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CANADIAN LITERATURE No. 49

Summer, 1971

VIEWS OF NOVELISTS

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Chronicle

BY MARGARET ATWOOD

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CRITICISM AND REVIEW

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editorial

CRITICISM AND OTHER ARTS

THERE HAS LONG SEEMED a division between the journeyman critic — the public critic as Northrop Frye calls him in his formidable masterpiece *Anatomy of Criticism* — and the academic critic. The academic critic is always tempted to analyse the work of literature as if it existed *in vacuo*, apart from life; this inclination was particularly strong among the New Critics who until recently were so influential in our universities and who regarded the author's life and even his intentions in writing a poem or a book as irrelevant to the close, enrapt study of the text itself. Frye's public critic, on the other hand, is more inclined to see the work in total context, relating it not only to the man who makes it, but also to the public that reads it.

On this subject let me continue by quoting Frye, writing in *Anatomy of Criticism* as one of Anglosaxony's leading academic critics:

It is the task of the public critic to exemplify how a man of taste uses and evaluates literature and thus show how literature is to be absorbed into society. . . . He has picked up his ideas from a pragmatic study of literature and does not create or enter into a literary structure.

This would be a fair portrait of such excellent practicing critics as Edmund Wilson and V. S. Pritchett, and I would ask for no better description of the course which I myself have followed. But Frye has always seemed to stand in awesome separation from such lowly practices, and I know "public critics" who regard him as The Enemy personified and see, in the formidable intellectual edifice he has built up to contain and categorize literature, a veritable palace of pedantry. Fortunately, as I shall suggest, Frye's architecture is not as consistent as it may seem.

In one of the two books which Frye has recently published almost simultaneously (*The Stubborn Structure: Essays in Criticism and Society*, Cornell University Press, \$8.50) he shows himself in his customary guise as the academic, the critic whose relationship to literature is essentially that of the Mandarin. It is characteristic of Mandarins that they seek precedent, of Mandarin critics that they operate by afterthought; Mandarin criticism considers literature after it has happened, as a phenomenon already frozen into the past. (In *Anatomy of Criticism* I found references — and usually unimportant ones at that — to only eleven poets living at the time the book was written, and all of them were poets with reputations formed a generation before.) Though Frye has disputed the “aesthetic view of the work of art as an object of contemplation” (see Herbert Read’s *Poetry and Experience* for an effective counter-argument) he does tend nevertheless — in his academic persona — to observe the works of the past in detachment, and therefore as objects, even though he may view them in contexts whose historical, ethical, archetypal or rhetorical nature is stressed. The main difference here between Frye and the aesthetic critic is that Frye goes a stage beyond contemplating the object; he creates for contemplation a critical *œuvre* that is as complexly structured and as filled with allusive resonances as any poem: it is an object in itself. I have long ceased to view the *Anatomy of Criticism* as a handbook of real practical value to the critic. It is, rather, a great and intricate edifice of theory and myth whose true purpose is its own existence; it has the same ultimate effect as buildings like Angkor Wat or the Sainte Chapelle, which were built to exemplify religious truths and which survive, when their message is forgotten or derided, as objects whose sole meaning to modern man lies in their beauty. Though I am sure Frye would shudder at the company I here make him keep, he has exemplified more effectively than Wilde himself the latter’s argument that criticism is primarily a creative process, leaving its masterpieces to impress and to move by their skill and grandeur long after their subjects have ceased to interest us.

The Stubborn Structure, for the most part, shows this critic-creator Frye, this maker of myths for his readers to discover, at somewhat playful work. The essays of which it consists were either presented as papers at academic conferences or published in scholarly journals. They fall into two categories. The first is the kind of general and rather abstract measure which is stepped out in those solemn dances where academics show their parts by taking set subjects and elaborating elegantly upon them. Frye is a past master at this kind of conferential entertainment, but I confess that I find these tribal exercises as tedious to read as to attend.

There are undoubtedly profound and provocative thoughts embedded in such papers as "Elementary Teaching and Elemental Scholarship" and "On Value Judgments" (especially indeed in the latter piece), but I confess preferring to search out my diamonds at muddier levels, nearer to life or, for that matter, nearer to literature as a direct and particular experience.

One is admittedly closer to living literature in the later essays of *The Stubborn Structure*, which Frye collectively entitles "Applications", and which deal with aspects of Blake, Milton, Dickens, Arnold, Yeats, literary utopias, etc. Yet it is in these essays that one learns just how *stubborn* Frye's structures may be, even though they are elaborated with the ease and lightness of a spider constructing its web, so that it is not until the essay ends with some final sentence which completes the pattern (e.g. "Just as in Eliot's 'Burnt Norton' the summit of vision and the depth of annihilation are the same point, the still point of the turning world, so in Yeats the top of the tower is both the rag-and-bone shop of the heart and the translunar Paradise that the heart alone has created.") that we realize we have been trapped by threads of what seems to be gleaming gossamer and absorbed mentally into a structure of invisible adamant.

In such categorizing criticism, no matter how faithfully the glitter of its constructions creates an illusion of movement and vitality, literature "lives" rather as it does in a museum of natural history — the specimens superbly stuffed and classified, arranged in attractive displays and fitted into families and genres. But birds in real flight? Never. For that one needs the field naturalist, the man who follows literature as it appears, who submits himself to the biographical heresy and the intentional heresy and the aesthetic heresy and by all these and any other means seeks to stimulate his empathetic understanding of the work. In other words, not the Mandarin, not the academic critic, not the structuralist with his beautiful webs and mind-made palaces, but our humble servant, the public critic.

We no sooner voice that need, in terms of literature in Canada, than the man himself appears at our elbow, Northrop Frye, critic for all seasons, appearing now in a guise that should dismiss all apprehensions of unregenerate pedantry. For in *The Bush Garden* (Anansi, \$7.50), Frye's second book of the year, he presents himself as nothing more formidable than an astute and rather genial public critic. In the intervals of building critical cathedrals and pursuing myths to inhabit them, of cogitating brilliantly on Blake and Shakespeare and Milton, Frye has not neglected the literature of his own country, and *The Bush Garden* is a collection of the essays and reviews he has written over the past quarter of a century on Canadian writers and writing.

The first half of the book contains what Frye wishes to preserve as the best portions of the annual surveys of Canadian poetry which he contributed to the *University of Toronto Quarterly* between 1950 and 1959, a brilliant ten years' examination of whatever was new in one of Canada's most vital poetic decades. The rest is made up of miscellaneous articles on Canadian writers and painters; it ends with the powerful analytical survey of the relations between literature and society in Canada since colonial times which Frye wrote originally as the Conclusion to the *Literary History of Canada*. (The same essay makes a somewhat incongruous appearance at the end of *The Stubborn Structure*, with the avowed intent of showing to the alien scholar "a glimpse of a new imaginative landscape which is still relevant to his own".)

As one reads these essays, with a growing awareness of Frye's sensitivity to the developing progress of writing in Canada, it becomes evident that he is indeed fulfilling all but one of the specifications which he himself laid down for the public critic in the *Anatomy of Criticism*. He shows how a man of taste "uses . . . literature". He shows how literature is absorbed into society; he goes further and shows how it emerges from society.

The one thing he refuses to do is evaluate, to assess and compare degrees of "greatness", and here, by applying what to him is a necessary rule for the academic critic, he is in fact showing himself an effective public critic in peculiarly Canadian terms. For in practice the exercise of evaluating books, of comparing them with the best the language has produced, must always be a hopeless task in a country like Canada whose literature is young and still in the process of formation. To use Frye's own pungent phrase: "If evaluation is one's guiding principle, criticisms of Canadian literature would become only a debunking project. . . ." But if Frye's critical conscience and — I suspect — his personal kindness, debar him from debunking, they also debar him from the kind of idiotic inflation of the claims of Canadian writing which has so often marred what in this country passes for criticism. He does not seek greatness or futility in a work, for these, it seems to him, are irrelevant to the central task of finding what the writer has sought to do and discussing how well he has done it.

In a situation like that in Canada, the critic's role is to act as the mediator between the writer and society, and this idea Frye is constantly reiterating in his notes on specific Canadian writers. Contrary to the legends which have credited him with being the spiritual father of a whole school of myth-obsessed poets, Frye claims that critical encouragement cannot bring a literature into being. But it can help to keep it going once it exists, and the poet can best be served by judging his

work according to the standards that are proper to it. Apart from the personal elements, including intention, these standards will inevitably be conditioned by the time and place in which the work is produced, by the ambience considered in historic and geographic terms as well as by the universal archetypal base, and out of all these things combined comes uniqueness where it is made manifest. For such reasons Frye has carefully avoided the comparative approach in dealing with Canadian writers. "I have considered the question carefully, and my decision, while it may have been wrong, was deliberate. I have for the most part discussed Canadian poets as though no other contemporary poetry was available to Canadian readers."

I do not wholly agree with Frye on this point. I grant that the writing of any country and even of any region has to be considered first of all in the context of the local culture within which it emerges. It is as much part of that particular ecosystem as the heron is part of the ecosystem of the marsh where it hunts and lives. But herons in all marshes share a common nature outside local systems, and in the same way poets exist within the larger unity that a language creates. We cannot stop influences from Britain, France and the United States crossing the oceans and the borders, and we cannot avoid seeing Canadian writing in relation to other writing in English or French, even if we may legitimately avoid the kind of pointless comparisons that might attempt to pit Earle Birney against Shakespeare or Leonard Cohen against Keats.

But it is the critic's practice rather than his theories that shows the sensitivity to the nuances of writing which is his one indispensable possession, and here we need have no doubt of Frye's validity as a public critic. I could quote for pages the clear, condensed passages in which he records his penetrating insights into the virtues (rarely the vices) of a generation of Canadian poets, but they are much better read in context. Many academic critics are like laboratory scientists, not much good in the field, as I have painfully learnt in editing this journal; in *The Bush Garden* Frye shows himself as good a field critic as he is a theoretical one. He recognizes the splendour of the bird on the wing as surely as he describes its anatomy in the lecture hall.

IN A RECENT ISSUE OF *Canadian Literature*, devoted to the frontiers where writing encounters and interpenetrates its fellow arts, Peter Stevens wrote on artists who had also been writers, and the first he mentioned was Paul Kane. Interest in Kane has revived recently with the upsurge of nationalist emo-

tions, and it is a versatile and historically timely talent that has been resurrected. Recently Mel Hurtig published a facsimile reprint of Kane's *Wanderings of an Artist Among the Indians of North America*, and that was a memorable enough event. Yet to read Kane's narrative without his paintings and sketches is rather like hearing the sound of a film one cannot see, for a visual record of the Indian cultures of the West was Kane's prime intent and in that his main achievement rests. Now J. Russell Harper, author of *Painting In Canada*, has given us, so to speak, the film complete.

In *Paul Kane's Frontier*, a massive volume published by the University of Toronto Press at \$27.50 and not dear at the price, Harper has not merely presented us the *Wanderings of an Artist* in full; he has illustrated it with 48 finely coloured plates and 205 black-and-white reproductions, which take one beyond the smooth surfaces of Kane's studio paintings to the hurried vividness of the sketches made on the journey and now published in unprecedented fulness. There is a *catalogue raisonné* of all Kane's known works, an appendix containing the few letters and documents relating to him that have survived, and a first-rate biographical introduction by Harper, who prepared himself for his task with characteristic thoroughness; he followed mile by mile the journey which Kane took in the 1840s from Toronto across the prairies to Oregon and New Caledonia. Here, for the first time, is Kane complete, a better artist than his well-known studio paintings had led one to believe, and a superb chronicler whose total achievement in recording the life of native Canada in its last flourishing provides a quite unique document of our past.

Two other painters, both very different from Kane, are the subjects of current books that span the arts. Robert Harris, the Prince Edward Island portraitist, is best known for a painting that no longer exists, his vast canvas of the Fathers of Confederation. In his time Harris was a successful academic painter, and some of his portraits and of his genre paintings (such as *A Meeting of the School Trustees*) have their interest as documents of social history. Undoubtedly he was a better studio painter than Kane, but delicate health and lack of enterprise kept him in the eastern cities, with France and England his artistic hinterland, and nothing he produced has the direct and urgent voice of Kane's sketches made in smoky Indian dwellings of the Canadian west. Yet Moncrieff Williamson's *Robert Harris, 1849-1919* (McClelland & Stewart) has turned out to be an unexpectedly interesting as well as a competent biography, drawing interest out of its subject by relinquishing any attempt to exaggerate Harris's importance as an artist and by reconstructing instead, from his letters and the other documents of

his life, an absorbing and at times amusing picture of the existence of a fashionable painter in Canada of the Confederation era. It is not art history, but it is social history, and Harris, a bore on canvas, comes alive as a craftsman observed in the act of creating and sustaining his position in a Philistine world.

It would be hard to conceive two men more different, as personalities or artists, than mild, conforming Robert Harris, and that formidable rebel, Wyndham Lewis, with his life of warfare against all men in the name of art, and his ambiguous Canadian links. Regarded by T. S. Eliot as the finest prose writer of his time, regarded by many others as the most remarkable modern English painter, Lewis balanced his massive satirical novels by formidable works of criticism in both the literary and the visual arts. It may be presumptuous for Canadians to claim Lewis, whom we treated shabbily when he lived among us, but he wrote here and painted here, and it would be pointless to deny a special interest in the creator of the best paintings commissioned by the Canadian government in two world wars and the author of that novel which so mercilessly flays us, *Self Condemned*. For long both Lewis's paintings and his writings on art have remained scattered; it has been impossible even to guess the totality of his achievement. Now two most important books, which complement each other, have appeared. They will be reviewed fully in a later issue of *Canadian Literature*, but I would like to note them now as further landmarks in defining the borderland where literature comes together with the visual arts. *Wyndham Lewis: Drawings and Paintings*, a splendid treatise on Lewis's work written by Walter Michel, introduced by the Canadian scholar Hugh Kenner and illustrated by an unprecedentedly rich selection of almost 800 reproductions of Lewis paintings and drawings, with a full catalogue, is being published by the University of California Press (McClelland & Stewart in Canada). Its companion volume is *Wyndham Lewis on Art: Collected Writings 1913-1956*, edited by Walter Michel in collaboration with C. J. Fox, a contributor to *Canadian Literature*. Together the two books present, in a completeness unseen before, Lewis the painter and Lewis the philosopher of painting.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

GROVE AND THE PROMISED LAND

Stanley E. McMullin

SINCE FREDERICK PHILIP GROVE had been writing for thirty years before he sold a book, the chronology of his novels is hard to establish. *A Search For America*, the first book conceived, was the fourth book published. In the thirty-five years between its birth and its publication the book was revised at least seven times. Many of his other books underwent extensive revision. *Settlers of the Marsh* was cut by a third from its original form as a trilogy called "Pioneers". That trilogy began to take shape in Grove's mind in 1917 and by 1923 he had completed the final version. Upon being informed that "no book of that kind stood a chance in Canada" he reduced the three volumes to one, which was published in 1925. In 1920, Grove tells us that he "simultaneously . . . re-sketched and largely rewrote . . . four other books."¹ These books were *The Turn of the Year*, "Adolescence" (later published as *The Yoke of Life*), *Our Daily Bread* and "Pioneers". *Fruits of the Earth* took forty years to take its final shape, going back to 1894 when Grove met a man who became a prototype for Abe Spalding. *The Master of the Mill* was conceived much earlier than its publication date. In 1928 Grove made an exhaustive examination of the flour-milling industry. In 1934 he accepted advance royalties from J. M. Dent and Sons for the book which he thought would be published in the spring of 1935. When *Over Prairie Trails* was accepted in 1922, Grove explained that he had a number of manuscripts on hand, enough to supply the trade with one a year for some time. The point of this discussion is that the publication dates of Grove's novels have little bearing on when they were conceived or written, and it is almost impossible to establish a

true chronology based on Grove's own evidence. In many cases it seems that they were being written concurrently. In this essay I will impose my own chronology based on a thematic examination of the novels. Grove was interested in the nature of life in America. He came in search of a Promised Land and remained to help chart the complexities of the life he found.

In his use of this Promised Land motif, Grove was articulating an essential myth of North American culture. Professor Frye has suggested that literature is "conscious mythology". He expands the point:

As society develops, its mystical stories become structural principles of story-telling, its mythical concepts, sun gods and the like, become habits of metaphorical thought. In a fully mature literary tradition the writer enters into a structure of traditional stories and images.²

In his use of the Promised Land myth, Grove was employing a story which has always had relevance to North American society. From the beginning the New World was viewed as a Land of Promise. Perhaps the first version was reflected by the Spanish Conquistadors who left Spain to find their fortunes in the new land. They accepted native mythology about the existence of great wealth and set out to find the "Seven Cities of Gold", the lost city of Cibola, the wondrous fountain of youth. While these lost cities were never found, the Conquistadors did locate Aztec and Inca gold and the New World fulfilled the promise of wealth. Once the metaphorical "milk and honey" was found, the procedure was to return to Europe and rejoin the society from which they had been barred for lack of means. The New World was a place where one could "make his pile" and then return to the more desirable milieu of upper class life in Europe. This view of the Promised Land has endured and it is still not uncommon for Europeans to come to America with the dream of refurbishing a failing fortune.

In Canada and the United States, the promise of quick wealth was provided by the fur trade, plantation crops, fisheries, timber and other raw materials. Thus the first vision of the Promised Land was basically economic in nature. The vision of the Promised Land as a "new Canaan", a place where the new covenant could be fulfilled, developed with the growth of immigration. The immigrant was attracted by the tales of the abundance of the new land. The lower-class immigrants were, like the children of Israel, living under severe conditions in their native lands. They were prey to a variety of tyrannies: conscription, unemployment, low wages, loss of farm land, religious prejudice, depression, famine, population explosion and the ills of industrialization. The New World promised a new

life free of the evils of a constricting society, a new chance to achieve salvation. It was the Promised Land of Moses reaffirmed in the New World.

IN 1892, WHEN Frederick Philip Grove arrived in America, the debate over the future of the Promised Land was being conducted by those who favoured agrarian life against those who felt that the new covenant could best be achieved through the advances of an industrial society. Grove felt that the industrial vision provided the least opportunity for man to find his soul. In his work he set out to explore the nature of the Promised Land, and his novels reveal the complexity of his reading of the myth.

In the United States, the period from the end of the Indian wars to 1890 was one of western expansion. Those who rejected a commercial vision of the Promised Land could still head out to the western frontier where free land was available. By 1890, however, settlement had progressed to the point where the Superintendent of the Census acknowledged that "the unsettled area has been so broken into by isolated bodies of settlement that there can hardly be said to be a frontier line".³ The New World was slowly filling up and a dream of a new kind of Promised Land was usurping the old. While the first dream was still basically oriented around life on the land, the ultimate fruits of the new vision were to be achieved through industrial revolution. The nature of the dream was still essentially religious in its overtones, although the symbolism had changed from the agrarian to the mechanical. The machine was the new Messiah come among men to lead them to a new salvation in the industrial cities of America. The industrial society provided Grove with little substance for his soul, and soon after his arrival he became aware of the inherent flaws in the materially oriented life lived in the cities. His experiences with "getting the best" of the other fellow caused him to question the values of American society. He set out to discover the America of Lincoln and Thoreau and spent the best part of twenty years in agrarian surroundings. He summed up his feelings about the industrial society in an essay published in 1929:

An industrial society means . . . the reorientation of the immigrants' minds towards a religion, if we may call it such, whose god is a jealous god because he denies the human soul the soil in which it can grow according to laws of its own, his name being a Standard of Living; toward a law which bows before economic obesity; toward aims which exhaust themselves in sensual enjoyment and the so-called

conquest of nature. These things have become tools devised by a new, a nascent plutocracy for the enslavement of the mind and the spirit.⁴

Grove very early identified the conflict between the two visions of the Promised Land. In his fiction he set out to explore the implications of this conflict, and his novels reveal his deep understanding of the problems involved. He explored the imaginative force of North American culture and gave it structure.

The motif made its first appearance in *A Search for America* where it had strong autobiographical overtones. The motif which grew out of Grove's own search for a Promised Land was successfully transferred to a fable in the later novels. Briefly stated, the motif starts with a geographical search for a Promised Land where the individual soul can grow according to its own innate rules, but it ultimately becomes a striving for an ideal existence beyond physical environments: the Promised Land vision becomes an unattainable ideal luring men on to a new and better life. Grove expands the point in *A Search for America*:

When I came from Europe, I came as an individual; when I settled down in America, at the end of my wanderings, I was a social man. My view of life . . . had been in Europe, historical; it had become in America, ethical. We come indeed from Hell and climb to Heaven; the Golden Age stands at the never attainable end of history, not at man's origins. Every step forward is bound to be a compromise; right and wrong are inescapably mixed; the best we can hope for is to make right prevail more and more; to reduce wrong to a smaller and smaller fraction of the whole till it reaches the vanishing point. Europe regards the past; America the future. America is an ideal and as such has to be striven for; it has to be realized in partial victories.⁵

Fruits of the Earth and *Settlers of the Marsh* are novels concerned with the taming of the land. Abe Spalding and Niels Lindstedt are economic pioneers, striving to exist in an environment already tainted with the excesses of an industrial society. Grove was well aware that it was no longer possible to escape from the influences of technology, and in his novels his heroes face the problem of living a life based on essentials in an environment bombarded by non-essential materialism. For my purposes, I will refer to these men as pioneers of the first generation. They are the starting point for Grove's investigations.

The next pair of novels, *Our Daily Bread* and *Two Generations*, deal with the conflict between the first generation and the second. In *Settlers of the Marsh*, Niels Lindstedt is concerned with the problem of continuity between generations. He feels his destiny is to set down roots in the new world by engendering a family, and he and Ellen go forward at the end of that novel to fulfil that goal. The

continuance of life is necessary for the preservation of the Promised Land dream. In *Our Daily Bread* and *Two Generations*, the continuance of life has been assured. Both John Elliot and Ralph Patterson have produced offspring to carry on after them. In these novels Grove examined the problem of transferring individual visions from father to children.

In these two sets of novels the setting is becoming more and more involved with the problems of materialism. In *The Yoke of Life*, Grove deals with a hero from the second generation. He examines the impact of industrial society upon a young and intuitively sensitive farm boy. Len Sterner is a misfit, unable to cope with either the land or the city. He moves through both, finally rejecting each and returning to the wilderness to die.

The Master of the Mill, is wholly concerned with life in the industrial society. Here Grove traces the lives of three generations of men operating in the technological milieu. The novel projects Grove's views into the future of North American society. In this book he considers the question of whether the covenant of the Promised Land could be obtained in the here and now, as the disciples of industrialism were predicting. This novel is the logical conclusion to a series of novels which start with a consideration of the first generation, then move to the second generation's conflict with the first, then to a study of the second generation alone, finally projecting a vision into the future generations. I suggest that an examination of Grove's total vision of life in America within the framework of this chronology gives new insight into his function as a spokesman for North American society. Considered in this order, each novel gains in impact as it is viewed as a part of a larger scheme.

Having examined the seven novels of Frederick Philip Grove according to the above chronology, we may offer some conclusions about Grove's use of the Promised Land motif.

THERE IS LITTLE DOUBT that Grove was influenced by two archetypal figures: Moses and Prometheus. Both displayed, for Grove, man's essentially tragic nature: both are embarked on hopeless struggles against forces they do not understand, knowing they will fail. Each is content to carry the banner for future generations. Moses especially was an important figure in Grove's imagination. Moses knew that the Children of Israel would go on to achieve the Promised Land. He could acquiesce in the knowledge that ultimately his people

would enjoy a success he would not live to see. Like Moses, Grove's heroes have epic stature; they are larger than life. Like Moses they are the leaders in the community. Moses never reached the Promised Land because he was human; he had the human flaw of egotism. Grove's characters suffer from the same fault. Abe Spalding and Niels Lindstedt had to learn to identify themselves with all that was not "I". Abe had to realize that no personal victory was possible in the battle against the forces in the universe which were trying to overcome him. He had to accept the fact that victory came collectively through the continued battle fought by many men through the ages. Niels had to learn that he could not exist in a meaningful way in isolation. He had to learn to live as a social man before his dream of life in the Promised Land had validity. In *Our Daily Bread* and *Two Generations* a similar type of egotism is encountered. The first generation must learn to accept the fact that their personal visions of life are not going to be those of their children. John Elliot must learn to accept the fact that he will never have his children living around him like the patriarchs of old. Ralph Patterson must learn to allow his children to work out their own destinies. Each man makes the mistake of living his life through his children, by this means robbing himself of personal fulfilment. Len Sterner is guilty of moral egotism. He isolates himself from other men with the idea that he is morally superior to them. Edmund Clark is guilty of attempting to change the course of world history single-handedly. He refuses to become a social man; he refuses to give birth to future generations who might carry on the chore he has set out to accomplish. Both Len Sterner and Edmund Clark die with no hope for any continuance of their lives. Each has denied life to future generations.

Central to the Promised Land motif is the importance of land itself. The Children of Israel are in search of a land of milk and honey where a spiritual life based on the essentials is possible. Grove's characters are involved with the land as well. Grove himself was strongly influenced by landscape which was flat, unrelieved, uncomplicated and vaguely menacing. He felt most at home on the prairies and the sea. On these flat expanses, man's contest with nature is reduced to a basic equation: horizontal nature and vertical man. Such landscape helps to simplify life, reducing it to fundamentals. In such a setting it is easier to find the essentials of life; to weed out the non-essentials. Phil Branden goes in search of the real America, and in the early stages of the book his search is geographical. Abe Spalding is looking for land upon which he can carve his own history. Niels Lindstedt comes from Sweden to the land of a million farmsteads. For John Elliot there is no other occupation than tilling the soil. The same holds true for Ralph

Patterson. Len Sterner finally is forced to escape to the wilderness in his search for insight. Only the Clarks in *The Master of the Mill* do not reflect a strong affinity to land, though even in that book, Sam Clark becomes a student of botany, creating world-famous gardens on his estate. The mill itself is the link, concerned as it is with converting wheat into man's daily bread.

Most of Grove's characters require the solace of landscape. They must make the symbolic trip to the wilderness to listen for truth. Under its influence they become intuitively aware of the value of their own souls. Phil Branden was the first to go into the wilderness in the search for personal equilibrium. Len Sterner also makes his last trip into the wilds in search of truth. Phil and Alice Patterson experience transcendent feelings from nature while working at the "Sleepy Hollow" farm. The wilderness strips man of his conventions and enables him to see into his essential humanity.

While the land fosters the intuitive process which makes people aware that they have souls, it does not act as a deterministic force. Rather it works as a catalyst, causing spiritual development without becoming actively involved in the process. If Grove believed in any kind of determinism it was a psychological determinism. "We are what we are." The individual must work out his own destiny in the search for the Promised Land. That destiny is fixed like the image on an undeveloped photographic plate. Life is the developing agent which produces a visible image. Thus man's reaction to life determines whether his destiny will be fulfilled. Central to fulfilment is awareness of soul. Awareness of soul is the ability to identify with all that is outside of self, with all that is not "I". The Promised Land becomes an ideal of what life could be for mankind if all men had awareness of soul. Grove states that the Golden Age lies at the never attainable end of history. We can approach closer and closer to that Promised Land as more and more good prevails through the efforts of an increasing number of aware people, but we can never fully achieve complete realization.

The realization of a goal spells the end of its value as an inspirational force. Grove believed that if God were known he would be dead. From this view Grove developed a paradox basic to his vision of life. Man must have a goal in life to give his existence meaning; he must have a destiny to fulfil. But the completion of that goal or destiny spells spiritual death. Edmund Clark points out that every culture is born with the seeds of death in it. So every man's creative life spawns its own destruction. For the pioneer this paradox works out in the taming of the land. When he has successfully cleared and tamed the land he has removed the very impetus which gives his life meaning and he finds himself unable to enjoy

the fruits of his labour. The industrialist, fighting to free man from the necessity of working — when and if he accomplishes this aim — will also destroy the very drive which gives him life. In terms of love, if the complete union of personalities were accomplished, the act would destroy the individual longing which fed the love in the first place. It is always, in Grove's world, the striving for a goal that is most significant. Thus it becomes imperative that man choose a goal which will be beyond his abilities to achieve. The battle for the realization of the Promised Land is such a goal.

There is a basic dichotomy in Grove's vision of life. On one hand he saw that man remains today what he was in the time of Moses. The essentials of life never change. Opposed to, and separate from, this essential nature of man lies man's history. Man's nature is timeless; man's cultural experience is within time. Man's history tends to be cyclic, with cultures rising and falling. Each culture is an attempt to realize the Promised Land; each culture gains its impetus through revolution. It finds the old culture stultifying and degenerate. Revolution is necessary to break from the old conventions. The new society, however, never manages to carry its revolution through to its logical conclusions. Man becomes frightened of the implications of his revolution and turns reactionary, reverting eventually to the same state from which he had originally revolted. If a revolution could work out to its logical conclusion the Promised Land might be obtainable. Man's history then would become part of that timeless force of nature; his revolution would become evolution. While it is the nature of cultures to follow a circular route, Grove did acknowledge the existence of progress. He saw the circular motion in terms of a wheel. While a point on the wheel always returns to the same point on the circumference as the wheel revolves, at the same time the wheel moves ahead. This slow, spiralling progress comes as man learns more about himself and his relationship to others around him.

Just as revolution is necessary in the overthrow of societies, it is also a fact of family life. Children, faced with parents who insist upon forcing their own visions of life on them, must rebel in order to insure the right of fulfilling their own destinies. Fundamental to this conflict is the role of the wife and mother. Grove places the responsibility for maintaining continuity between the generations firmly on the shoulders of the woman. It is her job to mediate between the father and his children. In the novels where there is no mediating mother, rebellion is guaranteed. Such is the case in *Our Daily Bread* and *The Master of the Mill*. Where a mother is available, compromise is often achieved. *Two Generations* is the best example of this. Grove holds that life proceeds by compromises only.

Compromise is the mark of a man who can over-rule his own egotism and identify himself with others. This emphasis on man as a social creature is important to Grove. Commitment to the service of mankind is basic to his view of life. In *A Search for America*, Phil Branden goes forth to assist fellow immigrants. Abe Spalding commits himself to public service in his district. Niels Lindstedt must learn to live as a social man. The two Clarks, Sam and Edmund, have idealistic visions of freeing man from toil by supplying them with their daily bread. Grove himself lived a life of commitment to mankind. He taught, often using his own funds to establish classes and equip laboratories. In 1943 he ran for the Ontario legislature as a C.C.F. candidate.⁶ His aim as a writer reflects his desire to serve mankind:

I, the cosmopolitan, fitted myself to be the spokesman of a race — not necessarily a race in the ethnographic sense; in fact not at all in that sense; rather in the sense of a stratum of society which cross-sectioned all races, consisting of those who, in no matter what climate, at no matter what time, feel the impulse of starting anew from the ground up, to fashion a new world which might serve as the breeding place of a civilization to come.⁷

There is a strong stoic influence in Grove's vision of life. He stresses the necessity of living in the present rather than in the past or future. He emphasizes stoic endurance in the face of ultimate failure, seeing this as the heroic stature of mankind. Those characters who live in either the future or the past find their lives slipping by un-lived. Abe Spalding experiences this problem. He lives for a future of materialistic success and finds that he has never known his own family. Sam Clark, on the other hand, is bound to the past, shackled by his father's unscrupulous practices. Each day must be lived as it comes. Grove's ideal is a life based on the essentials; on the raising of families, the growing of food, on an awareness of the fellowship of man. The city, for the most part, does not promote this kind of life. There one can become lost in the rush to acquire the spoils of an industrial society. Life becomes a continual race to acquire material goods which once acquired, quickly lose their novelty. The arts, Grove suggests, are eternal. Great music, art, or literature never lose their novelty: they remain fresh and significant. Grove feels that the fundamental function of art is to lead man into the recesses of his own soul. Materialism cannot offer any solace to the soul.

For Grove, the conception of the Promised Land begins as a geographical search for landscape which will allow his soul to grow according to its own innate rules. North America offered him that environment but he learned that the Promised Land was really an unattainable ideal, yet an ideal which all men could

strive to achieve. In *The Master of the Mill* he raises the question as to whether that ideal could be achieved through the Industrial Revolution: he replies in the negative. The ideal must prevail as a vision to spur men on to a better life. Each generation will advance its own conclusions about the nature of the Promised Land, and it will matter little that their observations are at odds with earlier or later generations. The fundamentals of life will remain constant, even though individual visions change. There will be progress; men will gradually become more and more aware of their own souls; the Promised Land will draw closer. Its final attainment will mark the end of history.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ Frederick Philip Grove, *In Search of Myself* (Toronto, 1946), p. 351-52.
- ² Northrop Frye, *The Literary History of Canada* (Toronto, 1965), p. 836.
- ³ Quoted by Frederick Jackson Turner, "The Significance of the Frontier in American History," *The Turner Thesis Concerning the Role of the Frontier in American History*, ed. George Taylor (Boston, 1956), p. 1.
- ⁴ Frederick Philip Grove, *It Needs To Be Said* (Toronto, 1929), p. 145.
- ⁵ Frederick Philip Grove, *A Search For America* (Ottawa, 1927), p. 436.
- ⁶ Bruce Nesbitt, "The Seasons: Grove's Unfinished Novel," *Canadian Literature*, No. 18 (Autumn, 1963), 48.
- ⁷ Quoted by Desmond Pacey, *Frederick Philip Grove* (Toronto, 1945), p. 11.

GROVE ET RINGUET

Témoins d'une époque

Antoine Sirois

Deux romans parus dans la troisième décennie du 20^e siècle, *Trente arpents* de Ringuet, en 1938, et *Fruits of the Earth* de Grove, en 1933, venaient à la fois couronner et défier une forme de littérature qui semblait bien installée depuis le milieu du 19^e siècle, celle du roman du terroir.

Cette bonne littérature, comme on le sait, dépeignait habituellement une vie idyllique où les protagonistes, à force de volonté et de bras, atteignaient à un bonheur ignoré des citadins. Les héros, robustes et vertueux, vivaient au rythme des jours et des saisons et finissaient par conquérir et dominer la nature dans l'espace rural qui leur avait été dévolu par l'auteur.

A la suite de Zola dans *la Terre*, Grove et Ringuet, importants dans leur littératures respectives, témoignent d'un monde en transition, passant de l'époque agraire à l'époque technique. Grove décrit une période qui s'étend de 1900 à 1921 dans *Fruits of the Earth*, et Ringuet de 1887 à 1930 dans *Trente arpents*. La première histoire se déroule dans l'Ouest, au Manitoba, l'autre dans l'Est, au Québec.

Les auteurs continuent, sous un aspect, le genre traditionnel, décrivant des héros enracinés dans leur terroir, à la psychologie un peu mince, qui tiennent plus du type que de l'individu. Mais les héros triomphant des forces de la nature sont devenus tragiques, leur règne est passager et illusoire. Ils sont esclaves du sol qu'ils croyaient dominer.

Dans l'étude qui suivra, je me restreindrai aux deux romans cités plus haut, qui ont une valeur esthétique certaine et qui m'ont paru significatifs et de l'accélération de l'histoire et de la transformation d'un genre romanesque.

La composition même de l'œuvre exprime la transformation du genre. *Trente arpents* narre l'histoire d'Euchariste Moisan. Ce paysan typique prend graduellement possession de ses trente arpents de terre, les fait rendre au point de pouvoir cumuler chez le notaire des sommes de plus en plus rondelettes. A cet accroissement de biens correspond une considération grandissante qui se manifeste par son élection comme marguillier à l'église et comme commissaire d'école. Il se sent béni en son fils prêtre qui vient auréoler sa réputation. Jusqu'ici, c'est le destin de Jean Rivard, modèle bien connu du roman du terroir. Mais au printemps et à l'été, succèdent l'automne et l'hiver. L'auteur, par une autre série de temps forts décrit le déclin du héros: dissensions dans sa famille, mort du fils prêtre, désertion de ses enfants pour la ville et les usines, dépossession par son aîné, perte de son argent, feu de sa grange et enfin départ pour les Etats-Unis, où il finit, lui si attaché à ses animaux, comme gardien de nuit dans un garage de machines considérées comme autant de bêtes dangereuses. Abe Spalding, dans *Fruits of the Earth*, connaît un destin analogue, coloré seulement par le contexte géographique et social différent. Il met en valeur graduellement les lots qu'on lui a cédés. Sans liarder comme Moisan, il joue surtout avec son crédit pour accroître ses possessions. Son succès commande le respect des fermiers qui l'élisent comme chef du district et président de sa "commission scolaire". Après une récolte extraordinaire en 1912, il bâtit la maison de ses rêves, symbole de sa réussite. Scénario jusqu'ici digne encore des meilleurs romans idylliques. Mais le fils aîné sur lequel Abe comptait meurt. Les autres enfants s'éloignent. Il connaît des difficultés financières et l'échec aux élections. Le deuxième fils sur la succession duquel il comptait se désintéresse du sol, passionné par la mécanique, Abe restera sur la terre, mais désormais dépassé lui aussi par les événements. Son succès matériel n'aura pas été une bénédiction dans le sens biblique, car elle a causé et masqué un échec personnel intérieur et une faillite familiale.

L'on ne peut s'empêcher de penser à *La Terre* de Zola où l'auteur joue aussi sur deux volets, celui de l'ascension du fils et du déclin du père, avec la différence que Zola conduit les deux de front, alors que Grove et Ringuet centrent surtout l'attention sur la montée et la chute du même protagoniste.

Les paysans-types de Grove et de Ringuet sont dépassés par leur temps. Ils avaient vécu dans un espace fermé, physiquement et moralement, bercé au rythme même des saisons, axé sur les récoltes, et porteur de valeurs traditionnelles. Voilà que, désormais, à la suite des innovations techniques, de l'industrialisation accélérée par la guerre, une série de forces nouvelles vont menacer les traditions conservatrices qui sont propres aux civilisations agraires. Le choc est d'autant plus

sensible que l'espace rural est bien clos, replié sur lui-même. "Cette société étroite . . .," dit Ringuet, "cette société circonscrite au voisinage et pour qui l'homme de la paroisse contiguë est déjà un demi-étranger qui ne s'agrège jamais quelqu'un venu du dehors, ni même ses fils. Il n'y a vraiment fusion qu'après deux générations". "La petite patrie restreinte que seuls connaissent les paysans" dira-t-il encore.

L'espace rural manitobain, bien que plus vaste et moins auto-suffisant à cause de sa dépendance des marchés extérieurs pour l'écoulement de son blé, contient quand même le paysan dans des limites réduites. Grove déclare de son héros: "His vision had been bounded by the lines of his farm . . .". Il ajoute: "More and more the wind-break surrounding his yard seemed to be a rampart which, without knowing it, he had erected to keep out an hostile world".

DANS *Trente arpents* l'envahissement de l'"étranger" se produit de multiples façons, prend différentes figures. Il apparaît par exemple sous la figure d'Albert, le Français engagé par Moisan pour l'aider sur sa ferme. D'une autre origine, il ne parle pas le français des paysans, il ne se rend pas à la messe dominicale, il refuse de se laisser lier à trente arpents de terre. On le considère alors comme un être "anormal", "presque inhumain", "suspect", pour employer les termes de l'auteur, et qui rée dans ce monde familier un "sentiment d'insécurité". Il représente pour les campagnards des valeurs différentes et troublantes. L'étranger prend aussi la figure de la science et de la technique. Les forces du paysan, dépendant jusqu'ici de ses bras, seront multipliées par la machine; dans le roman, l'on passe de la faucille à la faucheuse, du rateau à main à la lieuse, du cheval au tracteur. Le rythme des communications s'accélère par les premières automobiles: "On était loin des dimanches d'autrefois . . . L'automobile était venue qui avait changé tout cela." L'agronome, représentant de la science, commence à être consulté par le fils, au scandale du père. L'espace qui était statique devient dynamique. Mais ceci ne se fait pas sans résistance: l'oncle Ephrem s'oppose au passage de la faucille à la faucheuse, le père Moisan craint de passer de la moissonneuse-lieuse au "tracteur à gazoline", comme il dit, de l'élevage des poules à la culture des champignons. Pourquoi ces résistances? Sentiment de crainte pour des instruments qui semblent maléfiques: le "tracteur à gazoline" a déjà ruiné une terre, dit Moisan à son fils. Un vieux paysan

déclarait à Moisan : “Si on faisait la culture comme dans le vieux temps, ça donnerait pas aux jeunes le goût des mécaniques qu’est bonnes à rien qu’à amener des accidents”. L’auto que croise Moisan “est lancée à une allure de démon”. Autant d’attitudes qui démontrent l’opposition du milieu qui voudrait que les choses se fassent comme “au bon vieux temps”. Désir de retour au temps sacré parfait, immobile, qui n’est que reprise de lui-même, désir de perpétuer les valeurs anciennes, avec la nostalgie de ce qui bouscule l’ordre permanent et la sécurité.

L’étranger, perturbateur de l’ordre, prend encore une autre figure, celle de la ville. Facteur extérieur qui vient déraciner les enfants du sol. Pour le père Moisan elle revêt un visage hostile, crée des sensations d’étouffement, de désarroi, et même d’épouvante. Mais pour plusieurs de ses enfants elle devient un pôle d’attraction éblouissant. Trois des enfants finiront par travailler dans les usines ou les filatures. Ephrem est ravi par “les grosses gages”, et les femmes provocantes; Lucinda, par “les douze dollars de gages”, en argent liquide, les fanfreluches, les robes de couleur vive. Napoléon est “leurré par l’appau de la ville, ébloui par les facettes des affiches lumineuses, par l’argent facile, facilement gagné, facilement dépensé”. C’est la grande désertion du sol, combattue par tant de romans du terroir, voués à la conservation de la tradition, garante du bonheur de l’homme.

L’étranger comme personne ne joue pas un rôle dans le monde des pionniers de l’Ouest qui viennent tous forcément d’ailleurs et, dans le cas présent, de nombreux pays. Mais il semble que malgré cette diversité des expériences et des origines, un milieu paysan se reconstitue avec des valeurs déterminées qui tiennent plus au genre de vie qu’à l’origine ethnique. Abe Spalding, qui vient ouvrir des espaces nouveaux, après avoir brisé avec le monde paysan traditionnel en Ontario, se résigne seulement à l’utilisation de la machine parce qu’elle est l’unique solution pour conquérir ces vastes plaines : “There was only one, power-farming as it was called: machinery would do the work of many men. But Abe liked the response of living flesh and bone to the spoken word and hated the un-intelligent repetition of un-understood activities which machines demanded. Yet sooner or later he must come to that; he would have to run the farm like a factory; that was the modern trend . . .” Les fermiers du district expriment leur étonnement et leur scepticisme devant les innovations techniques d’Abe tel que l’éclairage des poulaillers la nuit ou l’utilisation de la trayeuse mécanique. Eux aussi, comme les paysans de Ringuet, affichent un mépris pour la science agronomique; “college farming” dit l’un. Spalding, comme nous l’avons exprimé, se voit surtout commandé par la nécessité, car il ne croit pas que la technique vienne

améliorer le sort de l'homme: "Labour-saving devices galore; and they did save labour; but did they save time?"

Mais Spalding est bien lucide sur le phénomène nouveau dans l'évolution humaine. Il comprend qu'il est dans l'âge de la machine — "machine age" —, qu'il y a un esprit correspondant au "machine age", mais il juge que cette époque nouvelle contribuerait plus à l'information qu'à la formation du caractère: "The imparting of information would be the paramount aim, not the building of character". Il constate surtout qu'il n'a pas lui-même l'esprit de cette ère mécanique: "What is needed is the mechanical mentality and this he did not have." Grove comme Ringuet signalent tous les deux ce nouvel aspect qui oppose les générations: l'existence chez les fils d'une mentalité correspondante à l'ère mécanique qui envahit maintenant le Canada de l'est à l'ouest: Ephrem et Jim sont attirés par les garages. Grove insiste pour nous montrer comment Jim est doué de cet esprit: il est un "born mechanic", il a le "spirit of the machine". C'est lui qui entraîne son père pour la première fois dans une automobile.

La ville joue également dans "*Fruits of the Earth*" un rôle perturbateur qui corrompt les jeunes esprits. Facteur d'attraction, elle arrache les enfants à leur milieu: "children taken from the farm and transplanted into the environment of town tended to grow away from the land and the control of their parents". Le séjour dans les villes, pour les études par exemple, donne encore naissance à un "commercial spirit": "the boy had the commercial spirit . . . an effect of his stay in town".

Cet éloignement physique et moral du monde agraire traditionnel est surtout activé pour Grove par la première guerre mondiale. Le paysan de Ringuet s'en souciait peu, il ne vendait que mieux ses récoltes. Grove perçoit ce grand tournant au retour des militaires. La guerre a créé toutes sortes de besoins, a bouleversé l'esprit des hommes. L'argent fait son apparition. Le paragraphe suivant est plus éloquent que toute dissertation: "The war had unsettled men's minds. There was a tremendous new urge towards immediacy of results; there was general dissatisfaction. Irrespective of their economic ability, people craved things which they had never craved before. Democracy was interpreted as the right of everybody to everything that the stimulated inventive power of mankind in the mass could furnish in the way of conveniences and luxuries. Amusements became a necessity of daily life. A tendency to spend recklessly and to use credit on a scale hitherto unknown was linked with a pronounced weakening of the moral fibre. In the homes of the Hartleys, McCreas, Wheeldons, Topps, gramophones and similar knick-knacks made their appearance; young men wore flashy clothes, paying or

owing from forty to a hundred dollars for a suit. Girls wore silk stockings, silk underwear, silk dresses; and nothing destroys modesty and sexual morality in a girl more quickly than the consciousness that suddenly she wears attractive dessous. This orgy of spending had been enormously stimulated by the easy money of the flax boom; and the rate of expenditure was hardly retarded by the subsequent disaster of the slump. A standard of expenditure once arrived at is not so easily abandoned as established!" La fille même de Spalding est rendue enceinte par un ancien militaire. Le dernier geste d'Abe Spalding aura une valeur symbolique face aux valeurs nouvelles en gestation. Il fermera l'ancienne école du district devenue à ses yeux un endroit de dévergondage de la jeunesse.

L'argent, les filles, l'alcool, les amusements, autant d'éléments reliés à la ville dont l'image, dans ces deux romans, correspond à celle que peignait le roman paysan traditionnel. Et le lecteur n'est pas certain que Grove et Ringuet, dans leur analyse presque clinique, n'endossent pas tous deux la perception que les vieux paysans se font eux-mêmes de l'urbanisation et de l'âge nouveau. Ils nous semblent adopter une même perspective. Ringuet brosse une image très déprimante de Montréal ou de White Falls à la fin de son roman. Grove par son héros semble prévoir une décadence des valeurs morales.

SI GROVE ET RINGUET se rencontrent dans la composition de leur roman, s'ils se rejoignent dans leur témoignage sur une ère en pleine mutation, ils partagent aussi des conceptions analogues dans leur vision de l'homme. Les romanciers du terroir étaient jusqu'ici assez optimistes, assez idéalistes, sur le destin des hommes; nos deux romanciers s'engagent à contre-courant et en proposent une vision tragique. Celui que l'on croyait un maître est en réalité un esclave.

Ringuet, tout au long de son roman, nous fait sentir la condition dépendante du paysan par rapport à la nature: "Et cela, dit-il, suivant l'ordre établi depuis des millénaires, depuis que l'homme abdiquant la liberté que lui permettait une vie de chasse et de pêche, a accepté le joug des saisons et soumis sa vie au rythme annuel de la terre à laquelle il est désormais accouplé." Moisan perçoit "que toutes les choses de la terre et lui-même ne dépendraient plus rien que de la terre même et du soleil et de la pluie". Mais ce semble surtout l'auteur qui parsème son récit de réflexions sur le destin de l'homme sans emprunter le truchement d'un personnage. Elles réfléchissent un sentiment d'impuissance de l'homme face

aux éléments. Ses décisions sont “conditionnées par la pluie, le vent, et la neige”. Il a une “chétive intervention dans l’ordre des choses”; ses gestes sont futiles dans “l’immensité indifférente des éléments”. S’il peut vaincre parfois, il a aussi la sensation, et ici c’est le cousin de la ville qui réfléchit, que la nature champêtre est si grande qu’il se sent “annihilé par son immensité même”. Quelle sera la réaction du paysan de Ringuet face à cette fatalité qui l’écrase? Quand les campagnards virent Ephrem Moisan, le fils, se rebeller, ils ne pouvaient comprendre qu’on “n’acceptât point l’état de choses éternel et fatal et qu’on pût vouloir lutter contre; que l’un d’eux essayât de prendre le chemin de traverse des décisions humaines qui ne sont pas imposées par la nature ou la coutume. Mais ils n’en avaient pas moins une espèce d’admiration étonnée pour le rebelle, pour cette mauvaise tête d’Ephrem Moisan.” On peut tout au plus ruser, “apprendre en quoi il faut obéir à la nature et comment profiter d’elle.”

Le paysan de *Trente arpents* accepte donc sans révolte l’ordre des choses. Cette attitude semble même normale: le paysan développe une *passivité*, celle “dont sont imbus ceux, hommes et bêtes, dont les décisions ne sauraient jamais être que conditionnelles: que conditionnées par la pluie et le vent et la neige pour les hommes . . .”

Nous ne sommes pas étonnés que le héros conserve cette disposition passive, lorsqu’il croupit chez son fils aux Etats-Unis. Voici les ultimes réflexions à la dernière page de l’oeuvre. “Il n’a pas renoncé à retourner là-bas à Saint-Jacques; renoncer cela voudrait dire une décision formelle qu’il n’a pas prise, qu’il ne prendra sans doute jamais, qu’il n’aura jamais à prendre. Ce sont les choses qui ont décidé pour lui, et les gens, conduits par les choses.” L’homme passe, la terre demeure. Le roman se termine ainsi: “. . . à des hommes différents . . . une terre toujours la même.”

Le paysan de *Fruits of the Earth* connaît-il un destin analogue? Comme Moisan, Spalding est asservi par le sol, et il en a nette conscience: “il lui avait donné le pouvoir de la faire.”

Il se voit, comme Moisan, soumis aux caprices des éléments, à la pluie, au blizzard, à la sécheresse, au feu qui sont en conflit perpétuel avec l’homme: “Now he fought because farm and weather ruled him with a logic of their own.”

Lors de la grande inondation, Abe et ses compagnons prennent figure de héros et de géants “fighting the elements”. Il se sent particulièrement vulnérable à l’occasion de la grande récolte sur laquelle il a tout misé. “Unless some major disaster interfered this crop would place him at the goal of his ambitions. But could it be that no disaster was to come? He felt as though a sacrifice were needed

to propitiate the fates. He caught himself casting about for something he might do to hurt himself, so as to lessen the provocation and challenge his prospect of wealth must be to whatever power had taken the place of the gods." Abe Spalding a réalisé plusieurs de ses grands rêves, surtout matériels: il a obtenu les 2 milles carrés de terre désirés, il a misé et gagné sur la grande récolte de 1912, il a bâti la maison qui dominerait la plaine. Mais il a aussi pris conscience "of the futility of it all", dans un retour sur lui-même, car il avait éloigné de lui son épouse et ses enfants. Cinq ans après avoir élevé son château, il s'est aperçu que celui-ci se désagrègeait déjà. "The moment a work of man was finished, nature set to work to take it down again."

Le pionnier de Grove est manifestement lucide face à son sort. Il sait faire des retours sur lui-même et juger de sa situation tragique. Peut-être est-ce à cause de cela qu'il est plus *actif*, en affrontant sa destinée. A la résignation passive du paysan de Ringuet qui ne comprenait pas qu'on "n'acceptât point l'état de chose éternel et fatal et qu'on pût vouloir lutter contre . . ." il oppose une résignation active. Euchariste Moisan n'a pas pris de décisions; les choses ont décidé pour lui. Abe Spalding qui avait démissionné un temps, décide lui, d'accepter consciemment son sort, et aussi de lutter contre lui. Prométhée enchaîné, il ne se rendra pas aux dieux. L'école qu'il avait fondé est devenue à la fin du roman "an abode of iniquity". L'esprit d'après-guerre envahit le district. Il décide de prendre ou de reprendre ses responsabilités, de réparer ses erreurs avec sa famille "True resignation meant accepting one's destiny; to him, it meant accepting the burden of leadership . . . I'll go on . . . To the end . . . Wherever it may be." Il se lève et va fermer l'école.

Conception analogue chez Grove et Ringuet du destin de l'homme-paysan, livré à la nature, même résignation, mais réaction plus lucide et active du pionnier de Grove.

Ringuet et Grove se sont dégagés des idylles régionalistes en vogue. Chacun à leur manière, dans des espaces éloignés l'un de l'autre, ils ont reflété de façon analogue la grande transition de l'ère agraire à l'ère technique au Canada.

Ils ont su aussi et surtout se dégager des particularismes ou des régionalismes pour porter leurs thèmes sur un plan plus universel, celui du destin de l'homme face à la nature. D'origine ethnique et de milieu différents, à l'intérieur d'un même pays, ils se rejoignaient sous des aspects dont l'importance m'a paru justifier une comparaison.

SOBER COLOURING

The Ontology of Super-Realism

Hugh Hood

SUPER-REALISM, yes, because that is how I think of my fiction, quite deliberately and consciously, very likely unconsciously too. When I started to write novels and stories about the year 1956, I had no clear idea of what I was doing. I had had a literary education, and knew something about critical theory and method as applied to the work of other writers, the classics especially, and some moderns. I got a Ph.D. in English in late 1955. After that I did more or less what I wanted. I began to write independently, feeling liberated from the need to defer to what other people might think. I was glad to get out of the graduate school.

I had no theory of my own writing, and belonged to no school, so I wrote most of a novel which was never published, and a dozen stories, in 1956 and 1957, instinctively, making all the important artistic decisions as I went along, with no theoretical bias for one kind of writing as against all the others. Instinctively, then, I turned out to be a moral realist, not a naturalist nor a surrealist nor a magic realist nor in any way an experimental or advance guard writer. That was in effect where I began.

All my early writing dealt with the affairs of credible characters in more or less credible situations. As I look back, I see that this instinctive moral realism was tempered by an inclination to show these credible characters, in perfectly ordinary situations, nevertheless doing violent and unpredictable, and even melodramatic, things. A brother and sister go to visit their mother's grave and are unable to find it in a cemetery of nightmarish proportions; a man kills his

newly-baptized girl friend thinking that she will go straight to Heaven; a young priest molests a child sexually; a young boy goes mad under great strain. A yachtsman runs his boat on a rock and sinks it, drowning his wife and her lover, who are trapped below deck. I would never choose actions like these nowadays, not because of their violence but because of their improbability. I still write about intense feeling which leads to impulsive and sometimes violent acts, but I am better able to locate these feelings in credible occasions.

In those days, and for several years afterwards, I tried to control these melodramatic tendencies — murder, suicide, hanging about in cemeteries, drowning in burst boats — by a strong sense of the physical form of stories. I arranged my pieces according to complex numerologies. A novel might have seven main sections, one for each day of a specific week in a given year, so that the reader could tell exactly what time it was when something happened. Or the book might be divided in three main parts, each with a specific number of subdivisions. I once wrote the rough draft of a book in two main sections and when I had finished each half of the manuscript was precisely a hundred and forty-four pages long: twelve twelves doubled. This play with numbers is a recurrent feature of my work. *Around the Mountain* follows the calendar very precisely, with one story for each month from one Christmas to the next. I have always had a fondness for the cycle of the Christian liturgical year. My first, unpublished, novel was called *God Rest You Merry*, and covered the seven days from Christmas Night to New Year's Eve, in a most elaborate arrangement.

I still do this. My new novel, which will appear in the fall of 1972, *You Can't Get There From Here*, is in three parts. The first and third sections have ten chapters each; the middle part has twenty, which gives us: 10/20/10. The Christian numerological symbolism implied is very extensive. It makes a kind of scaffolding for the imagination.

I had then, and still have, an acute sense of the possibilities of close formal organization of the sentence, syntactically and grammatically, and in its phonemic sequences. I paid much attention to the difficulties of writing long sentences because I knew that simple-minded naturalists wrote short sentences, using lots of 'ands'. I did not want to be a simple-minded naturalist. I hoped to write syntactically various and graceful prose. I took care to vary the number of sentences in succeeding paragraphs. I rarely used the one-sentence paragraph; when I did so I felt mighty daring. I kept a careful eye upon the clause-structure of each sentence. I wouldn't use the ellipsis mark (. . .) because Arthur Mizener wrote to me that he considered it a weak, cop-out sort of punctuation.

I sometimes use the ellipsis now . . . and feel guilty.

My interest in the sound of sentences, in the use of colour words and of the names of places, in practical stylistics, showed me that prose fiction might have an abstract element, a purely formal element, even though it continued to be strictly, morally, realistic. It might be possible to think of prose fiction the way one thinks of abstract elements in representational painting, or of highly formal music. I now began to see affinities between the art I was willy-nilly practising and the other arts, first poetry, then painting and music. I have always been passionately attached to music and painting — I have gone so far as to marry a painter on mixed grounds — and have written many stories about the arts: film-making, painting, music less often because it is on the surface such a non-narrative art. I find that it is hard to speak about music.

I have also written some stories about a kind of experience close to that of the artist: metaphysical thought. My stories “A Season of Calm Weather” (with its consciously Wordsworthian title) and “The Hole” are about metaphysicians. The second of the two tries to show a philosopher’s intelligence actually at work, a hard thing to do. Like musical thought, metaphysical thought seems to take place in a non-verbal region of consciousness, if there is such a thing, and it is therefore hard to write about, but to me an irresistible challenge.

My novels *White Figure*, *White Ground* and *The Camera Always Lies* dealt respectively with the problems of a painter and a group of film-makers. It is the *seeing-into-things*, the capacity for meditative abstraction, that interests me about philosophy, the arts and religious practice. I love most in painting an art which exhibits the transcendental element dwelling in living things. I think of this as true *super-realism*. And I think of Vermeer, or among American artists of Edward Hopper, whose paintings of ordinary places, seaside cottages, a roadside snack bar and gasoline station, have touched some level of my own imagination which I can only express in fictional images. In my story “Getting to Williamstown” there is a description of a roadside refreshment stand beside an abandoned gas pump, which is pretty directly imitated from a painting of Hopper’s. I see this now, though I didn’t when I wrote the story. That is what I mean by the unconscious elements in my work which co-operate with my deliberate intentions.

I HAVE TO ADMIT at this point that my Ph.D. thesis discussed the theory of the imagination of the Romantic poets and its background. The

argument of the thesis was that Romantic imagination-theory was fundamentally a revision of the theory of abstraction as it was taught by Aristotle and the mediaeval philosophers. The kind of knowing which Wordsworth called “reason in its most exalted mood” and which Coleridge exalted as creative artistic imagination, *does the same thing* as that power which Saint Thomas Aquinas thought of as the active intellect. I do not think of the imagination and the active intellect as separate and opposed to one another. No more are emotion and thought *lived* distinct and apart. The power of abstraction, in the terms of traditional psychology, is not a murderous dissection of living beings; on the contrary it is an intimate penetration into their physical reality. “No ideas but in things,” said William Carlos Williams. I believe that Aquinas would concur in that — the idea lives in the singular real being. The intellect is not set over against emotion, feelings, instincts, memory and the imagination, but intimately united to them. The artist and the metaphysician are equally contemplatives; so are the saints.

Like Vermeer or Hopper or that great creator of musical form, Joseph Haydn, I am trying to concentrate on knowable form as it lives in the physical world. These forms are abstract, not in the sense of being inhumanly non-physical, but in the sense of communicating the perfection of the essences of things — the formal realities which create things as they are in themselves. A transcendentalist must first study the things of this world, and get as far inside them as possible. My story “The Hole” tries to show a philosopher working out this idea in his own experience. Here, as everywhere in my writing, I have studied as closely and intensely as I can the *insides* of things which are not me. The great metaphor in human experience for truly apprehending another being is sexual practice. Here, perhaps only here, do we get inside another being. Alas, the entrance is only metaphorical. In plain fact no true penetration happens in love-making. It is not possible for one physical being to merge into another, as D. H. Lawrence finally realized. Bodies occupy different places; there is nothing to be done about this. Sex is a metaphor for union, not itself achieved union.

What we are united to in this world is not physical insides of persons or things, but the knowable principle in them. Inside everything that exists is essence, not in physical space and time, but as forming space and time and the perceptions possible within them. What I know, love, and desire in another person, isn’t inside him like a nut in its shell, but it is everywhere that he is, forming him. My identity isn’t inside me — it is *how I am*. It is hard to express the way we know the forms of things, but this is the knowing that art exercises.

Art after all, like every other human act, implies a philosophical stance: either

you think that there is nothing to things that is not delivered in their appearances, or you think that immaterial forms exist in these things, conferring identity on them. These are not the only ontological alternatives, but they are extreme ones, and they state a classical ontological opposition. The bias of most contemporary thought has been towards the first alternative, until the very recent past. But perhaps we are again beginning to be able to think about the noumenal element in things, their essential and intelligible principles, what Newman called the “illative” aspect of being. The danger of this sort of noumenalism is that you may dissolve the hard, substantial shapes of things, as they can be seen to be, into an idealistic mish-mash — something I’m not inclined to do. I’m not a Platonist or a dualist of any kind. I think with Aristotle that the body and the soul are one; the form of a thing is totally united to its matter. The soul is the body. No ideas but in things.

That is where I come out: the spirit is totally *in* the flesh. If you pay close enough attention to things, stare at them, concentrate on them as hard as you can, not just with your intelligence, but with your feelings and instincts — with your prick too — you will begin to apprehend the forms in them. Knowing is not a matter of sitting in an armchair while engaged in some abstruse conceptual calculus of weights and measures and geometrical spaces. Knowing includes making love, and making pieces of art, and wanting and worshipping *and* calculating (because calculation is also part of knowing) and in fact knowing is what Wordsworth called it, a “spousal union” of the knower and the known, a marriage full of flesh.

I want to propose the Wordsworthian account of the marriage of the mind and the thing as a model of artistic activity. I don’t think that the Romantic movement failed. I think we are still in the middle of it. Of the Romantic masters, Wordsworth seems to me to have understood best how things move in themselves, how they exist as they are when they are possessing themselves, having their identities, living. Wordsworth has an extraordinary grasp of the movement, the running motion, of the physical, the roll of water or sweep of wind, changing textures of fog or mist, all that is impalpable and yet material. In this fleeting, running movement of physical existence, for Wordsworth there is always the threat of an illumination, “splendour in the grass, glory in the flower”. Things are full of the visionary gleam.

The illuminations in things are there, really and truly *there*, in those things. They are not run over them by the projective intelligence, and yet there is a sense in which the mind, in uniting itself to things, creates illumination in them.

The clouds that gather round the setting sun
 Do take a sober colouring from an eye
 That hath kept watch o'er man's mortality;

This is a triple eye, that of the setting sun which colours the clouds, and that of the sober human moral imagination, and finally that of God as brooding, creative Father of all. The colouring of the clouds is given to them by the Deity in the original act of creation. Every evening the sun re-enacts the illumination. The moral imagination operates in the same way, though it is not originally creative; it projects colouring into things, true, but the colouring has already been put there by the divine creation. The act of the human knower is an act of reciprocity. It half creates, and half perceives "the mighty world of eye and ear".

"I have at all times endeavoured to look steadily at my subject," said Wordsworth, very justly. His regard to things is concentrated and accurate; he insists everywhere on the utter necessity of the sensory process, of seeing and hearing, of taking in the sensible world and transforming it. He proposes "to throw a certain colouring of the imagination over incidents and situations taken from common life." This is the same metaphor as that of the final stanza of the "Intimations Ode". The eye in seeing gives colour to things; but the colour is there.

The poetry of Wordsworth supplies us again and again with examples of this colouring of imagination spread over incidents and situations from common life. The figure of the old Leech-Gatherer in "Resolution and Independence" is perhaps the most overwhelming example of this capacity of very ordinary persons and scenes to yield, on close inspection, an almost intolerable significance.

In my mind's eye I seemed to see him pace
 About the weary moors continually,
 Wandering about alone and silently.

The concentrating eye, interior/exterior, giving to things their sober hues, is constant in Wordsworth. I have imitated it from him in my work. In the deliberately paired stories "Socks" and "Boots" I have chosen incidents from ordinary life and characters such as may be met with everywhere, and I have attempted to look steadily at these persons in the hope that something of the noumenal will emerge.

THESE STORIES ARE, to begin with, political; they are about the ways in which living in society modifies our personal desires, a very Wordsworthian theme. Domenico Lercaro in "Socks" does not want to work so hard. Nobody wants to work that hard. He doesn't want to work on a garbage truck or do snow removal, but he is driven to it by the need to survive. The fictional "my wife" in the story "Boots" wants to buy a certain specific kind of winter footwear, but the stores simply don't stock the boots she wants. We can buy only what we are offered, and our range of choice is surprisingly limited.

I have tried to move beyond the fiction of social circumstance by taking a very attentive look at my two main characters. In "Socks" poor Domenico sees the enormous, noisy, snow-removal machine turn before his eyes into a divine beast or Leviathan. Everyone who has seen these machines at work recognizes their intimations of violence, in their noise and in the sharpness of their rotary blades. They have actually killed and eaten people. Modern life is full of these mechanical beasts.

"My wife" in "Boots" feels trivialized by fashion; most women in middle-class circumstances do, I think. To wear high heels and a girdle is to enslave yourself — to adopt the badges of a humiliating subservience. This story tries to make its readers sense the galling limits on their activities felt by intelligent women in the face of the clothes which fashion and *chic* propose for them: the necessary sexual exhibitionism, the silly posturing, the faked little-girlishness.

The two stories insinuate larger issues than their subjects would suggest; they are following Wordsworth's prescription. I have at all times endeavoured to look steadily at my subjects. I hope that my gaze has helped to light them up.

FOOTNOTES

¹ This essay also appears as the introduction to these stories in the forthcoming anthology *The Narrative Voice*, edited by John Metcalf and to be published by McGraw-Hill of Canada.

ETHEL WILSON

Innocent Traveller

Frank Birbalsingh

“**D**O WE ALWAYS LIVE ON A BRINK, then, said Nora to herself, lying there in the dark. Yes, I believe we do.” This quotation, from Ethel Wilson’s novel, *Love and Salt Water*, reflects the thoughts of the heroine’s sister, soon after the heroine, Ellen Cuppy, meets an accident that leaves her face permanently scarred. Why should this disaster occur so unexpectedly during an ordinary outing in which Ellen takes her nephew to the seaside? Are all ordinary, everyday actions marked by unpredictability and filled with the same potentiality of disaster? These are some of the main questions that Mrs. Wilson’s novels and stories try to answer; and altogether, they brilliantly project the luminous truth of Nora’s observation — that we all live continuously on a brink, and that our commonest actions have the capacity constantly to frustrate, delight or, at any rate, surprise us. Since we live on a brink without knowing the exact outcome of our actions, we are innocent. It is the underlying purpose of Mrs. Wilson’s fiction to record the facts of our innocence by illustrating the critical significance of seemingly trivial events in our lives; and her underlying theme, throughout, is an unpredictable future which, by means of coincidence or unimportant incidents, asserts an unfailing ability to inflict apparently undeserved grief and unmerited injury on unsuspecting individuals.

Although her first short story appeared in 1937 when she was forty-nine years old, Ethel Wilson’s published fiction adds up to no more than six short novels and one collection of stories. In spite of its unimpressive volume, however, or perhaps because of it, her work — I suggest — achieves a higher standard of

literary excellence than that of any other Canadian writer of fiction except Stephen Leacock. Her excellence is due principally to a fresh and engaging style, the splendid detachment and graceful poise of which no other Canadian, again except Leacock, has been able to rival. Indeed, even the much-vaunted chronicler of Mariposa would sometimes be hard pressed to equal the purity of Mrs. Wilson's limpid prose, the accuracy of her dialogue, and the fastidious delicacy of the whole tone of her writing.

All Mrs. Wilson's books illustrate the sudden shocks and abrupt shifts of fortune, like Ellen's accident, which can be produced by unforeseen events. Mrs. Wilson's universe is one of complete chaos, where anything can happen to anyone at any time; but she shows no willingness to question this disorder. She takes her strange and haphazard universe for granted, and nowhere reveals the slightest interest in investigating its philosophical foundations. Thus her books do not probe or analyse the action which they describe. Instead, they impose on this action a view of life that is slightly whimsical and which effectively neutralizes the actual risks and inherent dangers of an unpredictable future. The two essential features of Mrs. Wilson's fiction therefore, are her illustration of the inimical capacity of the future, and a predilection for a whimsicality that evokes the supernatural realities behind everyday appearances.

These features can be seen in the first novel, *Hetty Dorval*, which consists mostly of fortuitous episodes contained within a melodramatic plot. The arbitrary selection and association of episodes represents only an imperfect presentation of the author's consistent subject of people living innocently in a world where each new experience brings them unsuspectingly to the brink of catastrophe. A prevailing feeling for fantasy suffuses the plot and reinforces a powerful sense of indwelling mystery in ordinary events. The heroine, Hetty Dorval, is a ruthless "femme fatale", a freakish creature of doubtful virtue, who is suspected of dark dealings and sinister intentions wherever she goes, whether to Canada, England or Europe. Her capricious movements and implausible relationships are marked by a whimsical fancifulness that flavours the entire narrative.

The Innocent Traveller, Mrs. Wilson's second book, is a mixture of fact and fiction which gives, in outline, the one-hundred-year biography of Topaz Edgeworth, an English lady, who emigrates in the middle of the last century and settles in British Columbia. The action chiefly provides situations "for a household of women to gather in and read their letters to each other, drink tea, mend, and turn sheets sides-to-middles," though, we should add, these trivial, spinster-

ish events are not nearly as claustrophobic as they sound. Touched by Mrs. Wilson's humour, they provide a narrative that is far from dull.

As in the previous book, fortuitous coincidence dominates the action so thoroughly that even factual incidents from the heroine's biography take on almost hallucinatory significance or convey implications that border on the supernatural. The opening chapter ends:

Above the table the future hung implicit, almost palpable, around the family. Above the table Mother sighed, caught the adult eyes, smiled her sad smile, and arose.

It was the next night that mother died.

And towards the end of the novel, another chapter opens as follows:

Topaz has for the last time left Vancouver for her summer holiday, but, of course, she does not know this. We do not know these things. Henceforward she will stay at home.

It is not that the author dabbles in the occult. Nothing as extreme as that. But often she is on the verge of prescient statements momentarily illuminated by a glimmer of clairvoyancy, as when she reminds us of unusual connections between apparently unrelated actions, or when she pauses, suggestively, to meditate on the unknown possibilities of the future. Yet, she employs no crude or macabre conceits. She hints quietly at unusual happenings or comments knowingly in passing when notable events take place; and her hints and comments are always, as it were, accompanied by a gentle smile that suggests wonderment or fascination. Her narratives delicately avoid eeriness or terror, and the tone of her writing never betrays "negative" emotions such as fear, or even disappointment.

The third novel, *Tuesday and Wednesday*, gives a closely-observed account of two days in the life of Mortimer Johnson, a feckless and irresponsible odd-job man who, towards the end of the story, tries in vain to save a friend from drowning, only himself to be drowned as well. The police assume that Mort and his friend were drunk, but luckily, Mort's cousin, Victoria, has seen him shortly before the accident, and is able to tell his wife, Myrtle, that he was not. The accident itself gives a totally unexpected reversal to the former drab routine of Mort, Myrtle and Victoria. Victoria's life, in particular, is of withering banality. Describing her, Mrs. Wilson writes:

However insipid, or unimportant, or anonymous you are, your humanity imposes upon you certain conditions which insist that you spend twenty-four hours a day somewhere, and that you spend, somehow, twenty-four hours a day.

But even insignificant Victoria, whose life is a mere filling up of time, proves significant in the end when, by coincidence, she is able to vindicate Mort posthumously. Mrs. Wilson again exemplifies her theory that our lives are largely a collection of commonplace occurrences any of which can suddenly assume great and critical importance.

The realistic aspects of *Tuesday and Wednesday* are embodied in the detailed documentation of the domestic routine of Mort, Myrtle and Victoria. This realism, however, is transfigured by vivid dreams and fantasies which produce, in the end, a narrative that is a subtle blend of realistic and fantastic elements. Ministering angels attend Mort and Myrtle on their daily rounds as well as in their beds at night. But even these bizarre creatures are not fully bizarre; certainly they are not frightening. Mort's angel is a friendly, sympathetic fellow who can be very patient with his protégé, and down-to-earth, human, in his reactions:

Mort's angel used to kick him a little when Mort said things like this; but the angel doesn't kick anymore, because it — the angel — realizes that the two things Mort really loves are his wife Myrtle and himself — the first inconstantly and the second with a varying intensity that sometimes includes his fellow man in some vicarious way identified with himself; and that when Mort makes these statements (that he loves being a gardener, or a shepherd, or a plumber, or a horse-breaker, or a plasterer), he really means them, at the moment, and it often gives his interlocutor a great deal of pleasure and a sense of security, poor thing.

The passage is typical, and it shows that though Mrs. Wilson's characters are visited by flashes of the supernatural, they themselves are never ghostly. Nor is the action wholly mysterious, though it has its elements of mystery. Mrs. Wilson is too delicate an artist to yield completely either to the drab monotony of everyday life, or to the imaginative flights of our best moments. Hers is a fine and subtle art, feminine in essence, one that perhaps no man and few women can reproduce exactly. It is this subtlety that saves her portrait of reality from being dull, and her flights of fancy from being incredible.

Lilly's Story, the next novel, tells of a Vancouver woman's uphill struggle to conceal her disreputable past for the sake of her illegitimate daughter. For thirty-two years, under the assumed name of Mrs. Walter Hughes, Lilly Waller labours ceaselessly to acquire and maintain a conventionally "respectable" image. Her efforts succeed when, in the end, the daughter is suitably married. Lilly's story is a frank and objective account of her original waywardness, her later iron-willed determination to change, and her subsequent decline into dowdy middle age.

The facts of her career are not idealized, but are presented successively in all their irretrievably mundane detail. At the end, her patient labours are at least temporarily retrieved from total insignificance when, as she goes about her job as cleaning woman in an hotel, she meets a widower who proposes marriage.

The pattern of events is identical to that of the author's preceding works: Lilly uncomprehendingly faces the future which at first fills her life with adversity, and, just as unexpectedly, brings her prosperity. Throughout, she lives on a brink, for each of the unexciting episodes in which she is involved takes her unknowingly to the verge of happiness or grief. Mrs. Wilson's theme could so easily have been sombre and grey. After all, Lilly's experiences are scarcely happy ones, except for the widower she meets at the end. But it is the whole purpose of the author's writing to avoid gloom and dejection, and she achieves this repeatedly by a judicious admixture of whimsicality that effectively neutralizes the tragic implications in her work.

Lilly is driven by misfortune from pillar to post; first there is her Chinese lover who gets into trouble with the police; then a Welshman who abandons her, pregnant; and throughout there is the malignant threat of "respectable" society. But Lilly faces each episode as it comes. Always, she shows an energetic wantonness that makes her appear either extraordinarily brave or utterly stupid. The truth in fact is in the middle. She may sometimes be a little brave and at other times a little stupid. At all times, she has the capacity to yield to romantic and fanciful instincts deep within her.

Swamp Angel, the fifth novel, relates the story of Maggie Vardoe, who flees from confining married security in Vancouver to the free, Cariboo country of British Columbia. She takes refuge in a camp with Haldar Gunnarsen and his wife Vera, but her happiness is soon shattered by Vera's unexpected jealousy. The very trivial undertakings which make Maggie happy — fishing, cooking, and general helpfulness in the camp — nourish Vera's jealousy, thereby asserting the author's consistent belief in the potentiality of common events to produce both happiness and grief. In the first place, it is the dreary routine of marriage that drives Maggie away from her husband, and, in the second, it is the routine of camp life that destroys her relationship with her new friends. In either case, the lurking unpredictability of the future influences her life critically and proves that she too lives on a brink. But Maggie is no more a tragic figure than either Hetty Dorval or Lilly Waller. She takes each setback in her stride. She bears her misfortunes cheerfully because she cultivates deep spiritual longings, and relies

implicitly on the advice of an old friend whose life is almost entirely given over to fantasy.

The esoteric affairs of this seventy-year-old friend, Nell Severance, are closely interwoven with Maggie's adventures. The frequent time-shifts between Maggie's adventures in the woods and those of her friend in the city can be irritating; but the main point of the relationship is that Maggie's substantial, down-to-earth activities are inevitably tinged by the mysterious atmosphere surrounding Nell. The result, as always in Mrs. Wilson's fiction, is a tantalizing description of a reality that is not as real as it seems. Nell Severance is a romantic who dreams of her former days in the circus, of which the gun "Swamp Angel" is a precious souvenir. In a typical gesture, reminiscent of Arthurian romance, she commissions Maggie to throw the gun into a lake when she dies. But Nell is not fooled even by her own fantasies. To prove that her feet are planted on the ground, the author endows her with piercing insights and uncanny wisdom. Of all her characters, Nell provides Mrs. Wilson's best illustration of the hidden sapience and discernment of our intuitions.

Love and Salt Water, Mrs. Wilson's last novel and her best full-length work, furnishes the most comprehensive treatment of her theme. The main action, dealing with domestic relations, family visits and humdrum social intercourse, is true to form. After her mother's death, Ellen Cuppy and her father leave Canada for a holiday abroad. The father remarries and Ellen returns to work in Saskatchewan. She keeps in touch with her family and regularly visits her sister, Nora, in Vancouver. Like Mort's cousin, Victoria, she leads an unremarkable life for a young girl; just her family, tennis, boy friends. Then comes her accident which is a direct result of one of the unremarkable, humdrum social activities in which she normally engages. Ellen, no less than her predecessors in the other novels, lives on a brink, as her sister Nora clearly realizes.

These two novels provide insights that are only hinted at in the earlier works. *Love and Salt Water*, in particular, reveals an acute awareness of unforeseen events linking up without warning, to affect different sets of people who are far apart and who sometimes don't even know each other. In a typical incident, Ellen is in Vancouver expecting a visit from her friend, George Gordon, who works in Montreal, but the manager of George's firm, Prendergast, is abruptly taken ill and George has to take his place. The author knowingly comments:

The circle of life is extraordinary, and Miss Cuppy was drawn up into the circle of Mr. Prendergast's life when his secretary had to telephone the doctor that he was ill, and then telephone Mrs. Prendergast, and the doctor telephoned and made

arrangements at the hospital, and the lives of George Gordon in Montreal and Miss Cuppy in Vancouver were affected, perhaps temporarily, or perhaps permanently and fatally.

The passage points to the inter-relatedness of human experience which is a direct product of the unpredictable future, the actual agent that is responsible for linking up the various people and bringing their disparate roles together in a single network of human relationships. Mrs. Wilson is not primarily concerned with this network, which is, after all, a result; it is the agent that generates the network which most interests her — in this case, the accidental illness of Mr. Prendergast which neither Ellen nor George could predict.

MOST OF THE STORIES IN *Mrs. Golightly and Other Stories* deal with familiar subjects of routine domesticity. In these stories Mrs. Wilson's customary blend of mild fantasy and solid reality is very happily expressed when dreary, everyday proceedings are touched by almost hallucinatory implications. A visit to the London church where two of Shakespeare's fellow actors are buried, arouses not merely admiring nostalgia, but also an enthralling sense of the past that seems to bring us into direct contact with the ghostly presences of the two men. Many stories have similar supernatural or quasi-supernatural overtones, which may astonish or briefly puzzle, but never frighten us. We wonder, but do not scream. It is the characteristic subtlety of Mrs. Wilson's art that it often takes us to the verge of horrifying emotions but never beyond.

In a way, Mrs. Wilson is the feminine counterpart of the film-maker Alfred Hitchcock, who skilfully exploits the hidden mysteries of familiar scenes and objects by simple, unpretentious techniques as, for example, when he uses a slightly unusual camera angle to photograph the depth of an ordinary armchair and awaken unsuspecting terror. But his trade is horror, while Mrs. Wilson's is merely fascination. It is the fascination that Mrs. Golightly discovers in the mechanical ring of a common telephone. Who is it? What should she say? What if she says the wrong thing? Her uncertain approach, cautious reply and final relief embrace a range of feelings that fascinate without terrifying her. Like Mrs. Golightly, many of the author's characters are able to perceive a possibility of fantasy, romance even, in ordinary day-to-day incidents. The unpredictable future should not frighten us, Mrs. Wilson implies: the very uncertainty that it imposes on us also provides an opportunity of supplementing the arid monotony of everyday living with the lush excitement of fantasy; if living on a brink is

dangerous, it can also be thrilling. Innocence does not exclude us from happiness on our journey through life.

Since her novels record the facts of our innocence by constantly stressing our ignorance of the future, and by warning of the possibility of good or ill-fortune in each new experience, we must agree that the author is projecting a point of view that is essentially hopeless. If the future is a blank, and catastrophe can take place at any time, then men are simply pawns of God, and human effort or optimism is surely irrelevant. This, one supposes, would be the logical line of argument implied by the author's stress on our innocence. But Mrs. Wilson distinctly avoids any such logical exploration of her themes and the hopeless or even tragic significance they may carry. Deliberately she ignores implications. Even when the future brings catastrophe, as it invariably does, her books show no sign of regret. Hetty Dorval, Myrtle Johnson, Lilly Waller and Maggie Vardoe are women to whom the future is far from kind; yet in no case does the tone of the novel become commiserating or plaintive. On the contrary, each narrative recreates a prevailing mood of splendid fascination as if to suggest that the author actually enjoys the limitations imposed upon us by our common ignorance of the future. Mrs. Wilson acknowledges these limitations, and sets her mind to relieve, not to investigate, their unpleasantness. This is why she does not probe the philosophical problems that underlie her novels for she is not really interested in philosophical inquiry or intellectual searching. She accepts human experience as it is, and simply suggests that we should accommodate to its limitations by invoking the immanent wisdom of fantasy to relieve its worst restrictions. To accommodate, all we need is faith.

The author's thinking is strongly influenced by the disillusionment of the immediate post World War I era which the poetry of T. S. Eliot expresses so well. It may be that Eliot's poetry itself directly influences Mrs. Wilson, but even if it does not, we are certain that both writers draw a substantial part of their literary inspiration from a common source — the gloomy philosophical climate of the 1920's and 30's:

Hot water at ten
And if it rains, a closed car at four,
And we shall play a game of chess.

The spirit of these lines is identical with the spirit of the discussions about Major Butler and his wife which "went on and on and never arrived." The difference

is that Mrs. Wilson sees the meaningless triviality of these discussions as a "merit," whereas Eliot regards it with a sense of tragic disillusion :

And what essential joy canst thou expect
Here upon earth? What permanent effect
Of transitory causes?

There is no such plaintiveness in Mrs. Wilson's novels. She feels as strongly as Eliot about the transience limiting our lives, but she conceals the extremity of her feelings and sublimates them in a kind of bemused fascination. The facts of our innocence do not challenge her intellectually as they do Eliot: she patiently records them, then sits back, fascinated, but unwilling to delve behind the facts themselves.

It is revealing to recall the antics of Mortimer Johnson's cat in *Tuesday and Wednesday*:

Feral, wise, with her inscrutable little hunter's nose and whiskers she felt and explored and recorded each chair leg, each table leg, each corner. She prowled and prowled on silent paws, and sometimes she stopped to wash. When she was satisfied, she accepted and adopted the room. Then she slept fitfully. She slept anywhere, lightly yet deeply, waking and moving often. Chiefly she slept on Mort and Myrtle who lay deep in sleep, warm and approved by her. But sometimes she awoke, remembering something pleasant. Then she jumped lightly down and ran to her box. She scrambled up the side of her box and sat down, quivering, still, looking into the transparent dark with bliss.

The last word of this passage corresponds with the author's own fascinated attitude, and it represents the whimsical view of life that Mrs. Wilson's fiction advocates all along; for fascination neutralizes and transcends the limitations of our innocence by exploiting its capacity for fantasy. The future may be dark and fraught with danger; but if we look into it with the bliss of Mort's cat, we relieve the shock and hurt of danger if and when it comes. We know from Nell Severance that the source of bliss (or fascination) is faith, but Nell does not reveal the ultimate source of faith itself, and we must try to trace it on our own by picking up what clues we can from both internal and external evidence within the author's work.

The best internal evidence consists of the characters who exemplify Mrs. Wilson's faith. Usually they are imaginative women who are willing, at the right moment, to yield to an inbred instinct for fantasy. Maggie Vardoe can flee from the security of marriage, to the freedom of a British Columbian forest because

she yields readily to deep, inner yearnings. Most of the women in the *Golightly* volume also show similar propensities. And the queen of them all, the aged, half-mystic, half-prophetic Nell Severance, by her vatic utterances, strongly reminds us of Mrs. Wilcox and Mrs. Moore in the novels of E. M. Forster. Both Mrs. Wilcox and Mrs. Moore abjure what Forster calls the "life of telegrams and anger", and cultivate instead the fertile intuitions of the spirit. Basically, this means exploiting the possibilities of fantasy provided by their immediate environment; for they too, in their innocence, cannot understand the reasons for so much that goes on around them. Unlike their friends and relations who allow themselves to be trapped by their innocence, Mrs. Wilcox and Mrs. Moore frankly accept their limitations and blissfully transcend them by developing their inner lives.

Faith is the development of one's inner life, an activity of the spirit that both Mrs. Wilson and E. M. Forster approve of and strongly advocate, but which neither of them fully understands. The most they seem able to do is to illustrate it. The similarity between Mrs. Wilson's outlook and Forster's seems conclusive. After all, it does not take much insight to imagine Nell Severance in India communing with the mystic sounds and silences of the Malabar caves. Forster's theme in *A Passage to India*, as well as in his other novels, is the "connection" between what he calls the "prose" and the "passion" of life. His "prose" corresponds to the material side of our experience, the humdrum everyday events of Mrs. Wilson, while his "passion" largely resembles her reliance on the intuitions of the spirit. The fascination that Mrs. Wilson advocates makes precisely the "connection" that Forster seeks, since it provides an attitude to life that is a compromise between the two basic elements of our experience, the material and the spiritual. As Forster says at the beginning of *Howard's End*, "Only connect the prose and the passion and both will be exhausted, and human love will be seen at its height. Live in fragments no longer." This is exactly what Nell Severance, Mrs. Wilcox and Mrs. Moore do. Nor should we ignore the external evidence offered by Desmond Pacey in his book on Ethel Wilson, where he quotes from one of the author's letters in which she expresses her love for three of Forster's novels in particular. There can be little doubt that the faith revealed in her own novels is, to some considerable extent, the result of Mrs. Wilson's close and admiring contact with the tender humour and cautious idealism of a fine novelist who was also one of the most tolerant, gentle and compassionate of men. So far as we can tell, Forster's novels are, if not the ultimate literary source, certainly a radically formative element of Mrs. Wilson's faith.

Before concluding, we should mention some aspects of the author's writing that contribute greatly to her success although they are not strictly related to her main theme; for example, her nature descriptions and dialogue. As illustrations of local colour, her books vividly reproduce regional features of Canada's Pacific coast. But there is no need to give any of her descriptions here, partly because they abound in her writing, and partly because they are a merit shared, to a greater or lesser extent, by other Canadian writers. Mrs. Wilson's pre-eminence shines more brightly in her dialogue. She captures authentic qualities of Canadian speech, whether she is dealing with Chinese artisans of Vancouver, naturalised, English-born immigrants or native Canadians. By exactness of diction, rhythm and intonation, she expresses subtle nuances of feeling and illuminates hidden recesses of character.

We must also briefly illustrate the characteristic qualities of Mrs. Wilson's general prose style, for example, its dry humour, judicious economy and serene detachment. The following quotation, from *Lilly's Story*, describes the gossip in a village store:

The talk in the store then resumed the endless discussion of how much older Mrs. Butler was than Mr. Butler; what was they doing in China anyway; Major Butler was in the Customs, why then he wasn't no soldier; he was in the Boxer troubles, but he didn't look like no boxer, too skinny: he was head of the Chinese army, they musta kicked him out: he was in the British Ambassador's office, well, he might be at that; seemed a nice fella: well, they minded their business and paid their bills: kinda funny coming way off here, maybe they wasn't married anyways. Discussions like this were pleasant in the long summer evenings too and had the merit that they went on and on and never arrived.

Provincial ignorance and narrow-mindedness provide obvious humour, while the careful selection of the details that are discussed indicates the spareness and shrewdness of the author's judgment. But the most outstanding feature of the passage is that Mrs. Wilson sides neither with the Butlers nor their detractors, reporting the failings of the latter objectively, without satire or venom. If we were to single out the most significant feature of her style, it would be this placid detachment which enables the author to portray less praiseworthy aspects of human nature calmly, without a trace of anger or bitterness.

For all their entertainment value, however, and despite their brilliant technique, Mrs. Wilson's novels cannot be said to constitute "major" fiction. Indeed, she does not attempt to produce "major" fiction. She does not analyse the problem of an unpredictable future in a way that significantly increases the reader's

understanding of it, or illuminates its precise moral characteristics. Her writing moves at a level that deliberately ignores the more profound aspects of her theme. Her chief aim is not to understand the philosophical basis of an unpredictable future, but to guard against the grief that the future can bring; to achieve this she instils in her best characters a flavour of whimsicality, a gift for fantasy which serves as a protective shield. Thus, Maggie, Lilly, Nell and Ellen are never made desperate by the accidental and unexpected miseries that afflict them. They are either reconciled to their unhappiness, or favoured with happiness in the end.

The desire to protect her characters from the harsher elements of her theme opens Mrs. Wilson to the charge of "escapism". But if "escapism" means that she alters or distorts real dangers and threats posed by the future, then the charge cannot stick. The cruel adversities endured by all her chief characters prove beyond doubt that Mrs. Wilson does not evade or escape the real issues of an unpredictable future. She advocates neither escapism nor aggression. She compromises rather than opposes, acknowledges rather than investigates. Hers is a patient attitude of ample compliance which, while it robs her work of intellectual insight and moral intensity, blesses it with a compassionate view of life that is essentially Forsterian; for her patient compliance embraces most if not all of that writer's tolerance, gentleness, good humour and simple faith. She is an innocent traveller, but none the worse for that.

THE POETRY OF RED LANE

Fraser Sutherland

*Of those so close beside me, which are you?
God bless the ground, I shall walk softly there,
And learn by going where I have to go.*

Theodore Roethke, "The Waking".

THE POEMS Red Lane left when he died in 1964 at the age of 28 are as direct and brave and manly as any in our literature. They speak from the depths of pain but are full of joy. To excel in suffering is the saint's way; the poet must do something less, and more: to blow the pain into a bubble of purity. This is not so much a way of living as a way of making life anew, beyond fashion, swindle and falsehood.

Blowing bubbles that will not burst is the poet's job, and was Lane's. He did it by talking, simply talking, and asking all the right questions at the right times.

A poem is a poet
who writes poems
for everyone
who is listening

Are you listening?

("What Is A Poem Is A Poem Is A Poem")

This poem is one of the first in "The Surprise Sandwich" section of Lane's *Collected Poems*, a group of "children's poems". They are of course children's poems for adults.

Lane will use a simple, child-like question at the end of a poem again and again. For one thing, it disarms the reader. For another, it puts the poem at the very centre of his own concern. In one of the poems the boy describes all the

games he's played, "the House Game", the "Follow The Leader Game", "the War Game", then asks:

What if the Games I play are Really Real!

And then I think

Would I still like to play games
if they are Really Real?

And then I wonder

But I still play games

Do you?

(“The Games That Seem”)

There is no moral here, only a twist that points up Lane's superb pacing. An even better use of this skill comes in a very funny poem, "The Lunches That People." Here, the boy reflects on the weird sandwiches mothers make for their hapless sons:

My best friend always brings Surprise food
that his mother wraps up for him
and doesn't tell him what it is
And one day
his mother wrapped up a fresh egg for him
instead of hardboiled
and when he tried to peel it he was Really surprised.

But the poem is not all a play on the phrase, "Really surprised." Near the end, the tap is turned and the flow changes:

Well
I guess if you were to stop and think about it
you would find that the lunches kids and people have
are only as important as the lunches kids and people have not

If you know what I mean

That is the first turn of the tap, then the other twist: "Do you know what I mean?"

"The Lunches That People" has a close rival for sheer fun in "Breakfast Is," which tells how the boy's family came to eat their dog's favourite breakfast. The fun stops, however, in another poem that is full of wonder at the world, a wonder that is mixed with fear and pain. There is also the dignity of living mixed in, of

being able to suffer and, with luck, survive intact. Wonder, dignity and waiting
— to see what happens next :

Wherever I go
whatever I do
there is one thing that is always happening
and that is me.

Each of the senses gives something to the poem, one by one each a witness to the wonder of selfhood. To slightly alter Heraclitus: no one ever is, but everyone is becoming :

And I have tasted blood in a crust of bread
And I have touched the brow that tells the head
And I have smelled the sweat that made the sea
And I have thought that Everything must be

(“Is Happening It Happens To”)

In his other poems, Lane will use what might be called his active voice. For we are not just acted upon but are forced by the dictates of life to act. With Lane’s poetry, the act becomes a search, and the search itself is what matters. “. . . so I just keep pushing away at the margins and searching for the truth, whatever,” Lane said in a letter in 1963 to his brother Patrick. The poet is amazed at his own life, and his life is the last thing in the world he would deny.

Ah
how simple to break
such a chain
by simply denying it

But then
I was the one who forged it
and I hesitate

Hesitate
to deny my own work.

In a sense, this is the pride of the craftsman. It is a pride founded in pain. Pain may be good for you, bad for you, but it must be dealt with somehow. One way is to put it naked in the harsh light.

The girl “was a virgin/and she wanted to be brave,” the boy was drunk and made her stand undressed in front of him :

I laughed
and said

Ugh
For Chrissake
Cover it up

and she raised her hands
up to her face
and covered her eyes

COVERED HER EYES

And O
the emptiness that racked me
as my soul overflowed

(“Margins X”)

The same technique applies to what, for want of a better term, one calls stasis in the midst of joy. The poem describes the man and girl fusing in the act of sex, in the fulness of the moment :

then
my eyelids flickered
and I saw her suddenly

STARING EYES

and my soul fainted

(“Margins XVI”)

Sorrow is the other side of callousness. The poet recalls making love with a girl in a field covered with snow. She left him later for another boy and he told his friends that he had “laid her in a snowbank” and that she had “come down with a bad case of bleeding piles.”

Now I hear she is married
and has a child
and I cannot stop the bleeding

(“Margins II”)

There are two who bleed, then. It is grim to think that Lane himself died of a cerebral haemorrhage. In another poem he would remark :

And the feeling is constant
I have
the feeling of nearing now
a destination

(“Margins XIII”)

One wonders if he knew that with that destination there would be no more searching.

The sense of being menaced is always present in Lane. Take for instance, a poem that concerns deer-hunting. The man shoots what seems to be a deer:

Yes
it is a deer
lying dead in the snow

Hell
I knew it
I knew it all the time

Dead

My friend is hunting to the left of me
somewhere
in the fog

(“Margins XIX”)

Who is the hunter, who the hunted? Either way, there is menace like that in Raymond Souster’s “The Groundhog,” in which “The half-wit hired man is blasting imaginary rabbits/somewhere on our left.”

Again, walking home at night the poet meets a dog that growls. This is the black dog of despair, a pariah dog like those in Malcolm Lowry’s *Under the Volcano*. But here, man bites dog:

I began to whistle

softly
brokenly

then
the dog turned his head
relaxed
moved slowly around me
away from me
and when it was well away

HYAH
YAH

I shouted at it
and it ran into the night
and I laughed aloud

for all mankind
and the night echoed back the laughter
(“Margins XVII”)

The sense here is not of that insipid ditty, “I whistle a happy tune . . .,” but of relief like rain on arid fields.

I have likened Lane to Souster but there is one important difference. Even in the sharpest of Souster’s snapshots there is something effete. The man with the camera is not the man of the street. But Lane’s poetry is working-class: fighting in the Army & Navy Service Club in Portage La Prairie, Manitoba; hitch-hiking to town; drinking draught in the beer-parlour. This poetry may not be more “real” than any other sort, but it was Lane’s choice of subject. The poetry is not anti-bookish but it is fiercely against putting thought before honest passion. One poem deals with the “mistakes” of George Bowering:

you argued with me that
intelligence came before knowledge
and went away
believing you were right

Bowering has a choice of making further mistakes, Lane says:

The first mistake will be made
if you go back to university
in the fall
or ever again.

(“Big Benzedrine”)

Lane had to take the straight, the direct way. Sometimes this way would yield the clearest and most startling results. For once, I will quote a poem entire.

There
in the earth light of sunset
up to his knees in a field of dandelions
central to the working hum of bees
the child in golden thought
stands monument
to the forms of reality
Hey!
Come on home for supper.

(“There”)

There it is, as clear and fixed and final as an Andrew Wyeth painting.

There are two kinds of loss in Lane's poems. Five of his poems deal with the loss of a girl: one girl dies, another leaves him. In the wildest sense, these poems deal with *social* loss. There is another kind of loss which finds its code in the poem beginning: "Green pastures now . . ." The poem holds the gorgeous image of

a young girl
riding a brown horse
and her long blonde hair flows out behind
as the horse gallops by

When they gallop away, "gathering the distances/heads back hair streaming," they leave behind "a path of brown and gold."

they go
and I cannot stop them
gone.

At the poem's end Lane says

from the hills beyond
they are indistinguishable
and the hills beyond

("Margins XXIX")

This is what I have to call *metaphysical* loss, and contained in a symbol more subtle and profound than anything in D. H. Lawrence. To be left behind, looking at hills with the girl and her horse somewhere among them, is a matchless vision of loss. The loss of beauty, the loss of God, the loss of hope that dwells somewhere in the hills.

The darkness is closing in. There is in Lane a sort of moving in the dark. But there is no fumbling and no failure, only sure movements among the rocks of despair, anguish and ennui. By being in the dark, he is made more aware. The pain, though, is always there. At times, Lane's lines seem to ask along with Souster's:

How long before the emptiness will go, or will
it always
Go on killing and aching and crying here in the darkness.

Lane's poetry does not give an answer — it is too wise for that — but it gives

a way of walking over rough terrain. One poem does this in the same fashion as Ernest Hemingway's story, "Big Two-hearted River." Both are about fishing trips, and about knowing the limits of the line. It is a kind of courage:

casting out my line
watching
the small artificial fly
looping out
to the limits of the line

Lane is always walking, often at night. In one of the best poems he walks, hears an owl hooting, and is afraid "of what may be in front of me."

I begin to talk aloud
asking and answering
in different tones of voice
as if I have companions with me
and we are carrying on a conversation

closer

and I pick up a few stones
and on the strength of my companions
throw the stones into darkness

and I no longer hear the hooting
on the road I'm walking.

Lane is not as excerptible as some poets because to remove a line is like taking away a step from one of his walks. I have not discussed the Lane poems which have failed, mainly because there are so few of them. Sometimes, however, his wit has too much flash and shimmer, and not enough weight. Sometimes, too, they are too private, as in the "Acknowledgements" section of *Collected Poems*. The poems addressed to Bowering, Irving Layton, Lionel Kearns and Milton Acorn are in places less poet to reader than poet to poet. But when Lane is truly walking he never stumbles.

The last poem in the collected edition is a fable, "for Milton Acorn, ultimately," about the plight of a sponge who must absorb life with his whole being, unlike the lucky sieves who just let life run through them. It is not easy to absorb life, and wait to be squeezed by God. The squeezing yields "All seed womb breath dust tears." To protest about being a sponge in a last great shout of courage is futile, and fatal:

And God changed the sponge in to a grain of sand
And turned and walked away from the beach.

(“Death of a Poet”)

This is a God who walked away. Lane was a poet who had a sure and total knowledge of his own life and gave this vision away for nothing more than the solace of your walking by his side.

FOOTNOTES

- ¹ All the Lane poems are from *Collected Poems*, eds. Patrick Lane and Seymour Mayne (Vancouver: Very Stone, 1968.) Because they are wisely arranged, I have discussed them in roughly the same order as they appear in the book.
- ² Quoted in Louis Dudek, “Groundhog Among the Stars”, *A Choice of Critics*, ed. George Woodcock (Toronto: Oxford, 1966), p. 169.
- ³ Raymond Souster, “Ersatz” in *Canadian Verse*, ed. Ralph Gustafson (London: Penguin, 1958), p. 222-23.

CRIME AND NO PUNISHMENT

Esther James

JAMES REANEY has chosen to construct *The Killdeer* as a social drama in which the values of our age are examined and contrasted with those values which Reaney believes to be of an eternal and universal nature. The compact three-act formula of the play, however, is suggestive of an externally applied technique. Reaney has structured the plot of *The Killdeer*, with its all but hidden hint of melodrama, largely after the fashion of the well-made play and, in terms of a theatrical style, he has chosen to combine elements of both naturalism and symbolism in order to carry the wide-ranging themes contained in *The Killdeer*.

It was the French dramatist Eugène Scribe who, in the first half of the nineteenth century, laid down the formula for the construction of the well-made play — a formula which many later dramatists (Ibsen, Shaw, Wilde, Pinero, Arthur Miller, and others) used to their advantage. Structurally, the form demands that the play be the culminating point of a story that had been going on before the play begins. The preceding events of the story are then brought to the attention of the audience by means of exposition which occupies a considerable part of the first act, whereupon the action of the play proper begins. A pattern of action and suspense is then built up in which the hero's fortunes see-saw up and down until the climactic moment of revelation or recognition, which is immediately followed by the dénouement or logical outcome of the action and which, itself, concludes the play.

The first act of Reaney's play opens with a scene between Mrs. Gardner and

Madam Fay, each of whom has a son — Harry and Eli respectively. The audience is informed of the background and history of each family, and of the relationship that exists between each mother and son as the play opens. More exposition follows concerning Rebecca, a girl in whom Harry is beginning to show an interest. This in turn is followed by a short scene which introduces Clifford, the somewhat sinister and melodramatic villain whose machinations with respect to the marriage of Rebecca and Eli are the cause of the beginning of the action in the play. Harry too, gets married — but not to Rebecca whom he loves.

Although the first act ends with the separation of the two lovers, it is logical to assume that their paths will again cross. At the beginning of the second act, therefore, we learn what has happened to them in the five years following their separation. Now they meet again, although the circumstances of their meeting are somewhat macabre. Rebecca is to be tried for a murder which Harry is convinced she did not commit. As Rebecca's defence lawyer, Harry searches for the evidence which will prevent a verdict of capital punishment for Rebecca.

In the traditional well-made play there is usually a missing document or a misdelivered letter which is the source of complication in the action, and which the audience knows about. In *The Killdeer* there is a missing document which complicates the action, but the audience is left unaware of this until the document — a legal certificate of death — is produced in what becomes the climactic moment of revelation in the play. The climactic moment in *The Killdeer*, however, is contrived and is not the logical outcome of the plot as is usually the case in the well-made play. But Reaney's vision of reality cannot be totally contained within the form of the well-made play and, at the point where it becomes dramatically, aesthetically and ethically most necessary to do so, he breaks with the form.

The form demands that events follow each other logically within a chain of causality, but logic and causality at the naturalistic level are not Reaney's prime concern. What does concern him is the presentation of a reality that stands over and against the pattern wherein logic and causality have meaning simply because events are seen to occur within a linear progression of time. In other words, throughout the play Reaney has presented two levels of reality. One has been presented at the naturalistic level which gives us a "slice of life" as we know it in our present age. At this level, through his characters, Reaney reveals and comments on the values that people live by — the social and legal values, for example. The other level he must present to us symbolically. At this level, linear

time, causality, and logic have no place. This is a level of reality where good and evil, light and darkness, innocence and guilt exist in eternal antithesis.

The climactic moment in *The Killdeer*, although it takes place in a courtroom, rises beyond the level of social and legal values and is not so much concerned with establishing legal proof of innocence or guilt as with establishing their eternal relationship. It is this reality that Reaney wishes to show, the reality of the forces of light and of darkness that stands over against the naturalistic world.

In the naturalistic world, events that take place in time have a way of being replaced by other events in time. It is true that these facts can be recorded, but facts in themselves are meaningless. They become significant only when they are seen as manifestations of a cosmology wherein everything exists because of, and in terms of its eternal opposite. The innocent are therefore guilty and the guilty innocent, and out of destruction and evil there yet arises creation and beauty: "flowers and butterflies, grass/Growing from the dead horse's body in the ditch."

I have suggested above that Reaney has chosen to construct *The Killdeer* as a social drama in which the values of our age are examined and contrasted with those values which Reaney believes to be of an eternal and universal nature. The play opens on the interior of Mrs. Gardner's cottage. The living-room itself is cluttered with objects which, as we learn later, represent the sum total of Mrs. Gardner's life. Outside the cottage a car is parked. This car belongs to Madam Fay who, like a modern-day Mother Courage, travels around the country-side selling her wares.

What emerges in the first act is a picture of our society set in economic terms. The opening situation between Mrs. Gardner and Madam Fay, for instance, takes place entirely as a buying and selling transaction. As the act progresses, tension is developed. On the one hand, we are shown forces at work in our society which tend to reduce everything to a purely monetary value. Marriages are arranged because of economic considerations, and people themselves become dehumanized objects reducible to a cash value. For most people in such a society, the acquisition of money, things, property becomes all important. On the other hand, there are those to whom these values do not apply. There is Rebecca whose impulses are directed towards love and the preservation of human relationships, and who stands in opposition to the others.

Whereas the setting of the first act had been highly detailed and particularized, the set directions for the second act call for the "simplest possible suggestion of a courtroom." In the first act, life has been presented almost as a social document.

In the second act, life is revealed in fuller terms. Once again we are given the facts of the situation, but the facts this time are not those which deal with monetary values. Now, the action has been shifted to a court of law and to an examination of that value system over which our society states the law holds sway: namely, the determining of the innocent and the guilty. The first scene, however, with its setting that barely suggests a courtroom, opens and closes with references to time and the river of time, and to the transitory nature of the world we see around us. What is happening, therefore, is that the naturalistic level is beginning to fade into the background and, as it does so, the question of guilt and of innocence takes on a new dimension, as does also the search for truth. In short, the dramatic action must now be understood at the higher level of metaphysics.

With this in mind it becomes necessary to look more closely at the ending of the play. Although the play has been concerned with violence and with death, with forces of evil as well as with forces of love, there is at the finish no scene of retribution. Clifford, whose villainy had caused so much of the suffering, dies a natural death. Madam Fay, a dark force of mischief and of evil, escapes from the courtroom and whirls off in her car. The inevitable question is then: why, if evil exists, does it go unchecked? The play makes no answer to this question except to say that evil does exist and that to understand this much is all that we can hope for in this life. Speaking of Madam Fay, it is Dr. Ballard who hints at the possibility of further knowledge — but not in this world:

In after life you will realize that she is
And why she had to be part of your lives . . .

The mystery with which the plot has been concerned at the legalistic level has been resolved, but the play ends on a note of metaphysical mystery. The play has attempted to establish the incontrovertible fact that evidence of the forces of good and evil surrounds us in our everyday lives. Through its symbolism it has attempted to convince us of the reality of those forces and of their eternal nature which, although they cannot be apprehended directly at a naturalistic level, must nevertheless be reckoned with, within the limits of our human experiences.

ELEVEN YEARS OF "ALPHABET"

Margaret Atwood

Now the young intellectual living in this country, having gone perhaps to a Wordsworth high school and a T. S. Eliot college, quite often ends up thinking he lives in a waste of surplus USA technology, a muskeg of indifference spotted with colonies of inherited, somehow stale, tradition. What our poets should be doing is to show us how to *identify* our society out of this depressing situation.

James Reaney, "Editorial", *Alphabet* #8.

Searchers for a Canadian identity have failed to realize that you can only have an identification with something you can see or recognize. You need, if nothing else, an image in a mirror. No other country cares enough about us to give us back an image of ourselves that we can even resent. And apparently we can't do it for ourselves, because so far our attempts to do so have resembled those of the three blind men to describe the elephant. Some of the descriptions have been worth something, but what they add up to is fragmented, indecipherable. With what are we to identify ourselves?

Germain Warkentin, "An Image in a Mirror," *Alphabet* #8.

All this is connected together, by the way.

James Reaney, "Editorial," *Alphabet* #16.

WITH THE APPEARANCE this year of its combined eighteenth and nineteenth issues, *Alphabet* will be over, and its small but faithful audience can only mourn and collect back issues.¹ While it lasted, it was perhaps the most remarkable little magazine Canada has yet produced. Many literary

magazines are group or movement oriented: they publish certain people or certain styles. Others, if they have “professional” pretensions, are greyish collections of goodish writing. *Alphabet* was different; its editorial decisions were based not on last names or idiosyncracies of punctuation, or even on “literary” standards, but on a set of premises about literature — or rather art of any kind — and therefore about life that was in application all-inclusive.

The premises themselves were set forth in the initial issues. The first *Alphabet* was subtitled “A semiannual devoted to the iconography of the imagination.” Each issue was to concern itself with a “myth,” the first being Narcissus, the second the child Dionysos, the third Prometheus, and so forth. To those unfamiliar with *Alphabet*’s actual methods, the terms “iconography” and “myth” may suggest rigidity and a tendency to collect and categorize. But the editor’s faith in the correspondences between everyday reality (life, or what *Alphabet* calls “documentary”) and man-made symbolic patterns (art, or what *Alphabet* calls “myth”) was so strong that in practice he left interpretation and pattern-finding to the reader. He merely gathered pieces of writing, both “literary” and “non-literary,” and other subjects (an article on Narcissus, a real-life account of what it was like to be a twin, the Tarot card of the Fool) and let the echoes speak for themselves; coincidences were there, he insisted, not because he put them there but because they occur. The “myth” provided for each issue was only a kind of key:

... Actually the same thing happens if you take the face cards out of a card deck; then put a circular piece of cardboard near them. Curves and circles appear even in the Queen of Diamonds and the Knave of Spades. But place a triangular shape close by and the eye picks up corners and angularities in even the Queen of Clubs. What every issue of *Alphabet* involves, then, is the placing of a definite geometric shape near some face cards.²

The reader never knew when he picked up an issue of *Alphabet* what would be inside. It might be anything, and the announced “myth” for the issue was not always an obvious clue. In eleven years and nineteen issues *Alphabet* published or mentioned, among other things, an article on Aztec poetry, a list of the Kings of England reaching back to the Old Testament, Indian rock paintings, an article on *Christabel* which identified Geraldine as Wordsworth, James McIntyre the Mammoth Cheese poet, the Nihilist Spasm Band, an early review by Bill Bissett in the form of a poem, the music of the Doukhobors, schoolboy slang and hand puppetry, the Black Donnellys, and a cantata about Jonah. Academic and

pop, "traditional" and "modern," verbal and visual, "local" and "international": *Alphabet* had no snobberies.

Because Reaney cheerfully acknowledged an interest in Frye, hasty codifiers stuck him in a Myth School of their own creation and accused him of the sin of "being influenced," without pausing to consider that for an artist as original as Reaney "influence" is taking what you need because it corresponds to something already within you. Others, who preferred a glossier, more Cream-of-Wheat-like "professional" consistency of texture in their magazines, found it easy to sneer at *Alphabet* for being one man's magazine (which it was), eccentric and eclectic (which it also was), and provincial, which it wasn't. Surely it's much more provincial to turn out second-rate copies of the art forms of another culture (what price a TV variety show with Canadian tap dancers instead of American ones), than it is to create an indigenous form, and *Alphabet* had something much more important than "Canadian Content"; though it was catholic in content, it was Canadian in *form*, in how the magazine was put together.

What follows is hypothetical generalization, but it is of such that national identities are composed. Saying that *Alphabet* is Canadian in form leads one also to say that there seem to be important differences between the way Canadians think — about literature, or anything — and the way Englishmen and Americans do. The English habit of mind, with its preoccupation with precedent and the system, might be called empirical; reality for it is the social hierarchy and its dominant literary forms are evaluative criticism and the social novel. It values "taste". The American habit of mind, with its background of intricate Puritan theologizing, French Enlightenment political theory and German scholarship and its foreground of technology, is abstract and analytical; it values "technique," and for it reality is how things work. The dominant mode of criticism for some years has been "New Criticism", picking works of art apart into component wheels and springs; its "novel" is quite different from the English novel, which leans heavily towards comedy of manners and a dwindled George Eliot realism; the American novel, closer to the Romance, plays to a greater extent with symbolic characters and allegorical patterns. The Canadian habit of mind, for whatever reason — perhaps a history and a social geography which both seem to lack coherent shape — is synthetic. "Taste" and "technique" are both of less concern to it than is the ever-failing but ever-renewed attempt to pull all the pieces together, to discover the whole of which one can only trust one is a part. The most central Canadian literary products, then, tend to be large-scope works like *The Anatomy of Criticism* and *The Gutenberg Galaxy*

which propose all-embracing systems within which any particular bit of data may be placed. Give the same poem to a model American, a model English and a model Canadian critic: the American will say "This is how it works"; the Englishman "How good, how true to Life" (or, "How boring, tasteless and trite"); the Canadian will say "This is where it fits into the entire universe." It is in its love for synthesis that *Alphabet* shows itself peculiarly Canadian.

"Let us make a form out of this," Reaney says in the *Alphabet* #1 Editorial. "Documentary on one side and myth on the other: Life & Art. In this form we can put anything and the magnet we have set up will arrange it for us." The "documentary" aspects of *Alphabet* are as important as the "myth" ones, and equally Canadian. Canadian preoccupation with and sometimes excellence in documentaries of all kinds — film, TV, radio, poetic — is well known. *Alphabet* was addicted to publishing transcriptions from life: accounts of dreams, conversations overheard in buses, Curnoe's Coke Book, a collage of letters from poets, known and unknown across the country. The documentarist's (and *Alphabet's*) stance towards such raw material, and thus towards everyday life, is that it is intrinsically meaningful but the meaning is hidden; it will only manifest itself if the observer makes the effort to connect. Give our model Englishman a hamburger and he will tell amusing anecdotes about it (his great aunt once tripped over a hamburger, hamburgers remind him of Winston Churchill); the American will make it into a symbol by encasing it in plastic or sculpting it in plaster. The Canadian will be puzzled by it. For a while he will say nothing. Then he will say: "I don't know what this hamburger means or what it's doing in this particular place — where is this, anyway? — but if I concentrate on it long enough the meaning of the hamburger, which is not *in* the hamburger exactly, nor in the hamburger's history, nor in the mind of the onlooker, but in the exchange between the observing and the observed — the meaning of the hamburger will reveal itself to me." The Canadian, one notes, is less sure of himself and more verbose about it than the other two, but he is also more interested in the actual hamburger.

Such theories, like all theories, are questionable, but the joys and graces of *Alphabet*, luckily, are not: its variety, its enthusiasms, the innocent delight it took in almost everything. Above all, one is amazed by its uncanny ability to anticipate, sometimes by five or ten years, trends which later became fashionable, Canadian cultural nationalism among them. "Who would have thought seven years ago," says Reaney in *Alphabet* #14 (1967) "that pop culture would catch up to *Alphabet*?"

The reasons for *Alphabet's* demise are partly personal — “In ten years,” comments Reaney, “you say what you have to say” — and partly financial. The first ten issues were handset by the editor who taught himself typesetting for this purpose; the last five needed grants to help pay the spiralling printing costs. But it's ironic that *Alphabet*, never in any way commercial, should fold just when a potential market for it is appearing in the form of large Canadian Literature classes at universities. If every serious student of Canlit acquires (as he should) a set, *Alphabet*, like beavers and outlaws, may soon be worth more dead than alive. Searchers for the great Canadian identity might do well to divert time from studying what also occurs here, like Ford motor cars, and pay some attention to what, like *Alphabet*, occurs *only* here. *Alphabet's* light is done; we can only hope that someone else with an equally powerful third eye, coupled with the desire to start a little magazine, will happen along soon.

FOOTNOTES

¹ Back issues and facsimiles: Walter Johnson Reprint Company, 111 Fifth Avenue, New York 10003, New York, U.S.A.

² *Alphabet* #2.

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EVERSON'S HALF CENTURY

Ralph Gustafson

R. G. EVERSON, *Selected Poems 1920/1970*. Drawing by Colin Haworth. Delta Canada, 1970, \$2.50 paperback, \$5.00 hard cover.

ONE CAN WELL START, as this book does, with some thoughts of James Dickey, the American poet. He claims Everson as a good Canadian poet. It is startling enough to have an American poet reading a Canadian poet and saying so. Canadian critical coteries must find it even more startling that Dickey reads Everson of all people. Out of ignorance and sectarianism they have kept Everson in limbo these many years.

Dickey uses Everson for some further conclusions. He says, "Reading Everson, one declares eternal war against the weeping-willow-haired type of poet full of vague fantasies and admirable sentiments, like Shelley, and thinks of practicality as one of the greatest of the artistic virtues, and as underlying all real imagination." As in Mr. Dickey's recent novel, one can only reach deliverance by killing off critical hillbillies with bows and arrows and paddling canoes between whirlpools and boulders. Deliverance is a very practical matter. So, in poetry. I prefer the word "actuality", however, to Mr. Dickey's "practicality" as one of the greatest of the artistic virtues. This still leaves poor Shelley nowhere. I don't much mind about that. What I mind is the turning of rubies into hammer-heads,

as Ruskin would say. "Practicality" suggests that poetry can wind clocks when it can only tell the time. Though if anyone wrongly deduces thereby that poetry is gamesmanship, that it is only a way of happening, whereas it is a way of concluding, he can go and jump in bed with Auden.

Which brings us to a very good poet . . .

Everson has been writing these how many years . . . quietly minding his poetic business at Montreal; making forays like Daniel into the prides of Canadian poets wherever gathered to decide the world and to read each other's latest; quietly publishing his poems in books published by the littler presses without what he is expert in and has always been retired from, fanfare.

Here, now, is the chance to get him straight in our minds: his *Selected Poems* of exactly fifty years. Good grief! We haven't acknowledged him in half a century, when he has been going so well, leading us into all sorts of actuality?

When I'm going well
as now at Westmount Glen and CPR
in wet October dusk, the winds
taste firecrackery. Loud sparks
jump up laughing like a Breughel bride.
Crayoned in phosphorus, the station agent

vibrates. He's electrocuted.

That poem (called by its first line) goes way back to the second book of Everson's I was familiar with (I see that I ticked eight poems in its index that had Everson going very well indeed). That was 1958 and *A Lattice for Momus* — a window for real thoughts to be revealed to the carping god. But already I had read *Three Dozen Poems* by this author and was willingly persuaded to devote some time to this voice up north (I was then living in New York City). Everson had been asked by the Library of Congress to make a long-playing record of his poems. Some American in Washington was aware of a Canadian poet. Or did he think Everson, like Carman, was American? The only comparable request I can think of is Harvard asking Ned Pratt to put some poems down on 78 rpms. Canada never did. I was suitably impressed by the Congressional invitation. I spent hours regulating into a consequence of moods Everson's poems so that two sides of an LP would be witness of his good work. Everson never got around to doing the record. I remind him each time I see him. Still and all, for my pains he did take me and Dudek and assorted wives to Sherry's for dinner at the old Metropolitan Opera House. The opera was *Il Trovatore*. A plot that Everson with his imagism could even sum up. Not that he'd want to. He likes his dramatics actual. Like a child scraping the inside of a shell:

The child scrapes scrapes away
at the shell —
always the same swirling colour shown;
it won't come off.
A waste of time, child. It's in the bone,
like tides and love.

Whoever reads this poet is going to

have to face up to it: the world is affirmative. The one great thing wrong with it, besides our own stupidity and the occasional hunchback, is that our time in it is too brief for us to get our fill of love. Everson is very out of fashion. He does not use the state of the world to exonerate his follies.

He just validates actual experience with significance; take it or leave it. He takes it with love. Plumed rhubarb blazes above his head; he suffers an apprehension of petals lest the mind open with intuitions and imaginings.

You can tell, leafing it through this book, that something vital is going on; something gay — like those wrinkled Chinese sitting looking at the lapis lazuli world; also something as dark as that light under that closed closet door. Like his housefly set free, he is blustering alive.

So filled with incidents is it, there is danger that the book will be judged a scrappy diary. I mind me of what Van Gogh told Gauguin when Gauguin complained that Van Gogh painted too fast: "You look too fast."

There are many ways to get our inescapes. This is a poet who thinks in images. They are terse, hard, with their colloquial adjectives full tilt. No little "whimperings of wind". Their satisfaction is that of turning a nut neatly threaded on its bolt.

The imagery ranges from Hannibal and his elephant failure and Macbeth murdering for high-plumed sons, all the way from that to quasars and Iceland. But by and large (mostly large), the images concern farmland near Oshawa, Ontario, or dictaphone incantations and other urban exercises in Montreal. Everson is a sophisticate who knows about evening milking and spring ploughing.

His rustic stuff is in a straight line from Raymond Knister's poetry. Everson, too, in his ploughing pauses to judge what he's done. You won't follow his rural history without ending up with some grand significances. He has his "Letter from Underground." Electrified fences cut off sire and dam and colt from land beyond, but, Everson notes,

Bright with gilts
of horsedung, underprivileged beetles stroll
flat through muddy land
and under the awful fence and over the
world

The poems are all short. Switches of inconsequence occur, the space of the poem being too short for what Everson wants to put in it. Cloggings occur. But no matter for that. Only the mediocre are always at their best, as Maugham told me. Rural or city, two images per poem or six, what you will get is delight at Everson being delighted at being alive. The secret of that is that Everson has comedy up his sleeve, even though he is hurried among the generations.

Here comes a French girl
everything waving
but she waves at some other fellow.

The old wait their customary predicament. But Everson doesn't grieve. The seasons turn cartwheels and he laughs while huge reality, a mindless lout, somersaults for his pleasure. Oh, he has an observation or two, this poet.

Remember the rape outside Drumheller
at fifty below?
Canadians are hardy.

I don't suppose he minds, knowing him as I do; but Canadians ought to be abashed that they have kept this poet in obscurity for so long.

There are far too many words around already, he says. Any poet who says that is worth reading. Certainly, Canada's present nests of singing birds ought to listen.

Here is his *Credo*:

Passionate human love, the scenes of nature,
agony of bringing into life
child or thought or shaped color —
these triumph over our lives' horror. Power
and vanity go raging out of mind

Even science, Paul of our age,
circuit-riding among gentile suns,
is no lord of this blotpage
cheerfully ballpointing nine lines

CRITICS AND CREATORS

George Woodcock

DAVID S. THATCHER, *Nietzsche in England, 1890-1914*. University of Toronto Press, \$15.00

TOM MARSHALL, *The Psychic Mariner: A Reading of the Poems of D. H. Lawrence*. Macmillan, \$15.50.

GEOFFREY DURRANT, *Wordsworth and the Great System*. Macmillan, \$5.75.

THESE ARE THREE CRITICAL studies by Canadian scholars which all, in their various ways, are momentous. In *Nietzsche in England, 1890-1914*, David S. Thatcher surveys an area of literary and intellectual cross-fertilization that

has never yet been thoroughly explored. In *The Psychic Mariner: A Reading of the Poems of D. H. Lawrence*, Tom Marshall reveals how surprisingly recent — in comparison with the elaborate work that has been done on Lawrence's novels — is any serious study of his poetry; in fact, as far as I know, Marshall's is the first treatment in depth of all the poems. Finally, in *Wordsworth and the Great System*, Geoffrey Durrant is likely to add to a growing reputation as a Wordsworthian by revealing new prospects — and forgotten graces — in his poet.

Nietzsche in England links a number of vital aspects of the fin-de-siècle period which includes both the last fling of romanticism in the decadence of the Nineties and the emergence — suggested in the appearance of names like Wyndham Lewis, Herbert Read and T. S. Eliot in Dr. Thatcher's final chapter — of the movement we generally refer to as "modern" in literature and art; Nietzschean ideas are one of the continuing elements in this transition which now seems less abrupt than we once imagined.

As Dr. Thatcher suggests, the influence of Nietzsche among professional philosophers in England at this time was slight; it came later, where it came at all. It was the literary men with a taste for the philosophical, and a touch of versatility which made them controversialists as well as creators, who were most affected by the spread of Nietzsche's writings and of his influence to England in the Nineties. The names of the writers which form the titles of chapters are significant enough: John Davidson, Havelock Ellis, William Butler Yeats, George Bernard Shaw, A. R. Orage. All men of flamboyant individuality, with a desire to reshape the world and strong views about the degen-

eracy of existing society, and in every case — even when wasted as happened with John Davidson — great literary talent and originative mental vigour.

Dr. Thatcher's book is especially useful in tracing how the order in which Nietzsche's books were translated — in itself largely a matter of accident — determined British reactions to his ideas, and prevented the appearance of a real Nietzschean cult. In its way the latter was a good thing, since it meant that Nietzsche tended to stimulate the writers who were too strong to be dominated rather than those who would become mere disciples. However, it is unlikely that a real Nietzsche cult of any importance could have arisen in Britain even under the most favourable circumstances, since, as some of Dr. Thatcher's quotations clearly reveal, the English of that proud time felt no need to be told of the desirability of developing the "overman" ("superman" was Bernard Shaw's adaptation of the Nietzschean term); they felt that in them the "overman" had already arrived.

The chapters of *Nietzsche in England* likely to be most useful are those on John Davidson and A. R. Orage. Those on Shaw, Yeats and Havelock Ellis merely confirm one's existing view of these writers from a new angle, but so little has been written on Orage or on that sadly underestimated poet John Davidson as to make any new discussion of them valuable. (It is amazing indeed that a man so influential as Orage in the literary world of England from the early days of the century down to the 1930's should still be uncelebrated by a serious biographical and critical study.) But it would be unfair to limit one's praise of such a book to individual chapters.

Nietzsche in England is uniformly interesting as the account of the penetration of a literary milieu by a potent and hitherto barely recognized intellectual influence.

There are a few textual slips in *Nietzsche in England* that better editing might have eliminated. André Gide, for example, appears as Guide, and in the bibliography there is a mysterious *Henry Read* to whom are attributed one book actually by *Henry Reed* and another by *Herbert Read*.

Tom Marshall, who has himself written interesting poetry and, in *Canadian Literature*, an excellent essay on A. M. Klein, has provided, in *The Psychic Mariner*, a very useful study of D. H. Lawrence's poetry, explicatory and critical at the same time. All Lawrence's poems are discussed and, since Marshall is an obvious enthusiast, a defence is made, but usually a reasoned one.

Undoubtedly it is time that Lawrence, very much underestimated as a poet by the critics of the Thirties and for too long afterwards, should be treated in this comprehensive and sympathetic way. The best defence of Lawrence's poetry up to now had been the long introduction which Kenneth Rexroth wrote to the New Directions *Selected Poems of D. H. Lawrence*, but that was too brief and in any case was written twenty years ago. *The Psychic Mariner* fills a gap, and does so well; I do not think any reader interested in Lawrence will go away without gleaning enlightening ideas on individual poems and on the magnitude of Lawrence's total achievement.

The great virtue of Lawrence — as a writer in any genre — was that the rhetorician, however noisy, never overwhelmed the sentient man. Lawrence

Thackeray

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never developed that elaborate structure of form which other poets — even the best — have on occasion used to conceal the lapse of inspiration, and in consequence, having little in the way of a technique of concealment, he never fails to appear bogus when he is so, as in *The Plumed Serpent*. Perhaps the lack of any desire to conceal was less a product of honesty than of his extraordinary English conceit and of the sense of total rectitude which he retained as a vestige of the Midland chapel culture out of which he emerged, but at least we always know where we stand with him. When his writing is artificial or bad this alerts us to some extremity of thought in which he has really lost faith, but about which he is still shouting because his pride will not allow him to forget it. Marshall is not always sensitive to those moments when the lines cease to ring true; he fails, for example, to detect the completely false sound of those pretentious pieces of poetastery, invoking the ancient Mexican gods, which are inserted into *The Plumed Serpent*, and treats them seriously, and inevitably unsuccessfully, as poetry.

In general there is a distinct weakening of the critical element as Marshall continues on his chronological progression through Lawrence's poems. In dealing with the early volumes he evaluates quite freely and well, and analyses techniques in some detail; in the later poems both these functions tend to give way to explication and — too often — adulation. Is it that Marshall believes Lawrence progressed into the kind of excellence that makes criticism inappropriate? Or is it that Lawrence's retreat from accepted formal patterns in poetry defeats Marshall's power of technical analysis?

When Marshall rashly wanders off

from Lawrence, of whom his knowledge appears to be intensive and virtually complete, he is liable to errors of fact or assumption. It is quaint, to say the least, to refer to the Imagists as "Miss Lowell's group"; even the formidable Amy would not have demanded such homage. It is derogatory to refer to Denise Levertov and Kenneth Rexroth as "followers" of William Carlos Williams and as Black Mountain poets, as if they belonged in the same pack of dull howlers as Olson, Creeley, et al. Rexroth is an important originative poet; he was writing long before the gathering on Black Mountain, and his home ground as a poet has always been San Francisco; Denise Levertov learnt her art among the New Romantics in England during the 1940s, and has developed individually from that point. It is also inexact to say, as Marshall does, that in "In the White Giant's Thigh" Dylan Thomas "writes with complete directness of the chalk hill as a giant"; he does not, for what he is talking about is not the hill, but one of those gigantic figures cut into the surface of the English downs which are attributed to prehistoric men. Such errors obviously do not disqualify Mr. Marshall as a critic. They do reflect the difficulties which critics have in discussing writers with backgrounds they themselves know only sketchily.

Geoffrey Durrant's *Wordsworth and the Great System* is really a development of a specific theme already adumbrated in his excellent short introduction, *William Wordsworth*, in the Cambridge British Authors series. Durrant's basic thesis is that the customary assumption that Wordsworth was naively hostile to physical science is far from correct: that, on the contrary, his strong scientific

interests and particularly his admiration for the Newtonian system, profoundly affected the content and even the structure of his poetry. It is a thesis likely to revive the flagging general interest in Wordsworth, and Durrant states it very plausibly in general terms, and then goes on to turn the plausible into the *almost* convincing by closely examining in individual chapters a series of Wordsworth poems in search of the influence of scientific elements on their imagery and structure.

I preface *almost* to *convincing*, since this kind of close analysis always leaves a shadow of doubt in the mind. It seems to be based on the assumption that poems are deliberately constructed artifacts, in which every phrase and word is weighed and placed carefully in order to produce a perfect intellectual structure, or alternatively to evoke carefully planned emotional reactions in the reader. In fact, it is critics, not poets, who work in this way. Much in poetry comes into the

mind without conscious thought; most poets have had the experience of whole verses, whole poems even, emerging into consciousness fully formed and clamouring, as it were, to be put on paper. And every poet also knows that the meaning he puts into a poem is not always that which the reader takes out, and that different readers take out different meanings, and that somehow this is in the nature of poetry: to be created out of a curious amalgam of unconscious impulse and conscious effort, and to retain an essential ambiguity which is most complex in the best poems.

I am sure that Professor Durrant, by finding something within himself, has found something in Wordsworth. But I doubt whether it was placed there quite so deliberately by the poet as the critic appears to insist. Its isolation in the crystal of an intellectual form is surely the work of the critic — not of the poet — as artist.

LOVE IS AMBIGUOUS . . . SEX IS A BULLY

Margaret Atwood

A. W. PURDY, *Love in a burning building*. McClelland & Stewart. \$4.95.

AT FIRST SIGHT I was prepared to dislike this book. Perhaps it was the presentation: on the cover some pleasant photos of two teenies embracing (a middle-aged man and a scowling

woman hitting each other with brooms or tied together with lengths of barbed wire or staring out a window in opposite directions would fit the contents better); or the nine pages of flame drawings be-

fore we get to the poetry (design is design, but nine pages?); or the peek-behind-the-scenes-at-McClelland-&-Stewart author's introduction. Or the title (meant to suggest a context of social desperation, riots, wars, The Bomb and such? But Purdy's desperations, here at any rate, are domestic and cosmic rather than social). Or the fact that few of the poems are new: though most of the old ones have been revised, it's like eating leftovers — they've been warmed up but you know you've had them before.

Buried under all the floss, though, there's a real book with real poems in it and some very valid reasons for existing. As always, one has to swallow Purdy whole, take the horsing around and the hyperbole along with the painfully-arrived-at honesties and the moments of transcendently good poetry. Purdy writes like a cross between Shakespeare and a vaudeville comedian (so did Shakespeare) and that's not such a flip remark as it may seem: note those Shakespearean double "and"-linked adjectives ("my faint and yapping cry," "the sad and much emancipated world," "the unctuous and uneasy self I glimpse"), the way iambic pentameter keeps creeping in; and on the vaudeville end the patter acts, sad clown laughing at us laughing at him, telling awful jokes while knowing full well how awful they are. Purdy too is inherently dramatic; assumed by all his poems are a human speaking voice or voices and a responding audience, and his sense of timing is often superb. But these poems have been chosen according to subject — "sexual love and its mental counterpart," says Purdy — and it's matter rather than manner that deserves attention here.

In his introduction, Purdy recounts an

incident in which he's told his poems aren't "romantic" but are instead "hard-boiled": a slightly archaic adjective, redolent of rock-jowled, mush-hearted 'thirties newspapermen and Humphrey Bogart private detectives. "Hard-boiled" and "romantic" are not mutually exclusive, and Purdy is both; certainly he's a semi-Romantic. He can hardly write Love without writing Death on the same page; his brand of immortality (see his introduction and "Archeology of Snow") is reminiscent of Shelley's; Byronic swashbuckle and Don Juanesque undercutting of one's own heroics, both are there. He's filled with yearnings for the ideal, the absolute, the eternal, with no unshakeable conviction they exist and with a consequent awareness of loss, transience and imperfection. What may have been meant is that Purdy's poems aren't pretty or foggy-eyed: the women in them are often, to Purdy's credit, solid flesh and blood, with a good deal of the latter. They do things the Blessed Damozel wouldn't: they sweat under the arms, menstruate, argue, sulk, have miscarriages, V.D., operations and orgasms (though not babies, oddly enough). They move in accurately observed surroundings full of what in a woman writer would be classed as typically female domestic imagery: Purdy is not above having insights in kitchens. They get bedraggled in the rain and have colds, and Purdy can be generous enough to comment, "When you sniff the acoustics of your nose are delightful." But Purdy has little trouble recognizing both his realism and his romanticism for what they are: "I can be two men if I have to," he says, and is.

Purdy's love poems demonstrate the self divided against itself to perhaps an

even greater extent than do his poems on other subjects. Here the freedom-loving adventurer pulls against the husband, that “greyish drunkish largeish anguished man”, and the female landscape (Purdy’s metaphor) separates itself into corresponding territories of Others and Wife. From Wife-country, viewed sometimes as a prison and sometimes as a place of refuge, Purdy makes brief excursions into Otherland, alluring but also threatening: he’d leave for good, he claims in “Song of the Impermanent Husband”, if he weren’t afraid to. The Others, whether memories of youth, exotic fantasies of “brown girls” or “white and lily girls”, a low-comedy “wagging fanny” pursued through a supermarket or a young girl in a poignant hotel-room interlude, are escapes or weapons to be used against Wife. Like Odysseus or a boomerang Purdy always returns, because Wife is where the action is and the action is not a tourist-trip but a battle.

It is this interaction which is central to the book, a constant unavoidable even when it is being denied and attacked. Like all crucial relationships it involves a number of emotions: Purdy, faced with the stubborn actuality of Wife, reacts with lust, anger, false pride, grudging admiration, claustrophobia, sadism, laughter, alienation, joy, fear of growing older and dying, and even a love “that can never be freedom exactly”. But he doesn’t make many guesses about the possible reciprocal feelings of Wife: either he doesn’t know, thinks he can’t know, or doesn’t want to know. Thus the celebrated skirmish in “Home Made Beer” — “Whereupon my wife appeared from the bathroom / where she had been brooding for days / over the injustice of being a woman and / attacked me with

a broom” — is made to seem both unprovoked (either being a woman isn’t an injustice, or it is but why blame Purdy?) and funny, a sort of Edwardian seaside-postcard surly-wife gag; though an in-depth interview conducted on the other side of the bathroom door would doubtless have been revealing. Wife, however, except for occasional mutterings of “you bastard,” remains silent, and is ultimately ungraspable, inscrutable, “neutral as nature”. From this war-torn relationship emerge two of the consistently best poems in the book: “Love Poem”, totally brutal and totally convincing, in which the poet identifies himself with the knife used to perform a painful and possibly fatal operation, and “Poem”:

You are ill and so I lead you away
and put you to sleep in the dark room
— you lie breathing softly and I hold your
hand
feeling the fingertips relax as sleep comes
You will not sleep more than a few hours
and the illness is less serious than my anger
or cruelty
and the dark bedroom is like a foretaste
of other darkneses
to come later which all of us must endure
alone
but here I am permitted to be with you
After a while in sleep your fingers clutch
tightly
and I know that whatever may be
happening
the fear coiled in dreams or the bright
trespass of pain
there is nothing at all I can do except hold
your hand
and not go away

This is simple and so good.

It’s also about as close as Purdy gets to tenderness, and it’s perhaps noteworthy that it chronicles a sickness: Purdy is more likely to express this kind of love in connection with the woman’s possible or fantasized death than in her here-and-now, awake and healthy presence. (See

also "Necropsy of Love" and "The Widower", even the poem in which he says "so / hell it must be love I guess" is titled "Engraved on a Tomb". Sex is another thing though, as Purdy well knows. Some of his metaphors for it evoke war and aggression: "I... / hold my separate madness like a sword / and plunge it in your body all night long;" "the exaggerated zone / and bomb-bursting place that / fucking is..." Others change humans to animals; the wonderful "werewolf metamorphosis" passage at the end of "For Norma in Lieu of an Orgasm", for instance, and the slapstick "vulgar elephant" equation in "Love at Roblin Lake". But Purdy's verbal orgies are counterpointed by a certain amount of hysteria. His interest in sex tends to be metaphysical rather than sensual: sexual attraction may be a "comic disease" ("... this chemical / formula is emotional / cancer even guinea pigs can't stand"), love may be "ambiguous" and sex "a bully", but still he can use it to convince himself he's alive and vital and (perhaps) to keep himself from dissolving into the cosmic soup, the flux of nature or the outer-space landscape that so repeatedly invades his bedrooms. Many times we find

him recalling or memorializing old episodes and indulging in new ones in an attempt to banish his real enemies, pain, sorrow and — especially — time. "That you are here it all," he says in "Idiot's Song", "delays my own death / an instant longer." It is the fear of death and of vanishing, we realize, that underlies a lot of the Victory Burlesque joke-man routines ("The Muse has thighs of moonlight and silver / her cunt is frozen gold / and that is why if any mortal woman need ask / my hands are always cold"): as in war, the wisecracks sustain the illusion of sanity in the face of an otherwise intolerable anxiety. Purdy does indeed "take women serious", but he needs his laughter at times to keep himself from screaming.

Love in a burning building raises a lot of extra-poetic, even extra-Purdy questions. Is it possible for men and women to stop mythologizing, manipulating and attacking one another? Do all men divide women into Wife and Others, do they all share Purdy's tendency to think of women in terms of separate anatomical features — for Purdy usually ass and breasts, he's not much of a leg man and there's only one fully-described face in the book — like cut-up chickens? Is

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Purdy's attitude towards women that of his sex, his country, his generation (in which case *Love* can be a handy guide for women who want to know what really goes on in the male skull, the Canadian male skull, etc.) or is it strictly personal?

Personal it certainly is. It may be more, but it's also one man's reflections, experiences and emotions, recorded so honestly that even the lies, the cruelties, the bathos and the trivialities are included.

CRITICAL LIMITATIONS

Douglas Barbour

ROBERT H. COCKBURN, *The Novels of Hugh MacLennan*. Harvest House, \$2.95 paper.

ROBERTSON DAVIES, *Stephen Leacock*. McClelland & Stewart (Canadian Writers 7), \$.95.

ALEC LUCAS, *Hugh MacLennan*. McClelland & Stewart (Canadian Writers 8), \$.95.

MICHAEL ONDAATJE, *Leonard Cohen*. McClelland & Stewart (Canadian Writers), \$.95.

THIS YEAR'S ADDITIONS to Canadian criticism of Canadian literature are not the novelty the first four McClelland & Stewart monographs were. All told, there are now three series of monographs, plus Ryerson's series of essay collections, and the interested reader can afford to approach each work with a critical attitude. In these new circumstances, a sloppy work of criticism is almost worse than no criticism at all.

This point is amply borne out by Alec Lucas's study of Hugh MacLennan. One indication of MacLennan's position in Canadian letters today is the fact that he is the only writer to be treated by all three series, Copp Clark, Forum House, and McClelland & Stewart, as well as in a separate, long study by Robert Cockburn. In such a case, for his book to have any value, a critic must have something new and interesting to say. Professor Lucas has tried a different approach, it is true, giving a chapter to each of

MacLennan's major themes (as he sees them) rather than to each of his novels. It's an intriguing idea, but lends itself all too easily to chaos. In every chapter, each novel gets a paragraph or a sentence to itself, but there is no room for a sustained argument about its formal qualities because the author must willy-nilly turn to another example of the theme. This is not to say there is nothing interesting in the book, but since the space allotted by McClelland & Stewart is so small to begin with, very little can be done with the few interesting lines of thought that do occur. Professor Lucas begins to mount a rather interesting attack on George Woodcock's "Odysseus Ever Returning", suggesting that other Greek myths are of far greater importance to MacLennan than Woodcock suggests, but he simply doesn't take enough space to develop a convincing argument. And the fact that he and Woodcock may share the truth doesn't

appear to have occurred to him, although such an idea is far more exciting than his attack on Woodcock.

It is instructive to compare Lucas's too short study with Robert Cockburn's book length critique of MacLennan's work. Woodcock's short book for Copp Clark was valuable, but also suffered somewhat from the limitations of space: this cannot be said of *The Novels of Hugh MacLennan*. Cockburn believes MacLennan deserves as much attention as he has received, but also believes that some hard-nosed criticism of MacLennan's novels, as novels, is needed. This he sets out to do, returning to a novel-by-novel approach, correctly believing that those themes and concerns which have haunted MacLennan all his writing life will naturally emerge where they should, under such an approach. He states his purpose clearly at the end of his Introduction, after quoting MacLennan on the art of the novel:

In evaluating Hugh MacLennan's novels, I shall apply the criteria he himself sets forth. It is my contention that he has never achieved in any one of his novels "a whole which is harmonious". And the major reason for this is that he, perhaps unconsciously, perhaps not, relies too heavily upon techniques which properly belong to non-fiction.

I think Cockburn does prove his contention, and he does so by the use of extensive quotation, and well thought out arguments, both of which require the space that his 163 full pages give him. After a slow start his style picks up, and at times becomes quite witty and ironic, which in no way hurts his presentation.

Cockburn early attacks Woodcock's mythological thesis, too, but he does so in a much stronger fashion than does Lucas.

I suggest that there are no symbolic characters outside *Barometer Rising*, and I do so for two reasons: first, because MacLennan himself says, "I don't use symbols in my writing, at least not consciously"; second, because I attribute the recurrence of character types not to any intricate master-plan, but rather to a poverty of imagination on MacLennan's part.

Cockburn doesn't then drop this argument, but reinforces it with examples and further arguments in every chapter of his book. It is in such development of all his criticisms of MacLennan's work that the value of his study lies. To argue with him, you would have to do an equal amount of hard work and hard thinking, and that is what criticism is about.

Surprisingly, despite the argument with Woodcock I have mentioned, Cockburn's evaluation of MacLennan's work is remarkably similar to the older critic's. Both men say that *Each Man's Son* is MacLennan's best novel, and their reasons for liking this novel are nearly the same. But Cockburn is not merely padding out Woodcock's essay. He has much more to say, and many specific points to make which have not been brought out so clearly before. Along with many other critics he attacks the "half-embarrassed, half-sly references to sex" which he says are a "MacLennan trade mark", and he sustains that attack with sensitivity and intelligence throughout his treatment of all the novels.

Nor does he neglect the valuable aspects of MacLennan's work; indeed, he brings them clearly to light, and specifically notes how some of MacLennan's finest qualities as a writer mitigate against his success as a novelist. Anybody who has read and enjoyed MacLennan's essays will understand and sympathize

with Cockburn's arguments in this area, for MacLennan is a superb personal essayist. But essays do interrupt the natural flow of a novel and, as Cockburn shows, MacLennan has never been able to resist slipping some in, except (almost) in *Each Man's Son*. And yet, Cockburn's final paragraph, while containing real truth, sounds just like a MacLennan ending:

Hugh MacLennan has come to terms with Canada more fully and in some ways more meaningfully than any other writer. His achievement in this respect is in a class by itself, and his novels are sure to stand for a very long time as landmarks of the Canadian experience.

Robertson Davies's study of Stephen Leacock suffers from exactly the opposite affliction of Lucas's study of MacLennan in the same series. He is competing with a shorter study, not a longer one, and even worse, that shorter study is his own, by now deservedly famous, lecture on Leacock, published in *Our Living Tradition*. There can be no doubt in the minds of readers of that lecture that Davies has a fine understanding of his man. But, within the lecture length, he was forced to express his ideas in a sharp and witty manner. Now the Canadian Writers monographs are not very long, but Davies didn't want to merely repeat himself (I think) and so he has given us an interesting examination of Leacock, the man and writer, that does not say enough about individual works, yet does not add anything vital to what he has already told us about Leacock's personality. Why didn't he spend a full chapter analysing *Sunshine Sketches* and *Arcadian Adventures*, instead of just a few pages? It's really too bad, because I think more needs to be said about Leacock and his work, and I

still believe Davies could be the man to say it. But he hasn't done so this time around.

Leonard Cohen is a different kind of writer than either Leacock or MacLennan, a pop phenomenon of the sixties, a weird cult figure all over the world as well as a Canadian poet and novelist, and Michael Ondaatje's book on Cohen is also unlike the other books in the Canadian Writers series. Ondaatje is the only poet thus far to offer a critique of a fellow poet in these monographs, and any reader of his poetry will immediately understand his sympathy with Cohen. As to the success of his study, every reader will have to make up his own mind. The reasons for this are not hard to find. Cohen, especially in his recent work, *Beautiful Losers*, the two albums, etc., has entered a world largely foreign to the ordinary writer, and has created works which call forth weirdly divergent reactions. People who agree about the beauty of *Spice Box of Earth* might not speak to each other about *Beautiful Losers*.

Nevertheless, I think Ondaatje has done a very fine job within his limited space. His little book is full of exciting critical insights into Cohen's work, and, given the fact that he obviously loves both novels, he makes a pretty good defence of them. His discussion of *Beautiful Losers* is especially intriguing, and should interest even those people who hate the novel. I'm not sure if I agree with what he says there (and it is interesting to note how another defence of the novel as a work of art, D. G. Jones's in *Butterfly On Rock*, argues the novel's worth for completely different, and almost opposing, reasons), but he certainly made me think about the novel and decide that I must read it again.

THE SMELL OF RECOGNITION

DAVE GODFREY, *The New Ancestors*. new press, \$10.

IN ONE OF DURRELL'S *Quartets*, Mount-olive crosses the entrance hall of a house and smells Mansion Polish in the air. The words struck at me at the time because (a) it was such a fantastic name for a floor wax (think of *Shinola*, in comparison) and (b) it implied a whole colonial mentality with which I was unfamiliar, and the snobbery it was based on was staggering. I wondered at the time if Mansion Polish smelled any different, and if they still used it in the mansions of Alexandria. Thus it was with a shock of amused recognition that I saw on the shelves of the Kumasi Kingsway in 1964 in liberated, socialist, "redeemed" Ghana, a row of flat green or red tins labelled Mansion Polish. It turned out "everybody" used it — when they could get it — and I know if I go back to that book now I'll smell the Mansion Polish too.

So it is with Dave Godfrey's book; and as a reviewer I must admit to a very real "shock of recognition." When he mentions garri, kenkey, highlife, dark glasses, pawpaw trees, the dust of laterite roads, Club Beer (or the lack of it), Fanta Orange, fans, the dam project, Mercedes cars and fat politicians I'm right back in that incredible heat, that violent landscape, that surreal world of rumours and counter-rumours that was the last year

and a half before Nkrumah was toppled by a military coup. I was there at about the same time Godfrey was: in a sense I have privileged information and my reactions to the book are bound to be coloured by my personal reactions to the country and culture whereof he speaks. But I think in the end it would not have made any difference — the book is brilliant and it doesn't matter if you've never been to "Lost Coast" just as it doesn't matter if you've never been to Patusan. Godfrey is interested in the conflicts of the human heart and the fact that I can *hear* his characters talking, or see and smell the "real" places is irrelevant. The words speak for themselves; Ama Burdener, as schoolgirl Ama, pampered, contemptuous, sizing up her new teacher in his mismatched socks — "And where is *this* failure from?" Eden, the bigman Minister, explaining to First Samuels, "We are all in a bus and Kruman is the driver — when he sways, we sway." The local politician who confesses, "I spend my day in beg and dash [bribe]. Aman is a man so what can he do. I do not complain of them; if a job is all a man owns then a man must earn from it. Socialism means self-help, we have all heard it, we have all seen it. All joke aside, my brother, what do you want?" "Did you have any money with Laing?" First Samuels asks another character. "Money? Or Lost Coast Pounds?", Kry replies.

The story is complicated and at times, particularly in the section called In the Fifth City, hallucinatory, at least in effect; but it is essentially the story of lost people living in an aptly named Lost Coast, who attempt to find or redeem themselves through commitment to a new revolution (First Samuels, Michael

Burdener, a host of lesser characters), Mother Africa and the "Kruman" myth (Gamaliel Harding) or love (Ama Burdener). Interestingly enough Godfrey does better with the Africans than he does with Michael, who is English or Ama, who has definitely been Anglicized. Michael's history is a little too complicated and his character not fully developed; Ama's story too much just a long rumination and she seems to possess almost total verbal recall, which is hard to believe. But *First Samuels* is tremendous, and the climax of the book, when he and a group of market women kill Gamaliel Harding in a scene of intense poetry and black comedy and increasing horror is the best thing in the book. First Samuels understands the market women as Gamaliel does not; he inflames them and then steps forward in the crowd to deliver the final, anonymous blow against false prophets and broken promises. It becomes not only an act of personal fury against a man who may well be his brother; it is also a symbol of the collective frustration of the people. There are things wrong with this book, some minor, some not. Godfrey has chosen to begin the first forty-odd sections of the book with an untranslated proverb or aphorism. This seems unfair to the reader and somewhat arrogant on his part. In the same way he uses many native words which are left untranslated and whose meaning cannot always be deduced from the context. On p. 136 alone I see *sunsum*, *abrabo*, *owura*, *akoa*; and there are several others, such as *obosomfo*, *okomfo*, *kra*, *nmeda*, etc. I can't help thinking of *The Beautiful Ones Are Not Yet Born*, Armah's novel about Ghana, which concerns many of the same issues, where the writer uses as few native words as pos-

sible, not, I think, from any "Anglicization" or neocolonialist attitude, but because he wants to be clear and simple and understood by his English-speaking readers.

A more major problem: the American, Rusk, is a silly caricature, as is the Peace Corps worker Ricky Goldman. Godfrey was with *CUSO* and one admires his "radical and nationalist" bias (to quote Robert Weaver's *Maclean's* review), but were the Peace Corps kids *all* so much more awful than their counterparts in *CUSO* or the *VSO* or whatever the British group was called? And linked to this is the author's handling of the affair between Ama and Kruman, the Redeemer. The fetish scene, which Ama remembers and which involves Ama, a Russian girl, a Senegalese and a girl from Jamaica may or may not be based on actual fact. Big time politicians are big time politicians anywhere anytime and there were lots of rumours about Kruman's prototype and *his* girl friends. But the incident doesn't come off, seems unnecessary and very stereotyped and the awful suspicion occurs that maybe it was included just to titillate the white reader's appetite. As a political caricaturist, in other words, Dave Godfrey is really crude.

But on the whole a big, complex, *intelligent*, poetic, book so unlike the majority of what claims to be Canadian literature (whatever that means) that it's exciting just to contemplate what he might do next. On the back of the book Margaret Laurence has made a long statement which ends "Dave Godfrey is, to my mind, the most talented young writer now writing in Anglophone Canada." I'm not sure this man needs the qualifying word. I can't think of any

"old" writers (writing fiction) that she could set against him.

AUDREY THOMAS

THE REAL AND THE MARVELLOUS

ROBERTSON DAVIES, *Fifth Business*. MacMillan. \$6.95.

Why do people all over the world . . . want marvels that defy all verifiable fact? And are marvels brought into being by their desire, or is their desire an assurance rising from some deep knowledge, not to be directly experienced and questioned, that the marvellous is indeed an aspect of the real?

THESE QUESTIONS and others like them are voiced quite often in one form or another by several of the more interesting characters in *Fifth Business*. The action explores those areas, suggested by the questions, in the form of a memoir written by Dunstable Ramsey, retired schoolmaster. The memoir is an apologia in which Ramsey's effort is to project a true image of his self and his experience (as marvellous but real) in angry reaction against the public version of himself as "typical old schoolmaster, doddering into retirement armed only with a shallow *Boy's Book of Battles* concept of history and a bee in his bonnet about myth." Ramsey's memoir moves from 1906, his childhood in a small Western Ontario town and his involvement there with two other boys, Percy Staunton and Paul Dempster and with Paul's mother, through his traumatic experiences of the first World War (in which he loses a leg, wins a VC, and feels himself reborn) to 1968 and the bizarre death of Staunton

in which both Ramsey and Paul Dempster have been involved.

The strength of the novel lies in its projection of Ramsey's self and in that of a number of other characters, (Mrs. Dempster, Joel Surgeoner, the old Jesuit Padre Blazon, Liesl Vitazliputali), all of whom inhabit psychically, more consistently than does Ramsey himself, the border areas between the real and the marvellous. These characters, as they appear and reappear, open up to Ramsey what he calls, at his first view of it, "a particular kind of reality, which my religion, my upbringing, and the callowly romantic cast of my mind had declared obscene." The prevailing tone is comic and another of the novel's strengths is in isolated comic scenes (like that between Ramsey and the Padre Blazon in the hospital) in which the comedy functions to suggest the peculiar kind of reality in which Mr. Davies is most interested. The major weakness lies, in my opinion, in the patterns of incident and action in terms of which these characters and others interact. This particular weakness reflects the major problem that confronts any artist, no matter what his medium, who is exploring the "real" and the "marvellous" in this way. Thus the same kinds of weakness of pattern are to be found (to confine oneself to contemporary examples) in some of the novels of Iris Murdoch, in Hugh McLennan's *The Watch that Ends the Night*, in some of Ingmar Bergman's films, and in some of Harold Pinter's plays.

Two examples from *Fifth Business* will indicate precisely what the difficulty is. The initial prosaic village world of 1908 explodes when Mrs. Dempster is discovered by a group of village men and boys (led by Ramsey and his father) "in

the act of copulation" with a tramp. In 1924 Ramsey meets Joel Surgeoner, main force in the Lifeline Mission, Toronto, recognizes him as that tramp, and learns that the experience had transformed him. It is in the twenties also that Ramsey becomes interested in hagiography. This takes him to both Europe and Mexico. Quite by chance he meets Paul Dempster on one of these journeys. First in France, in 1919, he finds Paul as part of a small travelling circus under the name of Faustus Legrand. After the second world war he meets him again in Mexico. Paul's name is now Magnus Eisengrim and he has his own troupe. Ramsey becomes, during a leave of absence from his teaching, a member of Paul's troupe. They meet again, and for the last time, in 1968 when Paul brings his troupe to Toronto.

Clearly, in terms of experience as "marvellous" these coincidences are acceptable as part of a pattern that is (if its premises be granted) both ingenious and "logical". In this pattern the names adopted by Paul have real significance as do his tricks and his role as magician. This significance would be fully revealed in the context of Jungian symbols, the Tarot pack (for Paul and his mother "the Magician" and "The High Priestess" are clearly relevant) the study of magic and witchcraft, as well as in the context of the varieties of interpretation to which Christianity is open.

If the two levels of reality — the real and marvellous — are seen as two, and they are so seen by Ramsey (and, one imagines, by most people most of the time), then, just as clearly, these coincidences, in terms of experience as "real", appear arbitrary and unconvincing. At this level of understanding we expect, impose, see, (whichever is the correct

word!) another kind of pattern, of "logic". Ideally some kind of double vision would succeed in presenting as single (as D. H. Lawrence does on occasion) the total reality.

I take it that part of the significance of Mr. Davies' title is to suggest that we are all "Fifth Business" in some plot. We are each of us the man without whom "you cannot make a plot work . . . the odd man out, the person who has no opposite of the other sex . . . who knows the secret of the hero's birth, or comes to the assistance of the heroine when she thinks all is lost . . . may even be the cause of somebody's death if that is part of the plot". We are all, like Ramsey, more than the public version of ourselves that the world sees. That Mr. Davies does not succeed completely in projecting "the marvellous [as] . . . indeed an aspect of the real" is an indication not so much of a lack of ability on his part as of his ambition in this novel and of the fascinating difficulty of the particular problem he there confronts.

W. F. HALL

A MATTER OF LOYALTY

BRIAN MOORE, *Fergus*. McClelland & Stewart.
\$5.95.

IT IS A CURIOUS MATTER of loyalty, that in Canada we are inclined to welcome writers as part of our literary life after they have been here only a short while, but are extraordinarily reluctant to abandon them to whatever country they may have chosen in preference to our own. Perhaps it is understandable that we should regard in this way Canadian-born

writers like Mordecai Richler and Norman Levine, who stay for decades in England, yet who find it hard to avoid writing about the Canadian past that still grips their imagination and colours their very language and their tone of writing. But Brian Moore, surely, is a bird of another feather.

Arriving in Canada, he writes two novels that are pure nostalgic Belfast, as Irish as *Dubliners*. Then, in *The Luck of Ginger Coffey*, for the only time in his career, he takes a Canadian setting, but Ginger remains inveterately Irish. The only other among his seven novels that has a smell of Canada is *I am Mary Dunne*, for Mary is *echt* Canadian, though of true Irish descent, and a clutch of comic Canadians are brought down to New York to play on the stage of neurosis. *An Answer from Limbo* takes us back to Ireland in memory and through the intrusion of old Mrs. Tierney, fresh from Belfast, into the hell of her son's grotesque marriage. *The Emperor of Ice-Cream* leaps back over the years into Irish youth again, into that Catholic Belfast which today so explosively dogs the headlines.

And now, in *Ferfus*, its very name suggestive of those blundering misty heroes whom Yeats evoked as twilight Celtic counterparts of Achilles and Agamemnon, the Irish past comes flooding back again with compelling and obsessive power. After reading it one can no longer claim Moore as Canadian or consider him a good man lost to the Yanks; he was never either. Ireland — Ireland alone — made and marred him.

The adjectives to describe Moore's novels slip off the tongue with a kind of glib inevitability. They are the works of one of the few impeccable stylists we

have left among us, and even in their tone — if we did not have the extraordinary plot of *Fergus* to convince us of the fact — they represent a sensitivity that responds acutely to the present but is not of it. Brian Moore, in fact is the last — perhaps the very last — of the tradition of fine Irish writers of English prose and, like so many of his predecessors, he lives as a physical exile from the land which mentally he cannot leave.

This, mirroring his author's predicament, is precisely the plight of Fergus Fadden. Like so many other Moore anti-heroes, he was born into the professional class and the Catholic minority of Ulster. He has left Ireland to live and make his writing career in the United States. In the elusive present time of the novel, which keeps shifting under his feet like quicksand, he is nearing forty, with loosening teeth and a morale rotted — as Spender once said — “by a modicum of success”. The mania for writing has made him skirt without involving himself the causes in which he believed, but he has not been able to escape the major lunacies of American life, and so we find him stranded in a rented house on a Californian beach, trying to save his already tattered integrity from being completely ruined by the demands of the film-makers to whom he is under contract. His wife has divorced him and is demanding enormous alimony, and in the meantime he is living with a girl of twenty-one who looks younger.

It is at this point that he begins to experience hallucinations. At the beginning of the book he goes into the living room and sees his long-dead father sitting, as solid as in life, on the sofa. The visions multiply until his whole past life intrudes upon the present. And they are

more than visions, for the apparitions are solid enough to eat plums and drop their chewed stones, strong enough for their viewer to touch and grapple with, but nobody else can see or feel them, and so Fergus lives a curious double life, partly in the vacuity of contemporary California with his mistress and her absurd mother, partly in the passion of the Irish past. Sometimes he talks to people from both worlds at once, which gives him — to outsiders — the appearance of incipient dottiness.

It is not merely the dead he sees and feels; there are also living people as they were at certain points in the past, so that he sees a sister at two different times as two different people, and is attacked by his own young self from the betrayals into which the years have led him. For these phantoms are conscious of the present into which they have erupted.

Moore, in fact, outKafkas Kafka in making the ghosts not strange visitants but people many of whom Fergus has lost to memory but who, as ruthlessly as the accusers in *The Trial*, arraign him for his covert desires, his secret betrayals, and judge him on the beach or inside his house in family conclaves or in the kangaroo courts of his contemporaries.

These solid guests present Fergus with himself, his past rising up to accuse and enlighten. Here are the relationships he has used as steps on that journey which has brought him where he is, to a hired house in a land and an age that deny the extravagances of individuality which the repressed world of his Irish youth bred and fostered. For perhaps the message that the company of apparitions brings to him is that even a narrow and prejudiced life, lived with passion, can have meaning. Stranded on the far edge of

the land, in his hired house with his easy girl, Fergus realizes the truth of his father's ghostly parting statement. "If you have not found a meaning then your life is meaningless."

It is at this point that he knows the ghosts have not come of their own accord. He has commanded them; he can release them. And the book ends with the solid phantoms driving off into oblivion in their creaking Morris Minor as Fergus walks into a present that is at last real.

Let us not speculate on the esoteric meaning of this strange vision. Perhaps it is Brian Moore's last farewell to his own Irish ghosts. Perhaps it is something quite different. The speculation is as fruitless as it is to wonder what is the real meaning of, say, Kafka's *Amerika*. It is the inner conviction of the vision that matters, and in all its literal absurdity, Fergus's nightmare is never less than convincing. The novel that bears his name is a masterpiece of the best kind of fantasy — that which succeeds because it presents impossible happenings with impeccable verisimilitude.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

GENTLE QUEBEC

GABRIELLE ROY, *Windflower*. McClelland & Stewart, \$5.95.

TERRORISM, kidnapping, murder — these are our immediate associations with the Quebec of this moment. How paradoxical, then, that Gabrielle Roy should publish another gentle book at this troubled moment in our history!

I was, frankly, surprised when I first heard that she was writing another book.

The Road Past Altamont seemed to end on a note of quiet finality. Then when I read her new novel, *Windflower*, I was greatly disappointed because I cannot believe that it will add anything to her distinguished career; indeed, if anything, it may diminish it. Her writing has apparently ceased to be an act of creative discovery and has become a ritual of self-resuscitation.

As I suggested in an article in an earlier issue of this journal, in her books Gabrielle Roy has been concerned with one over-riding theme — motherhood. I went so far as to suggest that the theme was so obsessional with her that it tended to affect the structure of her novels and the range of freedom permitted to the characters. *Windflower* would appear to be a paradigm of my hypothesis.

The central character, Elsa, is an Eskimo girl who is raped in a moment of desperate lust by a soldier from the nearby American base. All she ever remembers of him are the vivid blue of his eyes and the fast beating of his heart. Again, it is characteristic of Mlle Roy that the father is a shadowy, secondary figure. This time he is completely disposable, necessary only to impregnate the female.

Jimmy, the child of this momentary coupling, with his fair colouring is regarded by the Eskimos as a miracle dropped from the skies. Elsa knows that she has produced something extraordinary. The friendly, carefree girl becomes fiercely solitary in her possessiveness. She works long hours for the discontented wife of a French-Canadian official in order to provide her child with the tempting gewgaws of the Hudson's Bay catalogue.

However, while she is working, it is necessary to leave the child with his rela-

tives; and it is a torment to Elsa to see Jimmy acquiring slovenly Eskimo habits, and more bitter still, preferring the company of his permissive grandmother.

For *Windflower* also has a secondary theme: the problems of a society in transition. Elsa's family has moved into a settlement dominated by the Hudson's Bay Company and the American military. They are fast forgetting their native traditions and are uncomfortably trying to ape an unfamiliar culture.

One uncle has fiercely held out against the white man's encroaching civilization. For reasons which are not altogether clear (Mlle Roy has never probed very deeply into the psychological motivations of her characters), Elsa suddenly decides to take Jimmy to live with his uncle in order to re-capture his Eskimo heritage. For a time Jimmy becomes almost a true Eskimo child but serious illness forces them back to the settlement. This time Elsa tries to provide Jimmy with a duplicate of a white household, slaving over a sewing machine to provide her son with everything he desires.

As Jimmy grows older, he begins to realize that he is a different order of being from the Eskimos. He becomes uncommunicative and withdrawn from his mother, and disappears for longer and longer periods of time until he eventually stows away on an American plane and is never seen again. Some years later in a rather incredible episode an American plane swoops down over the settlement and a somewhat familiar voice radios greetings to many of the Eskimos by name, as well as a final unintelligible message which seems to be addressed to Elsa. Ironically, Elsa has not been listening to the radio at the time, but her belief that it really was Jimmy provides

her with a faint *raison d'être* in a life that had otherwise lost all its meaning. Still chronologically young, she has degenerated into an Ancient of Days as she wanders aimlessly about, more to be pitied than her own mother who had at least the traditional role of grandmother.

The book is touching, delicate, and sentimental. Dear Mlle Roy, I regret very deeply that you felt it necessary to write it again. PHYLLIS GROSSKURTH

LES THEMES DU ROMAN HISTORIQUE

MAURICE LEMIRE, *Les grands thèmes nationalistes du roman historique canadien-français*. Les Presses de L'Université Laval. Paper \$7.50, hard cover \$10.00.

LA PUBLICATION d'une étude d'ensemble sur le roman historique québécois s'imposait depuis longtemps déjà. Ce genre, plus pratiqué que la critique l'a cru, n'avait suscité jusqu'à maintenant que la rédaction de quelques études fragmentaires. De sorte que l'ouvrage de l'abbé Maurice Lemire intitulé *Les grands thèmes nationalistes du roman historique canadien-français* comble un vide.

L'auteur aurait pu aborder son sujet de bien des façons, soit en s'inspirant, par exemple, du travail déjà ancien de Louis Maigron (*Le roman historique à l'époque romantique*) ou de celui, plus récent et actuel, de Georges Lukacs (*Le roman historique*). Mais il a heureusement opté pour une méthode d'approche qui permet de dégager l'essentiel de cette production en la situant dans le contexte politique et idéologique de l'époque.

Dans cette optique, les thèmes les plus souvent exploités, qui sont la *légende* de

l'Iroquoise, les *missions*, les *pionniers*, les *soldats*, la *Déportation des Acadiens*, la *trahison de Bigot*, la *France ou le Canada*, la *victoire morale*, les *guerres canado-américaines* et la *Révolution de 1837*, prennent un relief nouveau, car ils permettent de saisir l'évolution de la mentalité québécoise depuis la Révolution de 1837, avec tout ce que cela comprend d'aspirations et de déceptions. Ce petit peuple, victime de tant de lâchetés, d'abandons, d'incompréhensions, n'a connu qu'un Papineau pour combien de Wilfrid Laurier et d'Hector Langevin! Comme on s'en doute, des romans historiques destinés à illustrer les grands exploits guerriers du régime français, nous apparaissent surtout révélateurs d'un passé plus immédiat. L'oppression y a provoqué, comme partout ailleurs, l'éclosion d'une littérature revendicatrice. Le roman historique canadien-français joue admirablement ce rôle, au dix-neuvième siècle surtout.

Comment ne pas signaler, dans l'introduction, les pages consacrées à ce "divorce entre la pensée officielle qui exprime des sentiments de convenance et la pensée nationaliste qui cultive les aspirations fondamentales de liberté." L'abbé Lemire a mis le doigt sur la cause de ce fâcheux malentendu qui devait engendrer une sorte d'agressivité. On le voit bien aujourd'hui que les politiciens ne peuvent plus guère tolérer les intellectuels! Et les pages consacrées à François-Xavier Garneau, à ses tâtonnements, à sa vocation, comptent parmi les meilleures qui aient été écrites sur le personnage. La destinée du grand historien, replacée dans le contexte social et politique — ce dont la critique traditionnelle l'a isolé bien à tort en en faisant ou un timoré ou un misanthrope — prend une

dimension nouvelle. Avec l'abbé Lemire, on est loin des hypothèses plus ou moins folkloriques servies régulièrement depuis la publication du *Centenaire de l'Histoire du Canada de Garneau* et qui font remonter la vocation du personnage à un bien hypothétique défi lancé un jour chez le notaire Campbell. Nous osons croire que les éditeurs des oeuvres complètes de Garneau recourront à des documents de première main et non à ces vagues roncants. Bref, nous ne formulerons qu'un seul reproche à l'adresse de l'auteur de cet excellent essai, celui de n'avoir pas toujours tenu compte, dans l'explication des faits, du rigorisme moral de l'époque. Sans doute l'auteur craignait-il de se laisser entraîner trop loin de son sujet.

ROGER LE MOINE

LA REALITE COMPLEXE DE MONTREAL

ANTOINE SIROIS, *Montréal dans le roman canadien*. Marde Didier.

TENTER DE CERNER la réalité complexe d'une ville comme Montréal, qui a connu dans les trente dernières années un rythme de croissance accéléré, et cela à tous les points de vue, relève presque d'une gageure. C'est pourtant la tâche que s'est assigné M. Antoine Sirois dans son ouvrage *Montréal dans le roman canadien*, s'appuyant sur les données fournies par 29 romans en langue française (canadiens-français) et 12 en langue anglaise (canadiens-anglais et canadiens-juifs), publiés entre 1942 et 1965.

M. Sirois approche d'abord le problème par le biais de l'histoire et nous donne un résumé succinct mais complet de l'évolution de Montréal depuis sa fondation en 1535, du développement

urbain et industriel du Québec (1891-1941), des principales valeurs de la société canadienne-française. Ce court essai sociologique est bien mené, solidement documenté, nous aide à situer Montréal, mais n'en est pas moins superflu à la thèse elle-même. Cette dernière s'ouvre sur Montréal et ses groupes ethniques, tels que vus par les romanciers. Il est donc question du dynamisme et du cosmopolitisme de la ville, de la grande division est-ouest, les Français d'un côté, les Anglais de l'autre, les Juifs au milieu. A ce sujet, la carte de la répartition ethnique des quartiers de Montréal,¹ datant de 1941, est intéressante à consulter, mais la configuration générale est-elle la même en 1965? De 1940 à 1965, il y a un écart de vingt-cinq années: quelles sont les traces laissées par l'évolution?

De loin le chapitre le plus dense et le plus révélateur du livre est celui portant sur les classes sociales. L'intérêt principal des romanciers français pour le milieu ouvrier, les problèmes élémentaires de survivance et d'adaptation, des romanciers anglais pour la couche socio-économique supérieure, la transmission du pouvoir et la pureté de la race, des écrivains juifs pour la classe bourgeoise, l'ambition et l'ascension sociales des nouveaux riches, ces caractéristiques nous disent déjà l'essentiel. M. Sirois n'emploie pas le mot, mais nous avons là les grandes coordonnées d'une "mythologie" montrealaise qui, malgré l'instabilité des classes sociales en milieu nord-américain, n'est pas près d'être démentie.

Comment se fait-il que notre intérêt pour les études sur la famille et la religion aille en diminuant? L'enquête sur la famille canadienne-française se termine en queue de poisson: l'auteur note le

sentiment de révolte dans les domaines religieux, intellectuels et ethniques, mais n'approfondit pas le sujet, se demandant plutôt si cette révolte a "toute l'ampleur quantitative que nous révèlent les romans". Les recherches sur la famille canadienne-anglaise aboutissent à une contradiction qui manque d'être nuancée: la jeunesse anglaise préfère "entrer dans les cadres établis", mais marque quand même une "réaction". Seule l'étude sur la famille juive paraît satisfaisante. Quant à l'essai sur la religion, M. Sirois dégage les traits dominants, sans plus. La conclusion se veut simplement un syltèse de ce qui a été dit, n'apporte aucun éclairage nouveau sur les données accumulées.

Pendant toute la lecture de la thèse, et surtout des derniers chapitres, une question se pose au lecteur: pourquoi n'est-il jamais question du domaine politique, alors que tous les autres (social, religieux, économique) sont traités? Dans une société, dans une littérature (autant française qu'anglaise) où ont toujours été intimement liés les trois thèmes famille-patrie-religion, comment se fait-il que l'un d'eux soit constamment absent de ce travail? On peut penser que l'auteur a préféré être prudent sur une matière aussi brûlante, mais peut-on l'être dans un domaine aussi essentiel, dans une thèse qui se veut le reflet fidèle d'une société et d'une littérature?

Ce manque est sans doute ce qui explique l'utilisation relative des romans étudiés. Si on ne considère que les romans d'expression française par exemple, certains sont constamment cités (*Bonheur d'occasion*, *L'argent est odeur de nuit*, *Les vivants, les morts et les autres*), d'autres trop peu (*La bagarre*, *La jument des Mongols*, *Le couteau sur la*

table), quelques-uns pas du tout (*Le cassé*, *Prochain épisode*, *La ville inhumaine*). Sauf pour le troisième chapitre, il se dégage du livre de M. Sirois l'impression générale qu'une énorme et riche matière, par certains côtés si minutieusement fouillée, ni tient pas toutes ses promesses, ni dit pas tout ce qu'elle a à dire. On interroge des romans d'un façon trop méthodiquement et systématiquement sociologique, sans tirer toutes les conclusions qui s'imposent.

Cela dit, il reste que la littérature canadienne comparée est un domaine nouveau, relativement peu étudié. C'est le principal mérite de l'ouvrage de M. Sirois que de commencer à déblayer un terrain vierge, un champ de recherches presque inépuisable. *Montréal dans le roman canadien* fera date, deviendra et est déjà un livre de référence obligatoire; sans doute aussi qu'il suscitera de nombreux autres travaux du genre. C'est là une des valeurs les plus sûres d'une thèse.

RICHARD GIGUERE

¹ Précisions qu'il ne s'agit pas du grand Montréal, que des municipalités comme Pointe-Claire, Dorval et Ville de Laval par exemple n'entrent pas dans les cadres de l'étude de M. Sirois.

VECRIRE

JACQUES GODBOUT, *Hail Galarneau!* Translated by Alan Brown, Longman. \$2.95.

WHEN THE *Wagner III* went down with father on board, it was the end of a great romantic dream. Mother remained, with her boxes of Black Magic, and an odour of quiet comfort, which seemed like the only magic left for the three Galarneau boys. Jacques and Arthur made good by becoming, one a priest, the other a Parisian sceptic. But François could not

adopt these traditional French-Canadian solutions to the problem of living without the spiritual patrimony that had foundered. He saw too clearly the extent of his alienation from the world around him. Rather than continue to be a victim of compulsory education, he dropped out of school to withdraw into a world of his own, a world he was willing to protect with a wall of silence against all the forces of indoctrination, priestly, Parisian or anglo-commercial, which threaten the development of an authentic French-Canadian self. Isolation was, of course, a failure, and François Galarneau has to emerge, to greet the sun and his fellow men. His experience is fantasmagorically convincing, and the outcome of it is a new word to denote, if not an entirely new concept, a new depth of conviction and a new application to French-Canadian realities. *Vécrire*, composed of *vivre* (past participle, *vécu*) and *écrire*, does not denote the pseudo-engagé cop-out, and the author avoids all direct reference to Sartrean apologetics. What he does quote is André Breton, on the substantiation of dreams.

Young Galarneau is driven to invent *vécrire*, because when he has dropped out of school, he finds it is not possible just simply to live. One precise problem runs through the whole adventure: having decided he can make a quiet living by running an honest hot-dog stand, he has to write a sign on what he has chosen. The peculiarly French-Canadian problem of language and culture in a society where people speak French and things speak English is thus presented as part of a living experience, and not an ingenious elucubration of intellectual revolutionaries. The hero-narrator lives and writes a Canadian French right

down to the seat of his *culottesbritcheuses*. The result is racy and entertaining, as well as really moving. This is a profound cultural problem, we feel, and it reminds us that cultural problems are profoundly real. It is a trifle larger than life, as artistic presentations should be. Galarneau's style is, in the proper sense of the term, an imitation of that notorious *joual* which Laurent Girouard copied so exactly as to be a bore, and which Claude Jasmin successfully launched into literature without really identifying it with the theme of his novel.

The translator faces a most exacting challenge. As the title, *Hail Galarneau!* shows, he stumbles at the outset on the details of cultural difference. The greeting, "Hail brother" is heard again these days, but the connotations are not those of the familiar "Salut." "Vécrire" will simply not translate, and so it goes on. But Allen Brown is aware of these problems. In fact, he seems to think that he discovered them, and his foreword says he invented the procedure of enquiring among native speakers about words he could not find in dictionaries. Such vanities are to be excused, for he has provided us with a good translation that captures much of the humour of the original.

JACK WARWICK

CIRCLE, STRAIGHT LINE, ELLIPSE

JOHN GLASSCO, *Poetry of French in Translation*. Oxford. \$4.00.

FRED COGSWELL, *One Hundred Poems of Modern Gaelic*. Fiddlehead.

DO YOU BELIEVE in signs? Here are three groups of translations on a common

subject, — French-Canadian poetry, — whose different characters are described by the geometric figures that the typographer has chosen to present the contents in each case.

The back cover of John Glassco's *The Poetry of French Canada in Translation* shows the names of 47 French poets circumscribed by the names of 22 English translators; Fred Cogswell is presented in straight line relationship to the *One Hundred Poems of Modern Quebec* that he has translated, title and author drawn up flush to the righthand margin; while in Doug Jones's quarterly of writers in translation, subject and translator are represented as the twin centres of an *Ellipse*.

But before plunging into mathematical speculation, let's look at the total accomplishment. Taking these three sources together, never has so much French-Canadian poetry been so readily accessible to the unilingual reader. In the past, as John Glassco mentions in his preface, translation in Canada was almost an underground art, circulated in mimeographed pamphlets, in little magazines, or in limited editions. Now over 300 poems by 60 poets are available, translated by two dozen English-Canadians, most of them skilled poets themselves. That's not much compared to what remains to be done, but compared to what we had last year, it's riches.

I have already named the three prime movers. Each has played a slightly different role, the most composite going to John Glassco. Besides editing the volume, he has supplied a fine preface, as interesting for its insights into the nature of French-Canadian verse as for its seasoned reflections on the art of translation. It's a pity it isn't longer, for Mr. Glassco is a

master of both subjects, but as a classicist he has also mastered the art of brevity. So we must be content.

He has, in addition, translated about one-third of the book himself, trying his hand at thirty-eight different poets. Such versatility has its price; all translations are not equally happy, though none is exactly sad. He excels at the urbane and witty couplet, as in this variation on the *carpe diem* theme (from Paul Morin):

*do not insist on gathering roses
it leads to arteriosclerosis*

But he also has lyric sweep and can deliver a solid surrealist wallop. Occasionally, in order to produce a representative anthology, he has had to include samples of high banality, but this is rapidly and blandly done.

His eclecticism makes it difficult to distinguish his true voice. I seem to hear it best in his new translations of Saint-Denys-Garneau, or in some of the light verse, for example, in his translations of de Grandmont and Godin (with A. J. M. Smith). But do I think I detect him here, in the faultless ease of this verse, because, as Glassco says, "poetry marked by clarity of thought and expression, spare and striking imagery and a simple internal movement" lends itself better to translation, or is it simply because I am partial to these poets? One thing certain: it is a real tour de force to be able to change into half-a-dozen poetic idioms as gracefully as a well-dressed man casually displaying his wardrobe.

Personally, I prefer translations where the translator's own frame shows through the cloth. And other members of Glassco's team, freer to choose only what suits them, come through with their own tone and idiosyncrasies intact. The Horatian

irony of A. J. M. Smith, the dark romanticism of Eldon Grier, the controlled colloquialisms of George Johnston, the fragmented melancholy of R. A. D. Ford, the linguistic intricacies of Ralph Gustafson — all these survive a close rendering of the originals. In some translations (I am thinking of A. J. M. Smith's version of the ballad "Right You Are, My Brigadier," — of most of his work for that matter), the question of authorship becomes inverted, and one finds oneself wondering, "How in the devil could you ever turn *that* into French?" All this contradicts the theory that the translator should be some kind of invisible, tasteless, odourless medium, and backs up Glassco's claim that his book is not so much a collection of poems-in-translation as one of translations that are poems in themselves.

In this connection, special recognition is given to F. R. Scott as pilot and pioneer in the translation of Quebec verse. His own spareness and deftness are well adjusted, as we know, to the lean stride of Saint-Denys-Garneau and the surgical swiftness of Anne Hébert.¹ But it is good to see collected here his translations of Hénault and Trottier, and to find the same style applied as successfully to translations of younger poets like Brault, Giguère, Pilon and Ouellette.

There is no space to comment on the performance of all the other poet-translators who complete the circle. At any rate, the last word must by rights come back to John Glassco who has so proficiently marshalled this round-up of talent. Three-quarters of these translations have never before appeared in print and were solicited or hunted down by this industrious and self-effacing editor. Typographically, his name should appear

where it really belongs, — right in the centre of the circle.

Fred Cogswell's single-handed translation of *One Hundred Poems of Modern Quebec* is a much more straightforward affair. The verse, too, is plainer, more direct, often less mannered, but less spectacular, too, less rich in allusion, and sometimes lacking in syntactic sinew.

Four of Cogswell's poems appear in Glassco's collection; of the rest, only sixteen overlap, and he has added a dozen new poets. So this volume is a valuable complement to the other. In quality, too, it stands up well. From one poem to the next Cogswell's translations are less even; some of the more abstract originals are almost unintelligible in his versions, but whenever simplicity is required, or native strength and, yes, let's say it, a kind of prosaic humility in expression, his verse is better. In the two cases where Cogswell translations coincide with ones by F. R. Scott for instance — in Saint-Denys-Garneau's famous "Birdcage" poem and in "The Time Corrected" by Pierre Trottier — I prefer Cogswell. The differences are small. Cogswell is a little more explicit, a little more personal, more homely. Scott is more formal, stiffer, more enigmatic. He makes calculated use of certain French-type constructions which give his translation a somewhat eccentric gait, while Cogswell's rhythms are more natural.

One can't be categorical; it would be possible to prefer Scott for almost the same reasons. Whatever the result, I recommend the game of comparing translations as a fast and fascinating way to get into the heart of the poetry, the French as well as the English. With poems repeated in the two collections, and using Cogswell as yardstick, one can

also compare the inspirations and techniques of Colombo, Downes, Ford, Glassco, Grier, Gustafson, Johnston, Smith and Sparshott.

One can even attempt the subtle sport of comparing Fred Cogswell with himself, for the same poem (e.g. Rina Lasnier's "The Body of Christ") sometimes appears in the two collections with mysterious variations. As a rule, one Cogswell seems to be more polished and well-rounded, while the other, when confronted with a problem in translation, takes the shortest distance between two points.

An objection that could be levelled at both books is that they contain so little verse by really young poets. Generations now in their thirties and forties are liberally represented, and the first quarter of Glassco's anthology is given over to French-Canadian classics. But Glassco includes only two poets in their twenties, Cogswell only four. Another sign of typical Canadian conservatism is the long publishers' parturition period for both books: Fred Cogswell did most of his work on these poems in 1967-68, and John Glassco's preface is dated October 1968.

Both objections and some others are countered by Doug Jones's quarterly *Ellipse* which for the past year has been presenting translations of two Canadian writers, — one French and one English, — in each issue. Until now the emphasis has been on poetry, though the latest number, *Ellipse 4*, was devoted to short stories by Roch Carrier and Dave Godfrey. The twin-centred elliptical principle is followed throughout the book: the original poem appears on the left, the translation on the right; an article or

interview in English introduces the French writer, one in French the English, and so on.

To illustrate how it works, take *Ellipse 3* which double-bills Michèle Lalonde and Margaret Atwood. A bilingual Editorial / Avant-propos situates and relates the two centres. Then come translations of nine Lalonde poems (four by Jones), a poetic tribute by Raymond Souster, "Michèle Lalonde, Reading," and a long interview with her conducted by Doug Jones. In the back half of the book Margaret Atwood gets equivalent treatment (fourteen poems and one prose text translated, plus an article by Tom Marshall.)

Such thorough consideration is usually beyond the scope of an anthology, but it represents the kind of deep study that any translator worth his salt is ready to undertake. As a result, Jones's translations of Lalonde are supple and new, with a rhetoric of their own but one that does not betray his model.

Ellipse is a kind of running continuation of the two collections reviewed. Its regular appearance and flexible format permits it to be more experimental and to feature younger writers. It is an excellent sign to see writers like Jacques Brault, Roch Carrier, Gilles Marcotte and Guy Robert (all of whom translated Atwood poems) discovering for the first time in its pages the stimulation and challenge of the art of translation.

PHILIP STRATFORD

¹ Scott's exchange of correspondence with Anne Hébert over difficulties experienced in translating *Le tombeau des rois* has just been republished in book form by HMH in Montreal.

CANADA PORTRAYED

GEORGE WOODCOCK, *Canada and the Canadians*. Oxford University Press, \$8.50.

GEORGE WOODCOCK, born in Winnipeg but raised in England, had already achieved prominence as a left-wing man of letters when in 1949 he took his leave of Britain and headed for remotest Canada. He did not, however, bother to cover his tracks once clear of the Old Country. Instead, by way of keeping literary London informed of his whereabouts, he has poured forth a wealth of books on subjects ranging from George Orwell to the Incas and the Doukhobors, from Proudhon and the history of anarchism to the face of contemporary India. If it seems puzzling why such a prolific personality should have quit the 1940s protest scene represented in England by Conway Hall and his own *Now* magazine, some explanation may be garnered from Mr. Woodcock's most recent book, *Canada and the Canadians*, which begins with a brief autobiographical foray before plunging into the main body of its enormous subject.

Mr. Woodcock's father was an English immigrant whose stay in Canada ended with a return to Shropshire forced by ill health; he regaled his son with accounts of Canada as seen through the eyes of a frustrated pioneer deeply nostalgic for the new country. And at the age of 37, George Woodcock set out for Canada where, except for a spate of university teaching in the United States and roamings in distant areas of the globe, he has resided ever since. This new book stands as an excellent memorial to his father, besides being a salute to Canada well beyond the capacity, in

terms of knowledge and patriotic enthusiasm, of any other Canadian writer.

As a prodigious example of dedication to Canada, this coast-to-coast compendium of social, political and cultural observation bears comparison to an earlier book written by an enthusiastic Canadian who also spent his youth outside Canada. That other volume, *Finding a Father* by Graham McInnes, was published as a tribute to Canada in its centennial year. In telling the story of a crucial phase in the author's life, it too was suffused with a passionate dedication to the Canadian land and to the people and the arts to be found there. "The true north strong and free (and deceptively simple, stood opposed to the muddles and tyrannies, to the interminable fractricides of the Old World," wrote McInnes of his definitive journey to Canada from Europe in the ominous year of 1938. *Finding a Father*, the author of which died in 1970 at his diplomatic post in Paris, forms part of a remarkable autobiographical tetralogy linking Canada, Australia and Britain, but it was for some inexplicable reason omitted from this journal's 1967 checklist of significant Canadian writings. Yet it expressed the same sense of eloquent exhilaration at the idea of association with a vast new land as is discernible in Mr. Woodcock's book, although this latest account of Canadian society in all its aspects is, even more than *Finding a Father*, far from being an uncritical hymn of patriotic praise.

As might be expected, the typographical gremlins have not spared *Canada and the Canadians* from the kind of misfortune they inflict on most books. Lord Thomson of Fleet, whose *Times Literary Supplement* in London reacted cordially to this volume, will perhaps wince at

seeing his name mis-spelled. And on p. 258 occurs a reference to the author himself which is almost eerie in its impersonal tone. But beyond such minuscule flaws the book suffers somewhat from having been written before the resurgence, beginning in October 1970, of political violence in Quebec. After the murder of Pierre Laporte and the frantic machinations on all sides which surrounded it, can any writer still say, as Mr. Woodcock does on p. 95, that "Canadians are less inclined to the emotional and cruel extremes of politics than Americans?"

On the contrary, it seems that, given the appropriate occasion and with due allowance made for the lower level of stridency possible among 20,000,000 people compared with 200,000,000, Canadians as a political crowd are hardly an improvement on their neighbours. For Canadians to think otherwise merely perpetuates the cardinal sin of both left and right in Canada, that smugness which, along with the "drab and snooty," impressed Wyndham Lewis as largely typical of Anglo-Canada during his three-year incarceration in Toronto three decades ago. In fact, well before the latest round of conflict in Quebec, Canadians had shown signs of sharing the destructive New World energies usually attributed to the U.S. alone. Aggrieved Indians, ravaged landscapes, the international notoriety (deserved or not) of the east coast seal hunt, the Black Power aspersions on Canadian commercial activities in the Caribbean — these are among the long standing justifications for second thoughts about the supposedly placid people who inhabit the Dominion of the North.

Nevertheless, Mr. Woodcock appears

well satisfied at being a North American without being that disreputable thing, an American. He dutifully records what to outsiders may seem the excruciating anguish which has gone into the celebrated Canadian search for "national identity". It naturally would pain him and many of his compatriots to contemplate the possibility that Canada, or that part of it outside Quebec, might one day be absorbed into the U.S.A. Yet he makes little allowance for the likelihood that a portion of the economic stake now held in Canada by the disturbingly expansionist U.S. commercial czars was actually sold to the much-abused interlopers by Canadians, certainly no proof of zeal in the cause of national independence. It deserves mention too that part, at least, of the development of Canadian resources would never have come about but for American enterprise, the latter-day natives being notoriously loath to take risks for the sake of patriotism or out of any other motive.

Still the quest for "national identity" goes on and Mr. Woodcock, though a man of European background and therefore in a position to know better, seems to share the delusion common in Canada that such "identity" can be achieved in a matter of decades rather than centuries. The fallacy of Expo 67, that costly public relations puff which seemingly was supposed to bolster national maturity in some miraculous and "instant" way, lingers on in the pages of *Canada and the Canadians*. Time, lots of it, and even, in the Yeatsian phrase, "our own red blood" go into the making of a nation. And history has yet to show whether Canada as it exists at present is simply another abortive British attempt at foisting a federation on a multi-racial society, or

will prove an adjunct of the U.S.A., doomed eventually to shed its separate status, or whether indeed the perilously capacious and under-populated country north of the 49th Parallel has the stuff of independent nationhood despite the deafening siren songs issuing from the south.

Mr. Woodcock for his part gives the impression of measured confidence about Canada's survival chances. He writes on p. 320, for instance, of the country's possible role as a "larger and more positive" Switzerland, although recent White Paper statements from Ottawa about future foreign policy indicate that Pierre Elliott Trudeau may have different ideas. Barring some reservations, Mr. Woodcock places great faith in Mr. Trudeau, to the point almost of naiveté. He considers the federal prime minister a genuinely liberal (small "l") politician, a point on which other observers would demur. He also portrays Mr. Trudeau as representative of French Canada. Quite apart from the fact (much exploited by Quebec *indépendantistes*) that the prime minister is only half French-Canadian and a millionaire in the bargain, Mr. Woodcock's evaluation of him might have been altered to some extent if, as appears not to be the case, the author of *Canada and the Canadians* had lived for a considerable time in even the "Anglophone" section of that profoundly divided city, Montreal, instead of having chosen Vancouver as his permanent base.

Such an experience might also have altered his approach to the Quebec question in general. As it is, Mr. Woodcock is a model specimen of that Ottawa-oriented ideal, the bilingual federalist from English Canada conscientiously

sympathetic towards the social and cultural aspirations of Quebecers. But this does not necessarily enable him to comprehend or communicate the doctrine which, in its moderate form, won almost 25 per cent of the Quebec popular vote in April 1970. For Mr. Woodcock, the history of Quebec is an inherent part of Canadian development as a whole. However, for the *indépendantistes*, the English-speaking Canadians impinge upon the past and present of Quebec not in any positive way but only as an "oppressive" front for the more powerful English-speaking "exploiters" to the south and elsewhere. Not even the great fund of fair-mindedness deployed by Mr. Woodcock will recommend itself to the *indépendantistes* unless he concedes this central tenet of their ideology, or at any rate takes note of the extra gravity it lends to inter-racial friction in Canada.

But *Canada and the Canadians* is a memorable work of synthesis by a scholar who, in the adventurous tradition of Harold A. Innis, insists on seeing the country for himself before writing about it. If Mr. Woodcock's pronouncements on the Quebec problem occasionally have the musty air of a "B. and B." report, other parts of his wide-ranging book pulsate with an authentic feel for the 75,000 miles of Canada he has covered in person. This flavour of the real country is enhanced by Ingeborg Woodcock's photographs. And there is a refreshingly iconoclastic bite to Mr. Woodcock's comments on Canadian art, at a time when the painting community in Europe as well as in Canada is caught up in an insidious rush to keep abreast of the New York-based "demon of progress."

C. J. FOX

NO NIGHTINGALES SINGING

BERTRAM WARR, *Acknowledgment to Life*,
edited by Len Gasparini. Ryerson, soft-
cover \$3.95, hardcover, \$5.95.

LEN GASPARINI, *Cutty Sark*. Quarry Press,
\$2.00.

THERE is a curious minor shock when one opens Bertram Warr's collected poems, *Acknowledgment to Life* and, on the first page after Earle Birney's Preface and Len Gasparini's biographical Introduction, reads the opening lines of the opening poem, "Working Class":

We have heard no nightingales singing
in cool, dim lanes, where evening
comes like a procession through the aisles
at passion-tide,
filling the church with quiet prayer dressed
in white . . .

It is the double familiarity of the lines that stirs one, lines themselves recognized after they have lain a quarter of a century in a forgotten broadsheet (for Warr never published an actual volume in his lifetime), but also reminiscent of a great deal of poetry that was being written in the early Forties, bathed in the minor-keyed romanticism that was one of the decade's reactions against the didacticism of the Thirties.

Warr did not reject the vision of the Thirties completely, and here he resembled more the Twentieth-Century Verse group (Fuller, Symons et al), with whom I believe he was not acquainted during his brief time in England, rather than the Grey Walls group with whom he did associate. One gets the sense of this in the last lines of "Working Class"; here Warr gives his own version of the dream of a world renewed which provided an

ending for so many famous poems of the age of the Spanish Civil War:

Though the cities straddle the land like
giants, holding us away,
we know they will topple some day,
and will lie over the land, dissolving and
giving off gases.
But a wind will spring up to carry the
smells away
and the earth will suck off the liquids and
the crumbling flesh,
and on the bleached bones, when the sun
shines,
we shall begin to build.

There are earlier echoes too — that of James Thomson, for example — and, in the undigested abstractions of some hitherto unpublished poems, a brimstone whiff of Rationalist Press Association materialism. All of this helps to mark out Warr's terrain, in his time, as a self-educated worker who read widely and preserved his residual individuality largely because he had no place in the literary world of his time. The best of his poems are glosses on experience, expressions of direct feeling, honest, limpid, often melodious, seldom experimental. I do not think it would be appropriate to use the old talk about promise. Like many other poets who were young with him, Warr might have fallen silent after the war and its peculiar conditions of living and feeling had come to an end; we cannot say he might have matured into a major poet. But what he wrote is worth preserving as a true voice of its time, and we must be grateful to Len Gasparini for his dedication in preparing the volume and making sure that it achieved publication.

By coincidence, Mr. Gasparini's own first collection, *Cutty Sark*, has also just appeared. Again, there is no need to presume on the future. Mr. Gasparini may go a good way beyond what he has writ-

ten here, and I hope he does, but he has still produced a creditable first volume, and — this time perhaps not by coincidence — a volume which appeals for similar reasons; there is a clear affinity that may explain the attraction between the two poets which leaps a generation.

Gasparini, of course, does not have a period flavour to anyone who reads his book now, yet there is a sense in which he is more genuinely contemporary, more a child of this year 1971, than most of the versifiers who are following the particularly lifeless fashions that were born — or rather resuscitated — in the later Sixties. He is not re-enacting what was good theatre when the Dadaists thought it up fifty years ago. He is not under the illusion that chunks of semi-literate prose cut into very short lines and delivered with grunting inarticulation comprise poetry. But he does have a clear, idiosyncratic ear and eye, he has learnt the lessons of the imagists without needing to imitate them, and one has the impression of a mind in which a natural tendency to write concretely is supported — though not overwhelmed — by the kind of rich, omnivorous reading which in these days only the dwindling company of genuine autodidacts seems to possess. Add a tempting touch of the macabre, a deep sense of poetic craft as a responsibility, and one has the basic *equipment* of a true poet. One hopes Mr. Gasparini can use it to overcome the tentative quality which makes some of the poems in *Cutty Sark* initially interesting but ultimately unsatisfying. An individual voice is speaking all right, but it needs strengthening. A total poetic personality, one feels, has not yet crystallized.

L. T. CORNELIUS

NEARER THE BONE

EARLE BIRNEY, *rag & boneshop*. McClelland & Stewart. \$6.95.

ONE OF THE POEMS in *rag & boneshop* is entitled "for maister geoffrey". After doing Chaucer the honour of skilfully imitating him, Birney ends this poem with a statement ("In Chauceres haselwood I walke always / And never thynke out of hise shawes to streye") which would certainly have caused Plato, had he read it, to boot Birney out of his republic for the usual reason. No one poet's "shawe" can ever content Earle Birney. In this book, he poaches on the preserves of writers as various in time and style as the author of Beowulf and bp nichol, adding little new in the way of thought or form, but redeeming every borrowed mode by a combination of technical proficiency, particularly of experience, and the flavour of a downright attractive personality.

Earle Birney, more than any other poet I know, is typical in thought and outlook of the average liberal-minded Canadian. His responses to life in Canada and his tourist impressions abroad are predictable and our own. But if he is the "average man" in this respect, he is rare among our writers in his ability to use forms derived from the whole tradition of poetry to express brilliantly and freshly whatever insight he does have. Moreover, he has an intelligent dedication to his craft that only a professional can possess. He can always be trusted to put old wine (which looks like new wine because it is made today) into old bottles (which look like new bottles because no one has seen them in a long time and because he has subtly adapted them to

the styles of our time) in such a way that every draft we take in is to us a new and heady experience.

Having said this much about Birney's work in general as continued in this volume, I should like now to comment somewhat haphazardly about particular poems or groups of poems that to me appear, for good or bad, worthy of particular mention.

First, with respect to the concrete poems, I shall only comment on a few, but what I say of these is typical of Birney's use of the concrete poem in general. It is always interesting, but the failures, I feel, tend to outnumber the successes.

"campus theatre steps" attracted me by its striking format, but after turning the book around and reading it, I was disappointed. It is a kind of "in-joke", which one is not apt to understand unless he comes from Eugene, Oregon. I come from Fredericton, New Brunswick. Once its typography has been unscrambled "Alaska Passage" is, one discovers, a typical Birney "wilderness" poem, made more difficult, not more understandable, by its author's attempt to make it look like a typographical wilderness. There is more organic justification for the formats of "Buildings" and "Outdoor Zoo", which fail, it seems to me, not because of their form but because they are "cute" only, and a poem ought certainly to be more than "cute".

"in the mammoth corridor" Birney pits his poetic prose against that of a tourist "blurb"; not surprisingly he wins, but his strength might have been more impressive had he merely flexed his muscles by himself. "in the night jet" is a brilliantly apt imagistic poem, and the printing of inverted black and white is annoying in that it is too crude and

unimaginative a device to be worthy of the brilliance of the poem's actual language.

"up her can nada" is Birney's masterpiece in the concrete mode — clever, intriguing, economical, yet imaginative, it presents a map of limitation and prejudice in an ugly, inimitable way. The clever "canada council" only suffers by comparison — one wonders, though, why Birney does not incorporate "oui" into the Council's vocabulary. It has not always said "non" to him.

Of the more orthodox poems, "once high on the hill" is the longest and most ambitious. This poem, Birney's reminiscences of San Francisco forty years ago, is a successful and moving work, giving a sense that, however men disagree over the meaning and value of life, the excitement and flavour of its flow is of itself value enough to justify existence.

"kiwis," "christchurch, n.z.," "strine authors meet" are the usual swipes that a creative giant delivers against non-creative academic pygmies. Birney, like Pope, has not discovered that these skilfully delivered blows are all that keep such beings alive. If poets left them alone, they would die of their own insignificance.

Birney, the liberal, is at his best in "four feet between", a poem that reminds me of Wordsworth's encounter with a leech gatherer in "Resolution and Independence" and more than challenges comparison with the latter poem.

"Oil refinery", Anglo-Saxon in form and imaginatively mythopoetic in the best sense, is a masterpiece, and for it I forgive Birney the kind of practical joking that "poet-tree 1" is, and his printing of "found prose from the Leacock centennial", which he certainly ought to

have left where he found it, in Orillia, Ontario. For me, "song for sunsets" and "if you were here", redeem their schmalziness by the aptness of their particulars and the beauty of their rhythms and make totally irrelevant all I have said by way of criticism and praise: "Beauty is its own excuse for being." I am grateful to Earle Birney for this book, and I hope that, for many more years, he will be spared to ask his interminable questions, that he will continue to mix up and write down his answers in what, despite all his gifts of imitation and parody, ultimately becomes his own inimitable way.

FRED COGSWELL

CALLAGHAN REVISITED

WILLIAM WALSH, *A Manifold Voice: Studies in Commonwealth Literature*. Clarke Irwin. \$7.00.

THIS SERIES of nine disparate essays on the nine Commonwealth writers who "have made a significant use of the resources of the language" is absolutely certain in its judgments, which it takes to be objective, yet it couches those assertions in a rhetoric that constantly loses its subject in abstraction. The language's "resources" and the resources' "significance" are both unclear. Though the essays quote liberally from the nine authors — Narayan, Chaudhuri, Schreiner, Achebe, Naipaul, White, Hope, Mansfield, and Callaghan — only on Hope (the one poet examined) does the author consistently demonstrate the relationship between style and art that he takes as his task. Callaghan, we are told, is sometimes "unaccountable" in his characters' motivation, sometimes "lack-

ing in abstract logic", oppressed "by the powerful tradition of the United States", "plain to the point of drabness and often painfully clumsy". Apparently his "unfashionable conscience" and the "flexibility and versatility" of *The Many Colored Coat* redeem him, but given the option of writing instead about the stylistic subtleties of Ethel Wilson, the dense intellectualism of Margaret Avison, the baroque magnificence of Malcolm Lowry, or the versatility of a number of other writers, Callaghan seems an odd choice to show off Canadian linguistic significance. Indeed, the omission of Wole Soyinka, Wilson Harris, Janet Frame, Francis Webb and others seems only accountable by positing a taste for the classical rather than the romantic as the critic's underlying criterion for the judgments he makes. It is this that makes the Hope essay so good and the pieces on Schreiner and White so out of tune. Because Professor Walsh brings a sound intelligence to the critical task, this is a good book to read, but because the literatures of the Commonwealth are so insistently romantic, it is also a good book with which to disagree. W. H. NEW

*** *Guide Bibliographique des thèses littéraires canadiennes de 1921 à 1969*. Ed. ANTOINE NAAMAN. Editions Cosmos (Sherbrooke, P.Q.), \$10.00. A detailed listing of M.A. and Ph.D. theses written in Canada on all literary topics, in English and French, organized by subject, and indexed by author and director. The sections on Canadian literature are welcome, but must be used exceedingly cautiously. There are occasional omissions but the faults of commission are greater, for M. Naaman unwisely has chosen to include (as if they were complete) all those topics in progress (some of them already disbanded) which appear in the mimeographed lists that Professor Carl Klinck has for several years circulated among Canadian academics.

W.N.

THESES IN ENGLISH-CANADIAN LITERATURE, 1969-70

Compiled by Carl F. Klinck

This list includes only theses in English-Canadian Literature because theses in French-Canadian Literature are now recorded by Professor Antoine Naaman of the Université de Sherbrooke in his Guide bibliographique des thèses littéraires canadiennes.

1969

- ATKINS, ELIZABETH. *Aspects of the Absurd in Modern Fiction, with special reference to 'Under the Volcano' and 'Catch 22.'* For M.A., University of British Columbia, (Professor D. G. Stephens).
- BENHAM, DAVID. *A Liverpool of Self: A Study of Lowry's Fiction other than 'Under the Volcano.'* For M.A., University of British Columbia, (Professor W. H. New).
- BOYLAN, CHARLES ROBERT. *The Social and Lyric Voices of Dorothy Livesay.* For M.A., University of British Columbia, (Professor W. H. New).
- BYSCOP, PAUL. *'The Looking Game'* (a short novel submitted in lieu of M.A. thesis, McGill, 1968), (Professor Louis Dudek).
- DAWSON, JEREMY ORME. *The Search theme in the Early Novels of John Buchan.* For M.A., University of Manitoba, (Professor G. L. Brodersen).
- DUNPHY, JOHN W. *The Technique of Fiction in the Novels of F. P. Grove.* For M.A., Dalhousie University, (Professor M. G. Parks).
- EDWARDS, MARY JANE. *"Fiction and Montreal, 1769-1885"* — English. For Ph.D., University of Toronto, (Professor G. H. Roper).
- HALL, CHIPMAN. *A Survey of the Indians' Role in English-Canadian Literature to 1900.* For M.A., Dalhousie University, (Professors M. G. Parks and R. L. Raymond).
- JOHNSON, CARELL. *The Making of 'Under the Volcano': An Examination of lyrical Structure, with Reference to Textual Revisions.* For M.A., University of British Columbia, (Professor W. H. New).
- KNELSEN, RICHARD JOHN. *Flesh and Spirit in the Writings of Leonard Cohen.* For M.A., University of Manitoba, (Professor Walter E. Swayze).
- MACLURE, EVELYN JOYCE. *The Short Story in Canada: Development from 1935 to 1955 with Attached Bibliography.* For M.A., University of British Columbia, (Professor D. G. Stephens).
- ORANGE, JOHN G. *"Ernest Buckler: The Masks of the Artist."* For Phil.M., University of Toronto, (Professor F. W. Watt).
- PARKER, GEORGE LAWRENCE. *A History of a Canadian Publishing House: A Study of the Relation Between Publishing and the Profession of Writing, 1890-1940.* For Ph.D., University of Toronto, (Professor Gordon Roper).
- RAMSEY, ROBIN. *The Impact of Time and Memory in Malcolm Lowry's Fiction.* For M.A., University of British Columbia, (Professor W. H. New).
- RIDDELL, JOHN ARCHIBALD. *Malcolm Lowry: The Voyage That Never Ends.* For M.A., Dalhousie University, (Professor Malcolm Ross).
- RIDEOUT, E. CHRISTOPHER. *The Woman in the Novels of Frederick Philip Grove.* For M.A., University of Alberta, (Professor H. Hargreaves).
- RINGROSE, CHRISTOPHER. *'Preview': Anatomy*

THESES

- of a Group. For M.A., University of Alberta, (Professor Dorothy Livesay).
- ROGERS, LINDA. *Environment and the Quest Motif in Selected Works of Canadian Prairie Fiction*. For M.A., University of British Columbia, (Professor W. H. New).
- ROSS, G. ARTHUR. *Three Minor Canadian Poets: Louis Alexander Mackay, Leo Kennedy, and Raymond Knister*. For M.A., University of Alberta, (Professor Dorothy Livesay).
- SHERMAN, JOSEPH. *Poems; and Notes Towards a Jewish Poem*. For M.A., University of New Brunswick, (Professor K. Thompson).
- THOMPSON, JOYCE LESLEY. *Structural Technique in the Fiction of Frederick Philip Grove*. For M.A., University of Manitoba, (Professor Walter E. Swayze).
- WING, TED. *Puritan Ethic and Social Response in Novels of Sinclair Ross, Robertson Davies, and Hugh MacLennan*. For M.A., University of Alberta, (Professor Diane Bessai).
- YEO, MARGARET ELIZABETH. "The Living Landscape: Nature Imagery in the Poetry of Margaret Atwood and other Modern Canadian Lyric Poets." For M.A., Carleton University, (Professor R. L. McDougall).
- 1970**
- BOLSTER, CHARLES G. *Shakespeare in French Canada*. For M.A., University of New Brunswick, (Professor David Galloway).
- BURNETT, RONALD FRANK. *Le Juge, c'est vous*. For M.A., McGill University, (Professor William Wees).
- COLE, YOLANDA. *Journey to Water Motif in Canadian Prairie Novel*. For M.A., University of Alberta, (Professor R. Harrison).
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- RICOU, LAURENCE RODGER. *Canadian Prairie Fiction: The Significance of the Landscape*. For Ph.D., University of Toronto.
- SHOULDICE, LARRY. *Translation into English of Contes Anglais et Autres by Jacques Ferron, with a Critical Introduction of the Complete Works of the Author*. For M.A., Université de Sherbrooke, (Professor D. G. Jones).
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