems are bad, it's just that most of them aren't especially good. There are only about three poems in the book that catch my interest.

Miss Rosberg uses all the poetic tricks, but somehow her poems remain dull. One exception, "Tiger Hunt in New York" does achieve a near-Blakean intensity: if only the many others that try to do so did! Her attempt at a "major" long poem, the dramatic "Night Thoughts", is far too diffuse and vague to hold a reader's attention throughout. Fred Cogswell says that "Guide" is "one of the most perfect and memorable statements of the objectives of art" that he has ever read, and it's certainly one of her best efforts, mainly because there are no extraneous words, and everything moves to one end. Most of these poems lack such unity, however, and her rhythms often falter and die. Compared with either Gwen MacEwen or Margaret Atwood (a not unfair comparison, I think), Rose Rosberg just isn't writing exciting poetry.

Robin Mathews is probably best known for his pro-Canadian, anti-American stand with regard to our universities, but he has been writing poetry for quite some time. *This Cold Fist* is a privately printed book which demonstrates throughout his pro-Canadian stance, one with which I fully sympathize. But, can politics and the "rhetoric of fury" make for good poetry? Yeats never thought so, and in this case I must agree.

Perhaps this book's greatest unconscious irony resides in the basic style of the poems. It is a style capable of some wit and a very idiomatic use of language, and the creator of this style is none other than that famous American poet, Laurence Ferlinghetti. Now, while there can be no doubt that many young Canadian poets have learned from American mentors (including George Bowering, against whom Mathews launched a vicious attack upon his winning the Governor-General's

Award this year), surely a true Canadian poetry, even while incorporating the lessons other poets have taught, will have its own form, its own idiomatic sound? Al Purdy (whom Mathews obviously admires) writes this kind of poem. Robin Mathews doesn't. The content may be Mathews, but the voice is Ferlinghetti's, as in this poem about Jacques Cartier:

all his work came to nothing
and so he went back to St. Malo
where he died
looking out over the bay that is shaped like
a croissant
towards Canada
the new land
dreaming a dream
in which he saw the cold fist open wide
and he saw men living in harmony and
riches . . .
and they said the captain's dream
was a dying madness
all false
faux comme un diamant du Canada

The Kings Have Donned Their Final Mask is a beautifully designed and printed book. Tundra Books, which is self-consciously Canadian, obviously intends to offer its readers books which are both visually and intellectually attractive. Like Robin Mathews', Malcolm Miller's poetry owes a great debt to Ferlinghetti, and while he has some very interesting ideas, I find his work too often fails as poetry. Miller is obviously attempting a kind of satire, and some of his sallies are very witty, but his language is too often abstract, lacking the concreteness and explicitness that poetry must have. I recognize that this use of abstract language is deliberate on his part, an aspect of his satiric method, but I cannot agree that such a method is viable. I enjoyed this book, but only in a half-hearted way. If you like poems like the following, this book is for you:

LET GOD
bear up
the mountain ranges
boulders
on the backs of men
are deforming
let god
bear up
what must be borne
man's business
is buoyancy
let god
suffer love
for all mankind
his embrace spans planets
while man
arms around
a single woman
must be content
with making angels
drool

Patrick Lane writes about personal reality: things he has done, things he has seen, people he has known. His method, or lack of it, results in a very uneven book. Sometimes he finds the right words for something ("Avenue C") and the result is a stunning poem; other times he merely reports an incident ("Water Truck") and there is nothing more to it than what the mere words say. But for a string of words to become a poem, the words must do double duty, pointing far beyond their mere designation. Lane's problem seems to be that his approach doesn't acknowledge this fact, and so the good poems are accidental. Because he refuses the challenge of poetry — to use craft to give specific poetic form to experience — the book lacks unity.

There is, however, a major theme of guilt and loss which gathers a number of the poems, both realized and unrealized, into a unified group. Again and again a poem celebrates a memory of something in the past, now irrevocably lost. A number of these poems, such as "Natasha"

and "Testaments", occur near the end of the book, and in their full development of this theme in terms of sexual relationships, they show what Lane is capable of. They make me think of some of John Newlove's poems, and contain a depth of feeling not present in the mere incident poems.

> The grass you crushed as you rolled away
> have brushed the leaves between us
> into a bed of broken stems
> Don't ask again.
> When I hurt you it wasn't anger.
> You want to know my dreams.
> You want too much.

> In my dreams I see
> the men and graven women
> huddle beside the stacks
> of starving children at Dachau.
> Come away from the fence.
> In the distance between us
> you're like a body left behind
> at Treblinka. We must make love again.

> I promise you I won't sleep.
> I won't look at the sun.
> Keep me awake and my eyes,
> born to a futile anger, will relearn
> their gentleness.
> Awake, I keep alive
> the mockery our fathers left us; asleep
> they lie with me in a common grave.

Richard Geller is a young American now teaching at UBC. His *Iowa* is a perfect example of private press printing at its best. The book is beautiful in itself. The added fact that it is a poem sequence in four parts which works admirably for the most part makes it a pleasure to own.

The first part, "Summer", is made up of a series of portraits, the voices of various representative Iowans, and descriptions of the countryside and towns of the state. It is the weakest section, for some of the segments fall flat, the connections are not always clear, the verse is sometimes too prosaic. But there are good bits, too. "[And]", a single short poem, "Indian Summer", is a good example of Geller's work:

> Floating mathematician: rainbow bearded
> and dressed in lavender and silver,
> figuring on your fingers —
> so much here, so much there and obviously
> a million suns banking into curves — effortlessly pulling
> rings of spinning planets with them.
> Moving slowly through the noon heat
> a breeze lays patches of ripples.
> The river silence drifting,
> each curve and bend poised.
> Butterflies light ivory above
> the lush, waxed green of the banks.
>
> And the breeze winds a faint long tone.
> Brown leaves touch, quicken the river
> as the sky
> begins a crescent of white frost and blue.
> Thoughts of her have been
> like slivers of glass on porcelain, Father.

"Fall" returns to the method of "Summer", but with a greater control of tone and method. The imagery here is fuller and more unified. There is an almost Keatsian lushness to some passages which I like very much. Finally, in "Here", the poet personally takes account of the landscape through which he has moved his poem. He makes brilliant use of The Tower of Babel theme in reference to the Corps of Army Engineers' building of the Coralville Dam. The exploitation of Nature is seen here, as elsewhere in this poem, in a darkly ironic perspective.

Richard Geller's concerns are natural ones, and he has obviously learned how to give them full expression. I hope he stays in Canada.

Douglas Lochhead's *A & B & C &* is another small, private edition. There are 34 loose pages, and the poet has left plenty of room on each one, "so that the reader may write down his own philosophical flashes." It's a little like bp

Nichol's box of a few years ago, and just about as enjoyable. Lochhead insists that it is Canadian, concrete, foolery, and fun. It is all these, and one can only enjoy, enjoy, when made a present (Lochhead's gift) of such an alphabet. There are only sixty copies, though, which is going to lessen the fun. Let Lochhead have the last word: "Word-play (play is a word) it is, for all who would play."

I have saved Gail Fox's *Dangerous Season* to the end, because it is the only book of this bunch that I can unhesitatingly recommend. Mrs. Fox has created a book, every page of which moved me. Her mind ranges over a great variety of ideas and interests, but her poems always deal with one basic concern: the problem of love and human loneliness. Her voice is not loud or raucous, and she does not indulge in rhetoric, but there is a quiet intensity to everything she says, so that her poems remain with you long after you have put the book down and gone on to other things.

One reason for this is her very fine sense of rhythm and of language. She is like Pat Lane in that her poems emerge from her own experiences, both her families, her friends, the everyday difficulties of living. She is very unlike him, though, in that she brings a much finer sense of craft to each poem, and always makes her language go beyond mere statement by creating images and metaphors that deeply resonate in the mind. When such technical competency is added to an open and cleansing sanity, poems of real merit result. Here is the title poem:

> I think you meant to rake
> yesterday, today I did it
> and found green shoots
> pushing up, accusingly.
> I gripped the rake harder
> and stood where you
> would have stood, uneasy
> with the raw look of things,
> unable to leave the place
> where grass blades began
> to travel to the trees,
> their shadows cutting
> deeply on my feet.
>
> Did you mean to rake
> yesterday? Sometimes I don't
> know what you mean and
> I stand in places where
> you would stand and
> find that nothing is safe,
> spring arriving and lighting
> its pale, green fuse . . .

In the final section of the book, there is a series of poems on her son that are full of love and wonder, and the boy's own "delight with becoming". These poems are simple with the simplicity that only comes after great effort, and suggest that Mrs. Fox will continue to create her beautiful and deceptively simple poems for some time to come. I look forward to reading them.

LOWRY'S LAST NOVEL

Matthew Corrigan

MALCOLM LOWRY, *October Ferry to Gabriola.* Nelson, Foster & Scott. $8.25.

THERE IS LITTLE EVIDENCE that Lowry could have turned the unfinished manuscript of *October Ferry to Gabriola* into as fine a novel as *Under the Volcano.* Lowry was simply not of a mind to finish things the last ten years

of his life. There is not the same urgency in *Gabriola* as in the great novel. *Volcano*'s flaws are justified by the character's propulsion toward self-destruction, a propulsion that will probably read to a later age as clearly as Ahab's does to our own, despite some of the same kinds of language excess. We never doubt the seriousness of Geoffrey Firmin's katabasis. *Gabriola* has the same seriousness but the action is missing to anneal the whole, the action-toward-death. *Gabriola* represents the volcanic state of mind drawn out to a fine tremor of existence: given the option of joy over the earlier novel's imperative of despair. We know Dante's paradiso is duller than his inferno and we know why it has to be so. Religion and art do not overlap without some loss of nerve. This is not to say that *Gabriola* doesn't work. It does work but it works as something different from what it pretends to be.

Because he laboured on it painstakingly the last ten years of his life *Gabriola* manages to survey beautifully that period of Lowry's creativity, a period that represents in many ways his conversion back to life. If there are any doubts after reading the letters and short stories that it was a fertile period, *Gabriola* puts these to rest. As a piece of writing it achieves moments of lyric and philosophic grace that equal anything written in the twentieth century; moments that spring from such a quietness of spirit (a *quietus*, even) it is difficult to peruse them in the context of a work that describes itself on the surface as a novel.

The infernal and paradisiacal (Eridanus) poles that divided and ruled Lowry's thinking are felt once again, though the pull is positive throughout, inclining finally toward a synthesis of salvation, even of grace. The theme is dispossession, eviction. Ethan and Jacqueline Llewelyn are under edict of eviction from their squatter's shack at Eridanus, on the north shore of Burrard Inlet, opposite Vancouver. They have shared two years of extraordinary, primitive joy: a joy based on the near totality of their rebellion against a polluted, plastic age (the year is 1949); based on a simple return to nature and a learning to love the elements of that nature; but based also on an Ockham balance achieved between reality and fear, of which fear Llewelyn has the usual Lowry inheritance.

> For the first time they had both acquired, though they didn't know it then, a complete faith in their environment, without that environment ever seeming too secure. This was a gift of grace, finally a damnation, and a paradox in itself all at once: for it didn't need to seem secure for them to have faith in its security. Or the little house itself didn't need to. The very immediacy of the eternities by which they were surrounded and nursed; antiquity of mountains, forest, and sea, conspired on every hand to reassure and protect them, as with the qualities of their own seeming permanence. . . . Eridanus *was*.

Essentially the novel takes place in Llewelyn's consciousness, though of such a symbiotic and cosmic nature is that consciousness that it tends to become whatever it considers or momentarily takes cognizance of. The book is this consciousness in the state of becoming. Present action takes place on a bus from Victoria to Nanaimo, where the Llewelyns board a ferry for Gabriola Island. They have heard of a sea-captain's house for sale on the island and they are journeying to inspect it. Should the house be unsuitable there is a tract of land they can buy running down to the sea, and Llewelyn is prepared, as before, to build

a house with his own hands. Present experiences tend to be few and far between — an incident in a Nanaimo tavern, something seen from the window of the bus — experiences which propel Llewelyn back into his past. The trip is laced with minute correspondences which secure the past in a state of webbed terror. Most of the time we are delving so deeply into the past that its own past becomes significant. The past within the past is explored in depth, so that everything gives way to and becomes part of everything else: a single continuum of consciousness in which time is technically suspended.

The ferry is actually taken but returns because of a sick passenger. The whole trip (Eridanus: Vancouver: Victoria: Nanaimo) seems to enact a geographic flirtation with Eridanus, as though something in the elements refuses to let them travel far from home; at several junctures they find themselves pointed homeward, the significance of which does not escape Llewelyn. The book ends with the travellers once again ferrying across the strait to Gabriola. Instead of taking us to the island, however, Lowry lets Llewelyn envision their new life there, a vision very close structurally to the one at the end of *Volcano*, where Firmin imagines a similar Canadian paradise. This sudden projection forward optimistically at the end presages an escape for the Llewelyns from the past that has terrorized them. At least this seems to be Lowry's intention. When the ferry returns to discharge its sick passenger the evening newspapers are taken on board. As the ferry approaches Gabriola they read in the paper that city council has reprieved the squatters at Eridanus. They are free to return from exile. Since they are already on their way the prospect of a more permanent home on the island takes on a new significance. It is as though they have eased clear of their doom, have escaped the punishment that has been threatening throughout. Salvation is felt as a moment of release that comes when least expected in the throes of an ordeal; it is something to remain humble about, for it retains as its present heritage the remembrance of what it is like to suffer exile. Such is the Lowry synthesis. We glimpse it partially in "Forest Path to the Spring" and in *Dark as the Grave*; in *Gabriola* it is given its longest moment. What is amazing is that it thrusts through the unfinished manuscript with the clarity and consonance of a single state of mind, suggesting that all of Lowry's later work was reaching toward this conclusion. Surprisingly, his plan for a continuum of works scanning the upsweep of the *Divine Comedy* becomes a reality with this book.

That Ethan Llewelyn is a forty-year old retired criminal lawyer is almost irrelevant to the book. Why he has given up his Toronto law practice to settle in a west coast shack is never explained. The book in fact is about Lowry's life at Dollarton, British Columbia: his struggle with actual and spiritual eviction, with alcohol, with guilt, with God. At times Lowry manages to objectify his ordeal, to disguise it in the fear or thought of an Ethan Llewelyn, as when Llewelyn is riddled with guilt about not defending a fifteen-year old boy sentenced to be hanged, a cowardice he connects with an earlier incident at university when he failed to prevent a young friend from hanging himself. Llewelyn is every bit as infirm as Geoffrey Firmin, with occasionally some of the same insight into the mystery of that infirmity. What is

most unfinished in this book concerns Llewelyn the lawyer and the reasons for his retreat. Lowry's working notes indicate some of the things he intended to add to facilitate our believing in his character on objective as well as personal grounds. Evidently, we were to be shown how Llewelyn had defended a man he believed innocent, only to learn he was a murderer. Thus his disillusionment and his retreat from civilization. That the book works as well as it does despite its factual imperfections and its structural imbalance indicates, I think, the degree to which Lowry was no mean characterizer, and no ordinary novelist. Finally, it doesn't matter who Llewelyn is trying to be; he is the Lowry persona, he could be no other. The book is the mind of the author at work phenomenologically on the raw substance of experience, narrowed as that experience was through his choice of life-style, through his consciously cultivating one species of suffering, through his latent Manicheism.

Llewelyn's external world makes a bizarre kind of sense. It is constantly telling him something about himself, pumping him with information to help overthrow the fear that the world has gone mad. There are few inert or isolated facts. Films that Llewelyn sees become more real than life itself. He becomes the "Wandering Jew" in a film of that title. He suffers that becoming. Nothing exists for him without prehension, without intentionality. The mountains spining British Columbia are one geologically with the infernal Ixtaccihuatl and Popocatepetl of *Volcano*. In his drunkenness Llewelyn is capable of merging consciousness with Noah, Swedenborg, Edgar Allan Poe, Geoffrey Firmin, and others. The ghost of Poe is

omnipresent throughout. Llewelyn looks like Poe physically (to say nothing of the spiritual resemblance). As a student he attended Poe's alma mater. The day of the bus trip, aside from its being the day on which his student friend hanged himself twenty years before, is the hundredth anniversary of Poe's death.

Everything is connected with everything for those with pure vision. The men's section of a bar in Nanaimo (which has "an ugliness the world had not thought of before") seems to take on the "perfect outward expression of his own inner soul, of what it meant, of what it did, even of what awful things could happen in it." Words overheard are "addressed mysteriously to Ethan himself; and moreover . . . every phrase [has] another meaning, perhaps many meanings, intended for his ears alone." Llewelyn has been introduced to the Cabbala by his wife Jacqueline's father, a "white magician" with sundry occult powers, and that too gets drawn into the overall flow of consciousness.

> In fact he could sum up no better their life on the beach than to say it had been, in a manner, *his* cabbala, in the sense that, if he was not mistaken, that system might be regarded on one plane as a means less of accumulating than of divesting oneself — by arrangement, balancing them against their opposites — of unbalanced ideas: the mind, finally transcending both aspects, regains its lost equilibrium, or for the first time truly discovered it: not unlike, Ethan sometimes supposed, the modern process of psychoanalysis.

When things are going well there is this perfect symbiosis between man and environment, between self and God. Their shack, unlike their other two houses (both of which burned to the ground mysteriously), means more than the usual abode: "they wear it like a shell," they "love it like a sentient being." Eridanus exemplifies a religious wholeness and love is the cement that secures it fast. Eviction, or its threat, is thus taken as symptomatic of some overlooked and unconfessed evil. Llewelyn has no difficulty screening his past for the appropriate evidence. He sees himself responsible for his friend's suicide; he sees himself a failure as a lawyer who might plead eloquently for the abolition of capital punishment, and for the life of the boy murderer. There is even the fear that he has become too possessive about Eridanus. Guilt is never that simple or unilateral, however. Llewelyn has the added torment of terrible visions — visions of chaos and not of some principle of good controlling the reeling world. His greatest despair comes when under the influence of alcohol.

Significantly, Llewelyn cannot avoid peering into such depths. He needs a sense of hell in his life almost in order to keep his joy sensibly bound. Once he envisions this hell it is enough. An inverse spirit resembling hope begins to point him in the opposite direction and he sees with cleared vision.

> What was important was that he was now convinced there must be some complete triumphant counterpart, hitherto based on hearsay or taken on trust, of that experience he had had, or almost had: as there must be of that abyssal region, some spiritual region maybe of unborn divine thoughts beyond our knowledge. . . .
>
> Mightn't he equally well consider that he'd been vouchsafed, was so being vouchsafed, a glimpse into the very workings of creation itself? — indeed with this cognition Ethan seemed to see before his eyes whole universes eternally condensing and recondensing themselves out of the "immaterial" into the "material", and as the continued visualization of their Creator, being radiated back again. While meantime here on earth the "material" was only cognizable

> through the mind of man! What was real, what imaginary? Yes, but couldn't the meaning, the message, for *them*, be simply that there *had* been a message at all? Yes, could he not just as well tell himself, as Cyprian of Antioch, that here God had beaten the devil at his own game, that magic was checkmated by miracle! Ethan drank half another beer. Gone was his fright. In its stead was awe. In the beginning was the word. But what unpronounceable Name had visualized the Word?

The only drama is that between present and past consciousness; the only action the will of the moment grappling with a mute past, not so that it can strike out in pure action, but rather so that it can enlarge upon itself, so that it can know itself. The process is self-defeating because of its intoxication, its solipsism. Few prose writers of the modern period have tried (have tormented) the moment of consciousness as Lowry does in this work. What he seems to be emphasizing is the compulsion of modern man to rework past consciousness; suggesting that if man is to constitute himself as a free individual he must first make sense of the nightmare of his past. The posture of Lowry's later work is *retrospective* in this sense. Terror is something experienced when one realizes the significance of the past, when one sees the connection; it does not consist of any present threat. Since all of this ratiocination is intended as a kind of reparation for the future, the present moment tends to be overlooked, if not also to be underlived. There is almost no active present tense in this work.

The fact is Lowry came to think this way as a writer. It represents a dangerously close perspective for a writer to have unless he is a phenomenologist and his subject, quite unabashedly, is the reduction of consciousness. Dangerous because you can't locate the infinite in the general labyrinth of human mind except in terms of a general intentional structure. The result at best is but a frenetic scaffolding that gives the sense of the impending event but never the spectacle itself. The prose takes on the tortured shape of the quest in its circumlocution. The shape of *Gabriola* is that of a vortex out of which something material is about to be hurled. Often nothing is hurled clear; no meaning is adduced and past consciousness is swept into present.

Lowry's is the problem of the poet turned mystic, of learning to face the fact that everything that comes from his creative unconscious is part of everything else in the order of creation, and must be attended to, must be set down in chiselled stone prose, if the final balance is to be maintained. Editing, or what for the average novelist amounts to an ordinary task, is lost sight of in Lowry's later work. Certain parts of *Gabriola* give the feeling that at some later rereading the author would have trimmed or deleted them. Yet the same pieces show us something of the difficulty of doing this for Lowry, because in some way they control parts of the larger whole; they give the feeling of belonging. There is a strange logic behind the excess (the plethora) of this manuscript, a logic akin to that of dreams. It defies ordinary daylight understanding yet demands our attention. I am thinking of the way a person we know reveals himself or herself totally in a dream, becoming through word or deed a full being and doing so in terms that seem totally appropriate to that person; so that on awakening we think "Yes, that is exactly what she would say, how she would act." Though nothing of the sort had taken place or

would ever take place in real life the dream had effected the imaginative leap that life was too shy or slow to make. The ontological accuracy of the thing strikes us. It is the same with the manuscript of *Gabriola*. Lowry was right, finally, to believe in his continuum of works as he did, to respect the presence of every wandering beggar that passed through his consciousness, lest the indigent turn out to be Christ in disguise. Reading Lowry, if one does it properly, requires more than the usual suspension of disbelief. If the writing works for us it does so not because it is fiction on its way to becoming a novel, but because it entails a vision of a higher order of creative existence altogether than we ordinarily get in modern literature. It would be difficult to imagine a later age making anything like a fair assessment of our own without such a testament, bleak and solemn as it tends to be.

THE O-ZONE AND OTHER PLACES

Alan Shucard

ANDREAS SCHROEDER, *The Ozone Minotaur*. Sono Nis Press. $5.00.
GEORGE BOWERING, *The Gangs of Kosmos*. Anansi. $2.50 paper ($5.00 cloth).
HARRY HOWITH, *Fragments of the Dance*. Village Bookstore Press.
IAN YOUNG, *Year of the Quiet Sun*. Anansi. $1.95.

THERE WERE TWO noteworthy events in Canadian poetry in a group of volumes published in Canada in 1969: George Bowering put out another good, competent collection, *The Gangs of Kosmos*, and was awarded the Governor-General's Prize; and Andreas Schroeder produced as exciting, as excellent a book of poems as has come from any press anywhere for a long time. *The Ozone Minotaur*, for whatever reasons, has won no award; only the admiration of almost all who have reviewed and all who have read it. The book reveals so boldly, so clearly, so poetically what sensitive people — particularly sensitive young people — see as the elemental truth of the world at present, and presents the reality so starkly that praise for the book rings extravagantly hollow as the poems engulf the adulation and make it seem like mere molecules of ink on paper or vibrations of air in a wind. Perhaps that is why the Foreword by J. Michael Yates strikes one as unnecessary advertising, a circus barker's side-show cry to view something patently beautiful.

It is not important that Yates's Foreword is untrue so much as that it is unimportant next to Schroeder's work, and cites irrelevancies. Schroeder may have been twenty-two when *The Ozone Minotaur* appeared, but the question of maturity, or its lack, never arises from the reading of the book; to suggest that it is a remarkable work by a twenty-two-year-old is simply not so significant as to say that it is a remarkable book. To label

Schroeder an *enfant terrible* or any other sort of *enfant* is to do him a disservice in the same way as it would be to apply the term to Keats, or to many others; he may some day be more mature, but he is indisputably a grown-up poet now. And to say that Schroeder is "a member of a race of young writers unique in the tradition of Canadian writers — cosmopolitan, multilingual, multi-medial . . . " is to wave the Maple Leaf needlessly. Schroeder was born in Germany, and Yates himself was born and raised below the border; and there are centres of cosmopolitanism, multilingualism, and multimedialism outside of Canada — in London, in New York, in Africa, for example. No, Schroeder stands above this kind of salesmanship on the pedestal of *The Ozone Minotaur* itself; Yates meant no harm and could evidently not resist reacting to the book in his own way. It is writers like Schroeder, a fine poet who happens to be writing in Canada, who will unselfconsciously establish Canadian literature as a notable force in the world of letters if they succeed in ignoring the chauvinistic blandishments of people attempting — with the best of intentions — to manufacture an instant and instantaneously renowned Canadian literature. Leonard Cohen speaks to a large international audience, and many outside of Canada are mildly surprised to discover that he is Canadian; but what does that really matter? Names such as Atwood, Avison, Bowering, and, one expects, Schroeder, will become familiar outside of Canada because the writers are good, and in spite of the promoters of Canadian literature. It was only after the Americanists of the post-revolutionary period, the Connecticut wits and others, ceased laboring to create an American literature that American literature relaxed and incidentally created itself.

What makes *The Ozone Minotaur* so excellent is its taut power; it is a precision watchspring wound so tightly that to read it is to sense the capacity of the verse suddenly and violently to let go; it is to enter the cell with the machinery of the world's violent *zeitgeist*, to feel and see its tick and tock, and to be horribly fascinated at what it might trigger. Through three zones Schroeder takes us, where we move only in possibility, never in certainty, until we complete the book and finish in what Yates rightly calls the "O-Zone", the point at which we realize that there is only the possible, where, as Schroeder has explained in Zone II, there is "nothing now / But the absolute knowledge / Of the ability to kill." The graphic, superb first poem of the collection, "Introduction", establishes Schroeder's credentials as the stunningly scary, thoroughly articulate guide to the understanding of his unreal reality, existence in a verbal Marienbad. The nightmarish specificity of description is perfectly matched with what occurs in the poem, as is the case through most of *The Ozone Minotaur*; Schroeder does not write of just men, or even of three men, but in particular of "three men in tails walking across / your cornfield to the creek" in the evening. He then tells us "why they exist": one walks along one side of the stream "measuring holes in the sand / with a small tape measure that / is alive." He shouts across occasionally to the man on the opposite bank who "is sifting debris / into a notebook . . . " and "measuring the size of / the sand grains." Schroeder, with the great exactness of his verse and vision of incertitude, is partly these men, but if he is to be iden-

tified with any of them, it is chiefly with the third man, the man who treads in the middle of the stream and steps on the fish and merges with the fish, for they "swim through / him and he walks through the fish." The academic measurements are taken at the verges, but it is at the centre that things are happening, unpleasant things, such as stepping on the fish. And the unpleasantness (often frustrated relationships described with the delicate toughness of a spider web) arouses the capacity for mayhem: "Cables" concludes with the poet standing "motionless, / while the hammer in my fist / grows steadily larger / and the time / short"; "Sands" has the poet's companion leaving "wild, like a man / in the skin of a bear that is / not yet killed"; and "The Signal", one of the last poems in the volume, bears reprinting in its entirety because it reflects both the uncompromising frustration and rising tide of violence of the poems, and Schroeder's arresting, precise imagistic form:

> Now is the time.
> My hands appear in many places
> I have never been;
> A drunkard, bottling silence
> on an ocean rock.
>
> The white hand creeps among
> white things,
> bone lightning, lean
> like a hungry rock,
>
> and in my tight clenched fist
> a razor
> splits the wind.

Schroeder takes his audience to those places in the Now, to where he hovers in "Tracks" "suspended in the silence of this wilderness", and he leaves them splitting a wind with a razor never named in so fragile and forceful a way before. That is what makes it important that the book be read widely without regard to mere matters of nationality, and that Andreas Schroeder give to literature another poetic statement of his vision as soon as he is ready.

George Bowering's *The Gangs of Kosmos*, Harry Howith's *Fragments of the Dance*, and Ian Young's *Year of the Quiet Sun* are all good works, certainly worth a reader's investment of time and thought. Perhaps their limitation is exaggerated by their publication so close to *The Ozone Minotaur*; perhaps it is only by comparison that they do not stir the spirit deeply. Each of them tells the reader in interesting new ways what the reader tends frequently to be aware of himself; that is, good poetry. Schroeder's volume tells the reader things that went nameless for him before; that is, excellent and extremely important poetry. Bowering is fine to read anywhere and he presents another instalment of the straightforward record of a sensitive man of many preoccupations among whose friends one would like to count himself. Howith's fourth volume is best in the love poems, and best there when he is most conversational. When the reader finishes with the others, he will probably find the Young collection worth the selling price, although the book may well leave him with the sense that he has read it all before somewhere, in little magazines or the odd thin volume. But it is a long way from the visionary Now of the O-Zone to any of the other collections — certainly farthest to Young's *Year of the Quiet Sun*.

books in review

CROWDED SPACE

ANTHONY BLICQ. *The Rise and Fall of Married Charlie.* AndreDeutsch. $6.95

ALLEN TATE once remarked that "Literary criticism is perpetually interesting and perpetually impossible." It is perpetually interesting because every new work forces one to question the validity of one's reactions. It is also perpetually impossible to come to any unqualified evaluation. There is always the uneasy question, suppose I am terribly, terribly wrong? A new novel is a particularly difficult test of the continuity and consistency of that elusive thing called "standards." A responsible critic knows that he must somehow reconcile these with an open acceptance of the possibility of doing things in a new way. In sum, ultimately all we can say of literary criticism is that it is a response to a work which has filtered through a particular sensibility.

Anthony Blicq's *The Rise and Fall of Married Charlie* elicits ambivalent reactions such as these. It is workmanlike, not badly written, and its author is obviously sincere and intelligent. But as a novel *The Rise and Fall of Married Charlie* just doesn't hang together very well.

The most egregious flaw is its wavering perspective. The narrator, Charlie, seems intended to represent the most unpleasant anti-hero of them all. A Canadian expatriate writer in his late twenties, Charlie marries a rich, neurotic English girl, Jenny. After he has alienated her relatives, run through her money, and hastened her ruination as a singer, he deserts her for a prostitute whom he impregnates. The sub-plot concerns Jennie's aunt, Barbara, whom Jenny has always been encouraged to flatter in order to inherit her money. Barbara has been married to Harry, a beefy American adventurer (an older version of Charlie), who has deserted her through a trumped-up plane disaster in which he appears to have been killed. Harry, in turn, marries Kate, a blowzy blonde, who had been living with Harry's lawyer, Keiv. Keiv is a handsome opportunist who is working for both Barbara and Keiv.

All this muddle comes to the boil when Barbara is vacationing in Athens and recognizes Harry passing in a car on the street. She summons Keiv from London to track down her missing husband, but since it is imperative to Keiv to convince Barbara that Harry is really dead, she loses patience with his lack of initiative and impetuously calls on Charlie as the sort of man who would get on with the job. In the meantime, Jenny, who has surrendered all her self-respect, follows Barbara to Athens to plead for some money. In the end, everybody comes out losers.

It is a bit of too much, isn't it? And, believe me, I've left out lots of the complications in order to stress the major outline. But, as I started to say, the greatest weakness of the book is the shifting perspective. Charlie is the narrator. Credibly he can be in only one place at one time. But he knows *everything* about everybody else in the book, what they are doing, what they are thinking, what they are feeling. Now Anthony Blicq might

argue that this is only a new-fangled version of the magisterial author, and that he is entitled to write his book any way he likes. Very well, but he has to grant concessions to his reader to the extent of seducing him into believing in the validity of his intentions. The difficulty with preternatural perception such as Charlie's is that we never fully believe in Charlie. Charlie's behaviour is brutally callous; how then can he depict Jenny's anguish with such compassion? When it comes to examining himself — and particularly his reminiscences of his Canadian background — a whining note of naïvété suddenly appears: a jarring contrast to the cosmopolitan world of international finance in which the action takes place.

The action is on the level of a spoofy James Bond thriller. Certainly Blicq can sustain suspense and narrative pace, but he is more ambitious than this. He wants to get inside his characters as well. As a result introspective analysis is clumsily engrafted onto a thriller. Graham Greene is one of the few writers who has been able to fuse the two; but Greene is a dangerous writer for a fledgling writer to emulate.

The Rise and Fall of Married Charlie suffers from an ailment common to most hard it is to get one's early works re-first novels — hypertrophy of material. The author has tried to cram too much lumber — symbols, parallels, characters, settings, action — into too frail a building. No wonder it collapses around him. But some of it can be salvaged for a structure with a sounder foundation and simpler lines.

PHYLLIS GROSSKURTH

HEEEEELLLP!

CHARLOTTE FIELDEN. *Crying as She Ran.* Macmillan. $5.95 cloth, $2.95 paper.

IN THE BEST of all possible worlds, perhaps, no humane reviewer would send in a review of a book he really disliked. Particularly if the book in question were a novel and the reviewer were also a novelist, and knew only too well how important — from the point of view of fellowship money and future publication — a good review can be. I was tempted, therefore, to send this book back, to be passed along to someone else who might be more sympathetic. I have not done so chiefly because I feel it is time someone came forth to say very plainly that there is a lot of bad stuff (particularly bad prose, particularly west-of-Quebec bad prose) being published in Canada right now, and somehow this little book is typical. With these prejudices established and admitted, I begin.

Crying as She Ran is primarily the story of Sarah Weil, her childhood, her puberty, her coming-of-emotional-age. Orbiting around her tale are the stories of her family, father, mother, two sisters, her boyfriend Ron (blue-eyed and Catholic), her aunt, her cousin, a perverted Hebrew teacher and a queer and crooked goy wheeler-dealer who is the eventual means to the end of Father Weil and the family's short-lived halycon days of wealth and wall-to-wall. The short novel (164 pages) is highly melodramatic and crammed full of all possible cliché situations. But this is not the main fault. (Life, too, is crammed full of cliché situations and highly melodramatic at least 40% of the time.) The main fault, I think, is that Charlotte Fielden has

chosen to tell her tale in imitation of Joyce's *Portrait* plus Brigid Brophy's Joycean technique plus free-form poetry, and to do this one must have a very fine ear indeed. Mrs. Fielden, unfortunately, appears to be virtually tone-deaf.

> Sing along
> Right or wrong
> It's Yuletide
> In with the good-and-bad-tide
> Out with the Jewish yidtide
> Happy Hanukkah and a Merry Christmas
> To you too
> Hallelujah. . . .
> She left the towel and the dish on the counter and walked out
> of the kitchen thinking a half-wiped thought. . . .
> Mark's arm a long sticky snail coming out of its molasses shell. . . .
> Cloppity-clop. Cloppity clop. Sarah's sneakered feet stirring up the ravine dust flopping around.

Granted the sneakers are too big, can they really go cloppity-clop? (She isn't wearing horseshoes or Dr. Scholl's health sandals.)

I admit I've selected these examples carefully and given nothing of their context. But I wonder not just about Charlotte Fielden, but about the editor who allowed this stuff to pass, like the Angel of Death, without comment.

Another drawback is that although the story is presumably Sarah's, the omniscient author lets us into the minds of *all* the other characters, both major and minor. This is really too much of a good thing, and in the end fouls up the Joycean effect the author is striving so hard to maintain. (And the Joycean effect is meant to be obvious from the first. The book begins:

> Once upon a clock there was a little girl who had a bald spot right in the muddle of her head. Middle muddle piss and puddle. Her name was Sarahlah quite contraralah. Her garden grew. Her garden grew.

The book is too short to allow this general think-in. In the case of Lil, Sarah's mother, it almost works because in her sections there is a more lyrical and less cutely ironic tone; but even here we are too aware of the author's smiling presence and become uneasy.

The Jewish question is *not* dead, nor is the novel of coming-of-age, whether in Samoa or the Good City of Toronto. But both are dead here because the author chooses to put style ahead of deep feeling, to experiment with techniques like Riiiiiiiiiiinnnnnnggg or Heeeeeeeeeeellllp instead of making us really aware of telephones and terror. All writing is a trick, of course, a technique, a magic-lantern show. But the feeling *behind* the writing must be real. Here it doesn't work.

The very last page of the novel, a highly-charged re-creation of the Passing of the Angel of Death, seen through the eyes and emotions of Sarah as five year old shows what Mrs. Fielden could do if she'd just forget to be so clever. It made my hair stand on end. But just one page??

Canada encourages cuteness and cleverness in its writers. Why, I still haven't figured out. Because big boys don't cry? Because we don't want to be called provincial? The big publishers certainly ask for, and get, big-city slickness. "Slick" doesn't necessarily mean professional — not in any good sense of the word.

This is, says the jacket, the first book of a trilogy. Good. That gives Charlotte Fielden more time to find herself (there is little doubt in my mind that she *can* write, if she wants to) and maybe to make me more interested in Sarah and the Weil family as a whole.

AUDREY THOMAS

PUSHED BACK TO THE RIDGE

MORT FORER. *The Humback.* McClelland and Stewart, 1969. $7.95

THE GREATEST STRENGTH of this first novel is its subject: the Métis of Manitoba living on the gravel ridge (the Humback) between Canadian Shield and prairie. They are a people between worlds; from their spine of rock they make forays down to the rich plain, the women to birth in the Ste Therese Hospital or to stockpile Hallowe'en sweets in Winnipeg, the men to have drunks and brawls. The men, however are most truly themselves when they leave both the plains and the Humback settlement; their work is cutting cordwood on the Shield and sometimes, like the Hermit, they retreat into it never to emerge. The women's world, for all its seeming stability, is the more teetering; they have no bush retreat to balance the pull of prairie and city. If, like 'Toinette and Colombe, they are not nailed to the ridge and "the book" in Abe Epp's store by their almost unbelievable number of children, then like Marcie or Lu-cil they can slide unnoticed off the ridge and disintegrate in either the city or the bush.

A mother lode for fiction, beyond doubt. Yet the Métis until now has had almost no place in major Canadian writing. The realists of the twenties: Grove, Stead, Ostenso, were chronicling settler-homestead life and the Métis had no place there; but even in contemporary fiction like Gabrielle Roy's *Where Nests the Waterhen* or Margaret Laurence's *The Stone Angel* the bare contact with Métis is seen as disaster by French and British Canadians alike. They are peripheral, bottom class, and apparently not worth extended fictional treatment. Forer has tried, and good for him.

Forer achieves his best with the characters Joshua and 'Toinette. Joshua is the bush foreman, sixty-five years old, a singer and thinker. When he speaks of

> . . . long ago, early in my father's time, when men like
> us grew out of the backs of horses and had legs that
> were like chickens

or helps the people to see their plight by asking the unanswerable, "Why did they nail Jesus to the cross?", the reader has a sense of the people, listening, breathing, being. 'Toinette is forty, mother of seventeen (she has "lost" six), a huge plum tree of a woman dropping her fruit every fall and willing to make babies even for her daughter Annabelle; she knows all the "things about the world you never challenge with thought — the seasons, the nature of man, the bearing of children." The story centres about her.

Though not as outstanding, Forer has other successes: muscle-bound Leo, epileptic Lu-cil, lean and mannish Georgette who cannot in the long run drive her car carefully enough, Marie who insists she has had a virginal (though undoubtedly not an immaculate) conception. He is less successful with the storekeeper, Abe Epp, and almost silly in the portrait of the priest.

Forer seems to struggle with the 'type' character that Epp inevitably is; he tries to make the trader exploiting the Humbackers human by giving him one turn into humanity: in the end Epp is as unsuccessful in coping with the outside world as they. All this manages to do is give him two dimensions instead of one. His beginning a beard to prove his

Humback-ness — well! The priest is completely one dimensional; his only characteristic is his sex-and-death hang up. He is boring, not because his problem is so but because he is handled with a kind of deliberate obtuseness.

The novel has an authenticity of detail which is amazing, but stylistically it is marred. One cannot read it for the pleasure of its prose. Almost always the conversations (especially in the Métis useage of "there") sound life-like, genuine, but invariably the rest is wooden or positively clumsy. The author tries — very hard, seemingly — for an individual style, but he was never able to quite lift me into his language so that I believed it. On the first page:

> Beside her, and in the curve of each huge arm, an infant
> curled into the shape of "C" slept. Behind her, bed-head
> to her bed-head, the boy-bed with three boys, and right-
> angled to the boy-bed, foot to bed-foot, the girl-bed with
> three girls.

There may have been worse sentences published last year, but I hope not.

For all the rich possibilities the setting provides, there is little sense of landscape. That is due to Forer's inadequacy both as stylist and story-teller. He gives us much detail, yes, and genuine, but it is report, tour guide stuff: one bit and then another bit and then another. He does one thing at a time, only, and when he tries to work at several levels, as in the á la *The Double Hook* introduction, he must make sure by taking us over the same terrain again, more prosaically, a few pages later. And unfortunately the same sense of "more of the same" arises out of the incidents in the latter half of the book before Forer can reach his 'big scene' and end it. That is too bad, because he has great things here in terms of both people, landscape and story strength.

The work as a whole give me a disturbing (perhaps not quite legitimate in a critical sense, but still very disturbing) sense of the inadequacy of this particular writer's vision of the humanity that is his subject. The Humbackers may have no sense of their history, that a century ago they ruled the rich plain — granted; but surely for the reader this fact must echo more deeply than one almost unnoticeable mention that the Humback Road was first built to bring in "avenging soldiers". Again, Joseph and 'Toinette can perhaps only know the world as great impersonal evils — slick pavement, fire, government — but surely we must see clearer responsibility. To recognize great good one must be able to recognize great evil; how great a novel can arise out of the attitude "nobody can't help nuttin"?

Having said which, let me say again how good it is that at last we have a realistic (not romantic, like Bugnet's *Nipsya*) novel whose subject and sole concentration is a most unjustly neglected part of the Canadian people. It has some beautiful characters and some exciting situations. It should be read widely.

RUDY WIEBE

CANADIAN HERO

ROY DANIELLS, *Alexander Mackenzie and the Northwest.* Oxford. $6.00.

CANADIANS are very close to their heroes, especially in the west and far-west. The experiences of a Thompson, Fraser, Mackenzie or Vancouver, though different in scale, are not really remote or difficult to imagine. The realities of bush travel and

river travel, the uncertainties of the mountain passes, the loneliness and gloom of the long inlets are familiar to many of us. Even the half-blind plunge across untracked country towards a doubtful destination is something we may have known. Yet the difference in scale makes the whole difference between the heroic and the ordinary; the shared experience merely sharpens appreciation of this difference.

In addition to the sense of nearness, there are always the journals, carefully kept, meticulously detailed, more or less readily available, leaving comparatively little room for conjecture, yet leaving so much unnoted — perhaps even unobserved. They challenge, irritate and amaze — challenge the imagination to fill the gaps, irritate because so much that could be there is not, amaze because so little is really revealed of the men who took part or their feelings. David Thompson is, of course, the exception; a humorous, kindly man, readily affectionate and a vivid narrator. Alexander Mackenzie is close to the type — matter-of-fact, concerned only with his purpose and the practical value of his observations to those who might come after.

But there is no escaping the journals. In a very real sense they are the measure of the journeys and the men who made them and, to some extent at least, revelations of character. In this account of Mackenzie, Professor Daniells has drawn extensively on Mackenzie's own journal of his two great voyages, to the Arctic and Pacific Coasts of Canada. He sketches background, reveals purpose, makes comments, and all this is effectively done; but the great moments of the journeys and the real nature of Mackenzie are revealed only in the carefully chosen quotations. For all their flatness and calmness, there is an immediacy of language in them that cannot be rephrased or re-interpreted without loss. This was how the man saw himself, his companions, the strangers he met and the country he faced. That and nothing else, even though it may be only partially expressed, is the essential truth. Another man in the same place at the same time would have seen companions, strangers and country quite differently and that, too, if he were honest as most of the travellers were, would have been essential truth. But a later writer in another time can do little to change or expand the record.

The quality of Mackenzie's determination and performance is perhaps best judged in the light of the much celebrated journey of Lewis and Clarke across the continental United States to the mouth of the Columbia. He was twelve years before them, much farther north, in country that was generally less known and more difficult, his destination far less certain. He had tried once already, following the river of his name to the Arctic Ocean in a journey scarcely less difficult and dangerous. His party was tiny and self-dependent, his mission scarcely more than an idea of his own.

Professor Daniells' book makes all this clear and the account of the actual voyages is, as always, breathtaking because the imagination is left free to work on so much that is unstated. The author has difficulty in developing the youthful Mackenzie, about whom it would seem that very little is known, and the attempted reconstruction is awkward and unconvincing. But his examination of Mackenzie's later life in the fur trade does much to explain the powerful forces

that moved him to such feats of leadership and physical endurance, and many comments throughout the narrative are revealing and valuable. The brief account of Mackenzie's navigation instruments and methods is especially interesting. In the last few pages of the book, Professor Daniells gives brief scope to his own poetic qualities and sends the reader back to look at certain passages with a new eye. It is tempting to wish there could have been more of this, woven through the book as a whole. But the written record inhibits the legend while it enhances the performance.

RODERICK HAIG-BROWN

RICHLER'S CANADIANA

Canadian Writing Today, ed. Mordecai Richler. Penguin. $2.15.

IN HIS INTRODUCTION to this Penguin anthology edited essentially for non-Canadian readers, Richler the Expatriate seems at odds with Richler the Nationalist: the second evoking a self-deprecatory flair for a culture the first has trouble taking seriously. Instead of redressing clichés more popular among Canadians than anyone else, Richler refurbishes them in an amusing but meaningless way. Though "charged with promise" Canadian culture is an "embarrassingly grandiose" one of the "world's elected squares", these "immensely boring" inhabitants of "the white, Protestant, heterosexual ghetto of the north."

But if Richler is a wobbly success as editor — and there are other imbalances — his contribution to the anthology as a fiction writer is steady proof of his real genius. In "Dinner With Ormsby-Fletcher" he satirizes a family of British WASPS with some adroit observations that link particular individuals to their foible-riddled class. This selection from *St Urbain's Horseman*, his novel-in-progress, admirably restrains outrageous situations in a way which anticipates more convincing characters than certain critics could discover in his last novel. Unlike his Introduction that tries to have it two ways, this piece confirms the sureness of the artist inside his material.

Such sureness does not lack either in "An Evening Out" by John Glassco, whose recollection of three rotating whores inside a Paris brothel on a fragrant summer night, manages nicely to satiate our interest whetted earlier at dinner with buttered snails. For those attracted by more characteristically Canadian institutions, Norman Levine invites them inside "Slaughterhouse", where promiscuity among employees takes a back seat (in the parking lot) to foreground dismemberment of freshly assassinated cattle. And with at least as much immediacy in a scene from *Fortune And Men's Eyes*, John Herbert reels off the banter of young homosexuals inside a Canadian reformatory.

Other writers prefer to probe asylums even less familiar — themselves. If, as Frye says in his "Conclusion" to *Literary History of Canada* (and Richler includes a portion), self-conflict is the measure of a mature writer, then certainly the extract from *A Jest of God* would confirm Margaret Laurence an accomplished artist for any reader unfamiliar with her novels. Similarly Hubert Aquin on the basis of his neurotic Separatist narrator from *Prochain Episode*; and Brian Moore for his "Preliminary Pages for a Work

of Revenge" in which a surface irony enhances the narrator's desperate sincerity. In *Canadian Writing Today* there are, too, the skirmishes of Margaret Atwood's interior landscapes she externalizes in order to isolate reality from an encompassing domestic horror:

> . . . when I dream images
> of daring escapes through the snow
> I find myself walking
> always over a vast face
> which is the land-
> lady's, and wake up shouting.

The landscape of Birney's "Way to the West" appears a culmination of the metropolis Frye envisions as a natural evolution of the garrison, poet recognizing industrial Sudbury for the urban cess pool it is, here headed for the open land requiring neither fort nor city.

Yet from such an open land Alice Munro returns with an ineluctable melding of perspective and apprehension to a small Ontario town. That return culminates the best short story in the book, "Walker Brothers Cowboy".

> So my father drives and my brother watches the road and rabbits and I feel my father's life flowing back from our car in the last of the afternoon, darkening and turning strange, like a landscape that has an enchantment on it, making it kindly, ordinary and familiar while you are looking at it, but changing it, once your back is turned, into something you will never know, with all kinds of weathers, and distances you cannot imagine.

Richler's attempt to balance French and English writing is commendable, and he does not fail to include essays by Pierre Elliott Trudeau and Hector de Saint-Denys-Garneau which argue the fatuity of Separatism. But generally I find his anthology perfunctory rather than imaginative. That brings us back to editorial balance. While region is mentioned as a tangential principle of selection, nothing here conveys an expression of the West Coast. Which isn't a neglect in itself, unless to say that an artist who lived there and wrote probably the best ever Canadian short story, "Forest Path to the Spring", is absent. Malcolm Lowry aside, where is Dave Godfrey, mentioned fleetingly in the Introduction? And while Richler might be excused (he makes no all-inclusive claim) for omitting certain integral poets — Avison, Mandel, Page, Livesay, to name four — the poetry selection in comparison to the prose is decidedly lean.

Otherwise Richler appears to believe *Tamarack Review* the only little magazine in Canada publishing worthwhile writers — as opposed to five British and American periodicals from which he draws material by both expatriate and at-home Canadians. Why not have included a talented new poet from *Quarry* or *Prism*, *Fiddlehead* or *West Coast Review*? Or less iconoclastically, have inserted a piece of prose by Morley Callaghan, whose national neglect Richler decries in his Introduction, and to whom he dedicates the anthology. Such a selection, say Chapter XXVI of *That Summer in Paris* — in which Callaghan recalls his infamous boxing match with Hemingway while Fitzgerald keeps time — might have complemented those other gymnastics Glassco remembers with his own two friends from the same period in Paris. But more importantly it would have illustrated the crisp diction George Woodcock's essay finds lacking in Callaghan's most recent novels; and, for that matter, uncovered a notable expatriate who lived among the most famous of the century, one who returned to Canada (as did Woodcock himself). Not that I

find it "disheartening", as Richler does, that a quarter of the writers in *Canadian Writing Today* live abroad; I happen to think, if the present numbers of wandering knapsacked Canadians are meaningful, that the expatriate experience will prove even more significant for Canadian literature. But reading through this anthology as a British reader might, writing as I do from that country, somehow it would interest me to know that at least a few artists have actually returned to the land confirmed in this collection as such a promise in cultures, such a challenge in expanse.

KEATH FRASER

CALM SURFACES DESTROYED

JOHN NEWLOVE, *The Cave*. McClelland & Stewart. $4.95.

SOMETIMES I think if I see that word "honesty" used to describe a poet just once more, I'll grow talons and claw the blurbwriter until he emits shrieks of pain that are nothing if not "honest". The way blurbwriters use the word, it becames a rank and smelly cliché, and it certainly doesn't describe John Newlove's poems in *The Cave* nearly as well as a wolf-whistle on a street corner encircles and worships a pretty girl.

Neither do Newlove's poems "speak plainly about plain themes," however much they may appear to do so. Superficially, perhaps, the human realities and politics of love are simple, but only from the outside. Newlove is inside. Take this line from *A Young Man*: "I still dream of the perfect moment occurring": then later, in the same poem: "But I saw the dead bodies / floating on the river." That kind of thinking destroys placidity and the calm surfaces of things for ever.

John Newlove has always used a stripped-down language, in which decoration played small part, and in *The Cave* this quality is even more in evidence. In earlier books there was a brooding undercurrent of domesticated despair, along with recurrent gaiety and intensity. There was self-pity and navel-watching, and nearly complete awareness of these things in himself. There was also derision at his own weakness that becomes a metamorphosed strength.

All these things are carried to a near ultimate in *The Cave,* except that I think any trace of gaiety has disappeared. Bryan McCarthy, in *Smoking the City,* dived into these blackest places of the human psyche, and has not surfaced with another book since. One might speculate that the reason for this failure is McCarthy's own failure as a writer: or else that joylessness carried to its extreme is a dead end, a blank wall confronting the mind. I hope Newlove's present attitudes do not lead to this blank wall: he is only 32 years old, and his poetry has not quite become merely bitter philosophy, if only because it has more flesh attached.

But there is also wit attached to some of Newlove's bitterness, as in *Never Mind*:

> Never mind your jealousies and leavings;
> she is beautiful and kind to you;
> if you took hers, she took your leavings.
>
> To be jealous of a loving woman for loving
> is foolishness — she'd not love you
> if she were not; and where'd your jealous
> loving
> be? These meetings and lovings and leavings
> ought to be comfort, not distress, to you.
>
> It is a greedy man who acts as you,
> one who cannot have enough of loving
> and always plans his leavings.

And what is one to make of this autobiographic fragment: "I act the part / my youth derided: half-success / in a limited circle?" I feel an odd embarrassment reading that line, and wonder if Newlove feels he is hypnotized and trapped by this "half-success" which he probably accounts failure. But I've never thought Newlove a failure, for his poems have always seemed to me to by-pass such words as failure or success. The very act of writing a poem or a novel or whatever, is an act of faith that makes whateven happens to the end-writing-product rather irrelevant when set beside the writer's own pride in his work.

Many of *The Cave* pieces are love poems, of a grinding intensity one can expect from Newlove. The themes are black, admittedly, but sometimes leavened by wit and such plays on words as the aforementioned "leavings". And there is a vision of existence in the title poem that seems to alleviate the blackness somewhat, unless this reader is deceiving himself. That poem ends:

> Beyond the planets,
> beyond the dark coffin, beyond the ring of
> stars,
> your bed is the shining tree-lit cave.

However, I remain dissatisfied with this book, despite its merits. Despair and bitterness are sometimes good material for poems; but some kind of magnificence and/or profundity has to come out of them. Poems are refracted in each case from a particular personal life, and taken in total I suppose it's possible to reconstruct that life. When the poems are one-sided, this seems to me due to the limitations of the writer — which I hope is not the case with Newlove.

A. W. PURDY

FLUID TIME

SINCLAIR ROSS, *Whir of Gold*. McClelland & Stewart. $6.50.

Whir of Gold, Sinclair Ross's third novel, is much better than his second, *The Well*, but it does not have the subtle qualities and excellent writing associated with *As For Me and My House*. It is a curiously simple story, with a conventional beginning, middle, and end, tied together by flashbacks to the youth of the hero in which he points out to us and to his girl friend why it is that he behaves as he does.

Sonny, the major character, is an ageing prairie boy living in Montreal, unable to find a job as a musician, recovering from a bad cold, and living in humble circumstances. He meets a girl from the Maritimes, Mad, and they live together for a few weeks. During this time they both recollect their youths when they wanted to make their mark on the world, Sonny as a player in a popular orchestra and Mad as the wife of someone with whom she could be happy, someone who was 'right'. The story has the usual flavour of two social misfits who get together because they need each other, because both would have been better to stay in their familiar environment rather than try to be successful in the big city. Sonny eventually is conned into a burglary by his neighbour in the rooming house in which he lives, only to be abandoned by his accomplice who takes all the money from the burglary, and to recover from a wound in his foot caused by a policeman's bullet. For all his guilt feelings and ego trips, Sonny is at times difficult to take, and Mad ends up the sympathetic character in the novel mainly because

she is so uncomplicated by life and wants merely to enjoy simple pleasures which she justly deserves.

The story is well written. Ross has a wonderful capacity for putting the right word in the right place. His usual fine descriptions of the prairies are there; his one new venture is to explain by descriptive means primary emotions. He does this very well, and his metaphors for love are well conceived and often very moving. He captures the right word for all things, creating an easy moving structure that wanders back and forth across Sonny's mind with finesse and taste; it is something that appears to be easily achieved but it is also obviously very carefully worked out. The language of *As For Me and My House* is its most compelling feature, and the same can be said of *Whir of Gold*.

Though Ross remains a careful stylist with his use of metamorphic language and his choice of diction, he has written a very simple story of two people coming together for a short moment in time, to break up their relationship as Sonny tells Mad to leave his life and to forget him. The reader knows that the relationship will end because of the general tone of sadness in the book, but he is led to expect something to happen which will make Sonny realize that Mad is the right girl for him. He doesn't, and for that reason the book is a disappointment. Not that I require a happy ending, but Mr. Ross created the desire for one. The apprehension of life produced in *Whir of Gold* is neither bold nor fresh; it is as if it had been conceived as an after-midnight story to lull the mind temporarily, but then to surprise with an unhappy ending. It is possible for writers of Mr. Ross's talent to make something serious out of an ordinary story; he has provided the ordinariness, but for some reason refuses to assume an attitude toward it beyond recognizing that ordinariness. This refusal prompts the reader to wonder whether Mr. Ross realizes how very ordinary his story is. In any event, the novel comes to life only when Sonny has been wounded and Mad takes over as the character of some strength. One wishes that she had forced Sonny to stay with her; she is capable of making something out of both of them.

This quality underlines the major characteristic of the book and tells me something quite basic about Mr. Ross as a writer: he is primarily a short story stylist. The whole concept of this novel is oriented to the form of the short story. The plot is simple, the moment is elemental, and the time is of the short, fluid moment. *Whir of Gold* could have been written in a third of the space, with the wounding of Sonny serving as the high point or climax of the story. The reader would be satisfied with an unfinished ending, where things are not resolved, because the form itself lets a writer create things that do not complete themselves. The ending that Mr. Ross has put on the novel is artificial and is really not necessary. The plot could have stopped in time, and the reader's imagination could carry the ending in any direction. But Mr. Ross does not do this, and instead, disappoints his reader. Nonetheless, the book was a pleasure to read, for Mr. Ross talks about things that do matter, that matter very much. The scene when Sonny and Mad first go to his room is particularly well done. Both of them are tentative and uneasy, partly frightened of emotion and partly searching for it, and, quietly and subtly revealed

by Ross, the whole scene is most convincing. It is moments like it that save *Whir of Gold* and that indicate Ross's greatest capacity — the fluid moment as revealed in the form of a short story. I look forward to his next book; one hopes it will be a collection of short stories.

DONALD STEPHENS

TWO LITERATURES: TWO SOLITUDES

CLEMENT MOISAN. *L'âge de la littérature canadienne.* Editions HMH.

AN IMPORTANT yet disappointing event is the publication of the first comparative history of English and French-Canadian literature, *L'âge de la littérature canadienne.* Important it is, for until now the student of Canadian literature has generally dealt only with the literature in his own language because of the difficulty of access to the literature and critical techniques of the other "solitude". This informational vacuum has been well-filled by Clément Moisan's book, for he has given detailed descriptions of the movements and critical positions prominent in Canadian letters. Thus there is now a valuable tool for the student, the general reader and particularly the foreigner interested in Canadian intellectual development. Seemingly, also, through his detailed description of the past, particularly the recent past, the author has achieved his aim of predicting the future of Canadian letters: greater exploration of the interior, a more international concern.

However, it is the generality of the survey which makes it so disappointing. For the critic interested in either or both Canadian literatures, *L'âge de la littérature canadienne* contains nothing but a collection of quotations and judgments proferred by many eminent writers in previously known works. The original contribution of the study is to proclaim that the two literatures are so closely parallel as to be one. But even this has already been stated by Ronald Sutherland, whose basic division of the two literatures (first sketched out three years ago in this journal) has been followed faithfully by Moisan. Indeed, the area in which the most fruitful exploration has only just begun, the study of the themes of the literature, its myths and those of society, has been left untouched. Happily, perhaps, as this leaves more scope for the rest of us.

In spite of the fact that Moisan's study contributes little new to our understanding of Canadian literature, and that its method and intentions resemble greatly those of the critics he feels are "déclassé" because of their interest in finding the point of true independence for these minor literatures of two great languages, it will form a very useful guide in the many undergraduate courses in comparative Canadian literature now springing up in the universities. For this reason alone, one can look forward to the translation by William Kingsley which is to appear shortly.

BARBARA THOMSON GODARD

CANADIAN LITERATURE - 1970

A CHECKLIST EDITED BY RITA BUTTERFIELD

ENGLISH-CANADIAN LITERATURE

Compiled by Rita Butterfield

COLLECTIONS

KROETSCH, ROBERT. *Creation*, by Robert Kroetsch, James Bacque and Pierre Gravel. Toronto, New Press, 1970. 213 p.

RASMUSSEN, BERYL G. *The leaves are silver.* Saskatoon, printed by Modern Press, 1970, c1969. 40 p.

RUSH, JERRY M. comp. *Solitudes; an anthology of Canadian student poetry and prose.* Richmond Hill, Ont., Scholastic Book Services, 1970. 77 p.

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BLIGQ, ANTHONY. *The rise and fall of married Charlie.* London, A. Deutsch, 1970. 281 p.

BRANDIS, MARIANNE. *This spring's sowing.* Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1970. 214 p.

BUTLER, JUAN. *Cabbagetown diary; a documentary.* Toronto, Peter Martin, 1970. 206 p.

CALLAGHAN, MORLEY. *The loved and the lost.* Toronto, Macmillan of Canada, 1970. 234 p. (Laurentian Library) (First published 1951).

CALLAGHAN, MORLEY. *Strange fugitive.* With an introduction by Robert Weaver. Edmonton, M.G. Hurtig, 1970. 266 p. (Canadian Reprint series) (First published 1928).

CHARTERS, MICHAEL. *Victor victim.* Toronto, House of Anansi, 1970. 186 p.

CLARKSON, ADRIENNE. *Hunger trace.* Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1970. 306 p.

DAVIES, ROBERTSON. *Fifth business.* Toronto, Macmillan of Canada, 1970. 314 p.

ENGEL, MARIAN. *The honeyman festival.* Toronto, House of Anansi, 1970. 131 p.

EVANS, CICELY LOUISE. *Nemesis wife.* Toronto, Doubleday Canada, 1970. 253 p.

FIELDEN, CHARLOTTE. *Crying as she ran; a novel.* Toronto, Macmillan of Canada, 1970. 224 p.

FORER, MORT. *The humback.* Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, c1969. 315 p.

FRY, ALLAN. *How a people die.* Toronto, Doubleday Canada, 1970. 167 p.

GALLANT, MAVIS. *A fairly good time.* New York, Random House, 1970. 308 p.

GARBER, LAWRENCE. *Circuit.* Toronto, House of Anansi, 1970. 196 p.

GARNER, HUGH. *A nice place to visit.* Toronto, Ryerson Press, 1970. 255 p.

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HELWIG, DAVID. *The streets of summer.* Ottawa, Oberon Press, 1970. 188 p.

HOOD, HUGH. *A game of touch.* Toronto, Longman Canada, 1970. 192 p.

IANORA, CLAUDIO. *Sint Stephen; Canada; Polyphemus' cave and the Boobieland Express.* Toronto, New Press, 1970. 124 p.

JANES, PERCY. *House of hate.* Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1970. 320 p.

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MARKOOSIE. *Harpoon of the hunter.* Illustrated by Germaine Arnaktauyok. Montreal, McGill - Queen's University Press, 1970. 81 p.

METCALF, JOHN. *The lady who sold furniture.* Toronto, Clarke Irwin, 1970. 150 p.

MOORE, BRIAN. *Fergus, a novel.* Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1970. 228 p.

OATES, JOYCE CAROL. *Them.* New York, Vanguard Press, 1969. 508 p.

OUTDOOR WRITERS OF CANADA. *Stories of the outdoors, an anthology.* Vancouver, Mitchell Press, 1970. 140 p.

PAYERLE, GEORGE. *The afterpeople.* Toronto, House of Anansi, 1970. 137 p.

RENAULT, MARY. *Fire from heaven.* Toronto, Longmans Canada, 1969. 375 p.

RIPPON, MARION. *Behold, the Druid weeps.* Toronto, Doubleday Canada, 1970. 232 p.

ROSS, SINCLAIR. *A whir of gold.* Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1970. 215 p.

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RULE, JANE. *This is not for you.* Toronto, Doubleday Canada, 1970. 284 p.

SCHWARZ, HERBERT T. *Elik and other stories.* Illustrated by Mona Ohoveluk. Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1970. 79 p.

STEVENSON, LESLIE. *Civil servant.* Ottawa, 1970. 234 p.

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TOPPING, C. W. *Jewish flower child.* Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1970. 224 p.

WEES, FRANCES SHELLEY. *The last concubine.* Toronto, Abelard-Schuman, 1970. 191 p.

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BIESSEL, HENRY. *Face on the dark.* Toronto, New Press, 1970. Unpaged.

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BLEEKS, PHILIP C. *Cinders for the eye*; mind exercise by Philip C. Bleeks. Art quickies by Arthur Horsfall. Winnipeg, printed by Baker, 1970. 56 p.

BOOTH, LUELLA. *The love poems of Luella Booth.* Fredericton, Fiddlehead Poety Books, 1970. 52 p.

BOWERING, GEORGE. *George Vancouver, a discovery poem.* Toronto, Weed/flower Press, 1970. 39 p.

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BROY, EVELYN J. *Almanac of absence.* With illustrations by Eva Janouchava. Windsor, Ont., Sumner Pub., 1969. 39 p.

BUNNER, FREDA. *Of joy and despair.* Toronto, Baxter Publ., 1969. 68 p.

CAMPBELL, A. P. *The first time I saw the sea, and other poems.* Charlottetown, St. Dunstan's University Press, 1969. 50 p.

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FETHERLING, DOUG. *My experience in the war.* Toronto, Weed/flower Press, 1970. 11 p.

FINNIGAN, JOAN. *In the brown cottage on Loughborough Lake.* Toronto, Printed for C.B.C. Learning Systems, 1970. Unpaged.

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FLANAGAN, ROBERT. *Body.* Toronto, House of Anansi, 1970. 95 p.

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FOX, GAIL. *Dangerous season.* Kingston, Ont., Quarry Press, c1969. 60 p.

FOX, GAIL. *The royal collector of dreams.* Fredericton, Fiddlehead Poetry Books, 1970. 16 p.

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GADD, MAXINE. *Hochelaga.* Vancouver, blewointment press, 1970. Unpaged.

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HOWITH, HARRY. *Fragments of the dance.* Cover and illustrations by William A. Kimber. Toronto, Village Book Store Press, 1969. 70 p.

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JULIAN, MARILYN GRACE. *Marilyn Grace Julian.* Montreal, Delta Canada, 1970. Unpaged. (Quarterback 4).

JUNGIC, ZORAN. *I will kill a purple fish for you: poems.* Vancouver, Talonbooks [1969] 36 p.

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LABUTE, DAVID. *She's sitting waiting four? the negative.* Toronto, 1970. 42 p.

LACHANCE, BERTRAND. *Eyes open.* Vancouver, blewointment press [1970?].

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MACDONALD, BERNELL. *I can really draw eagles.* Fredericton, Fiddlehead Poetry Books, 1970. 32 p.

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MAYNE, SEYMOUR. *Mouth.* Kingston, Ont., The Quarry Press, 1970. 61 p.

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NEWLOVE, JOHN. *The cave.* Toronto, McClelland & Stewart, 1970. 88 p.

NEWTON, STUART and DAVIS, IRA. *Poems, 3¢ each.* Vancouver, 1969. 17 l.

NICHOL, B. P., editor. *The cosmic chef.* Ottawa, Oberon Press, 1970. 80 p.

NICHOL, B. P. *Nights on prose mountain; some scraptures sequences.* Toronto, Ganglia, 1969. 16 p. (Gronk ser. 3, no. 6).

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PARSONS, R. A. *Interludes.* Toronto, published for the author by Ryerson Press, 1970. 81 p.

PERRO, BRUCE. *The obnoxious few.* New York, Vantage Press, 1969. 124 p.

PHILLIPS, DAVID. *Wave.* Vancouver, Talonbooks, 1970. 62 p.

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ON THE VERGE

*** WILLIAM ORMSBY. *The Emergence of the Federal Concept in Canada, 1839-1845.* Toronto, $4.75. We are inclined to think of the federal concept in Canada as an emergent of those years from 1864 to 1867 during which Confederation came into being as a political reality. In fact, it appeared as a defensive reaction against the irrational unity imposed on the two provinces of Upper and Lower Canada as a result of Lord Durham's half-visionary and half-moronic report of 1839. Dr. Ormsby here traces the emergence of the concept among both English and French speaking leaders, and suggests, if he does not state, the inevitability which it assumed because all the other alternatives were so much less desirable. It is a book that deserves better presentation. Unfortunately, while the production standards of the University of Toronto Press have in general gone far ahead (witness the superb visual look of Walter Young's *Anatomy of a Party* — noticed above), the Canadian Studies in History and Government series, to which this book belongs, form a backwater where the currents of change have not reached, and it is hard to envisage a more dully conservative format than that to which Dr. Ormsby's book is unjustly condemned.

*** JOHN G. RICKER & JOHN T. SAYWELL. *The Story of Western Man*, Clarke Irwin, $17.50. 2 vol boxed set. The first volume of this history was noted in CL 41. The complete text is now out, bringing the story to the 1960's. The text, in the second as in the first volume, is meagre, but the illustrations, once again, are astonishingly well-selected. "But to get the feel and colour of the times, rather than the musculature of events" — we repeat our past comment — "it is a book to be recommended . . . "

*** LESLIE ROBERTS. *Montreal: From Mission Colony to World City.* Macmillan, $8.95. Masquerading as local history, this book is really the product of a strongly regional sense of Canadian history. As a Montrealer, Leslie Roberts is convinced that his city is the centre of its land and of the universe its inhabitants observe, and therefore what he gives us is not the account of events in one Canadian city (though these of course play their part) but a narrative in which the whole story of the land is told as if it were observed through a long-distance telescope rotating from the summit of Mount Royal (an approach basically no different from the history seen through the telescope of the St. Lawrence Valley which is purveyed by Donald Creighton). It gives old events a new look, and as Mr. Roberts introduces enough unfamiliar facts about Montreal itself to spice the narrative, the result is a highly idiosyncratic book which I would place as the author's most readable book to date.

** WALTER TRAILL. *In Rupert's Land.* Edited by Mae Atwood. McClelland & Stewart, $7.95. To be the son of a distinguished father is a burden, hence the scarcity of second-generation geniuses. How much more to be

the son of a distinguished blue-stocking mother! Walter Traill was descended from the formidable Strickland family which contributed so much to the early literature of Canada; his mother was Catherine Parr Traill, his aunts Susanna Moodie and Agnes Strickland, his uncle Samuel Strickland, formidable and copiously published writers all of them. Small wonder that — though Walter Traill still felt the family urge to record his experiences (and interesting some of them were as a Hudson's Bay Company officer at the time of the Red River rising) — the literary fervour had diminished so far that he never sought publication, and only in his last years — six decades after the events he recorded — gave his papers to a young relative to edit and publish. His recollections are thus late in appearing; by now one has learnt from other sources most of the day-to-day details of life in the declining fur trader's west of the late 1860's, and there is really little *new* that he has to give us: little except the freshness of familiar experiences seen again through another young eye from the past.

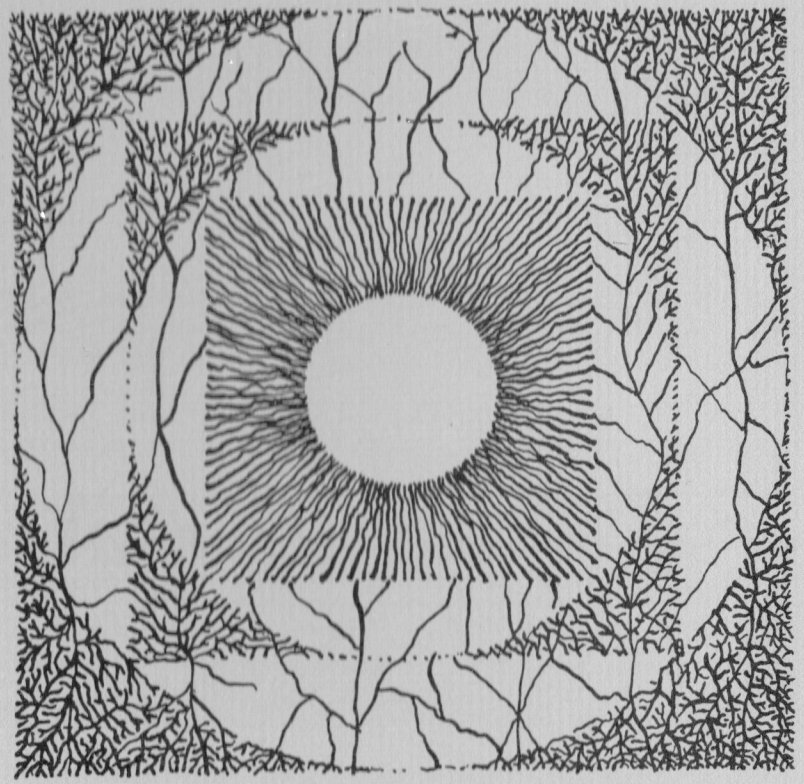
** LAMBERT DE BOILIEU. *Recollections of Labrador Life.* Edited by Thomas F. Bredin. Ryerson, $5.95. Pretentiously introduced, this is the unassuming narrative of a young Englishman who for five years in the 1850's managed a trading and fishery post on the shores of Labrador. There are adventures — some dangerous — but the most appealing aspects of *Recollections* are provided by the details of Labrador daily life more than a century ago, told with a kind of lucid candour of which the mass media have robbed the ordinary man today. For Lambert de Boilieu was essentially an ordinary man, and in his revelation of the normal existence of fishermen, Indians and Eskimos in Labrador of the past lies the main justification for reprinting this interesting but most undramatic book.

** SIR FRANCIS BOND HEAD. *A Narrative.* With notes by William Lyon Mackenzie and edited by S. F. Wise. McClelland & Stewart, Carleton Library, $3.35. Sir Francis Bond Head, Lieutenant-Governor of Upper Canada from 1835 to 1838, was a richly eccentric Victorian man of letters, and perhaps the strangest of many odd figures chosen to represent the Imperial Majesty in Canada. His strangeness — disastrous administratively — gave colour to his travel narratives, notably *Rough Notes Taken During Some Rapid Journeys Across the Pampas and Among the Andes* (1828) and *Bubbles from the Brunnens of Nassau* (1866), but the tasks of government shrivelled Head's literary as they did his political abilities, and *A Narrative* is interesting chiefly for its revelation of two rival paranoias — that of Head convinced that William Lyon Mackenzie was his evil genius, and that of Mackenzie — in his hurried notes to the *Narrative* — obviously convinced of the reverse. A document which reveals how curious — beneath its deceptive carapace of greyness — Canadian history can so often be.

** MARTIN ROBIN. *Radical Politics and Canadian Labour, 1880-1930.* Industrial Relations Centre, Queen's University, $7.95. A useful account of the relationship between the labour movement and radical politics in Canada between the early years of trade unionism and the onset of the Depression. Professor Robin moves with assurance in a field as yet little written of in Canada, and his book is a useful — if stylistically rather graceless — contribution to the socio-political history of our country.

* MICHAEL FILEY. *Toronto: Glimpses of the City that Was.* University of Toronto Press, $7.95. An album of old photographs of Toronto, from the early 1860's, gathered from the collection of Michael Filey. Historically mildly interesting; many of them, for example, provide good visual background for Callaghan's early novels. But aesthetically they suffer from the civic ugliness out of which Toronto is only now emerging.

* PAUL NANTON. *Arctic Breakthrough: Franklin's Expeditions 1819-1847.* Clark Irwin, $6.50. It is hard to know whether to class this piece of bookmaking as a reprint or an original work, for it is essentially a paraphrase, with lengthy quotations from the original, of the records Franklin published of his first two expeditions. As the narrative of the 1819-22 expedition was republished in its entirety last year, and the narrative of the second will follow shortly, Mr. Nanton's labour of retelling seems superfluous, since he adds no important thoughts of his own, and does not even trouble to note how, in Franklin's own accounts of his early journeys, one sees the inflexibility of mind that was largely responsible for his eventual tragedy — a real tragedy of pride. To the third expedition and the searches for Franklin, with their extraordinary results in terms of discovery, a meagre twenty pages are devoted.



THE GREAT BEAR LAKE MEDITATIONS No. 13

Legend: The god in the sun
Made two men. In the hands of one
He placed a book. An axe
He handed the other.

Decree: In search of one another
They shall circle the earth forever.

Curse: May you walk upwind
All of your days.

Act: The left hand
Looses memory of the right.
Neither blade nor word gives
The feel of gods at this
Long high noon of the night.
The wind, like consciousness,
Appears only in other things.

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