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BY P. K. PAGE

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OXFORD

SWARMING OF POETS

An Editorial Reportage

George Woodcock

WHEN *Canadian Literature* began, twelve years ago, I promised that every book of verse by a Canadian poet, as well as every novel published in this country, would be reviewed in its pages. It was an easy promise in a year — 1959 — when twenty-four volumes of poetry were all that the bibliographer who compiled our checklist of publications could discover. All twenty-four, I believe, were duly reviewed. Through the Fifties, Northrop Frye, writing his yearly poetry article in the *University of Toronto Quarterly*, had been able to devote a few sentences or even a few paragraphs to every book of verse that appeared; they came, in those days, mainly from the regular publishers, who lost money on good poets to give prestige to their lists. There were few small presses; amateur publishing hardly existed; the mimeograph revolution had not begun.

The change since then was brought home to me with formidable emphasis on a recent morning when nineteen books of verse arrived for review in one mail delivery. The poetry explosion of the past decades was a phenomenon I had already talked of lightly enough; now it was going bang in my face. Last year, according to *Canadian Literature*'s annual checklist, more than 120 collections of verse in English alone were published in Canada, and that is a minimal count, for we were well aware that by no means every title had been flushed out of the coverts and copses of amateur publishing. This year, if that one day's mail was a fair augury, the total may well run into 250 or 300 titles in English. With that realization I had to admit to myself that it was time to abandon even the pretence of reviewing every book or pamphlet that a Canadian poet might drift on to the current of public attention.

Now came the nag of editorial conscience. If only thirty or forty books of verse can be noticed at meaningful length, someone has to make the choice, and since editing like writing is a craft that cannot be performed in committee, the choice has to be made by an individual, and inevitably his perceptions and tastes will be dominant. This editor presents as his justification — and his limitation — that he was weaned into writing on Imagism and Original Dada, proved his youth in the shouting Thirties, saddened into manhood in the romantic Forties, and came in the Sixties to a solitary selfhood expressed in verse drama which only the CBC has seen fit to encourage. He claims, at the least, an experience varied enough to spot when poets are merely doing again what was done better when it was first conceived, a caution about condemning anything that seems to have new life, an old dog's nose for the smell of failure, a bone-deep knowledge of the flaw in every success.

But once the score or two of books to be reviewed have been duly selected by such eminently fallible means, what of the books that remain? The least one can do is to list them for reference, and this we have tried to do year after year in the Checklist, but with a growing sense, as more and more collections of verse are *merely listed*, of the need for something more, some kind of occasional survey of the poets and trends that are emerging into significance and the little presses that encourage them.

During the last month, in the attempt to do at least this minimal justice, I have read some eighty books and booklets of verse that have accumulated on my desk. I cannot say that I have reached any portentous theoretical conclusions; there has not been time to be more than impressionistic. But perhaps that is not inappropriate at a time when the current prejudice against structure has helped to prevent even the emergence of a definable trend that might be compared with those of the Thirties or Forties. One has the feeling of a guerilla army percolating in all directions, and not always forward, for often the movements whose outlines one fleetingly recognizes are in fact ghosts, the ghosts of Dada, of Surrealism, even, in the latest wave of younger poets, of the social Thirties.

NOW FOR A HEADER into the bookpile! On top are the anthologies; of the first two I turn up, one is made by a young poet selecting from the stars of Establishment 1970; it is *Fifteen Canadian Poets*, edited by Garry Geddes (Oxford, $3.95). The second is selected, by one of the Establish-

ment stars, from among the young (an unspecified "upper age limit" has been imposed, but it is hard to determine, since at least eight of the contributors have crossed into the thirties and some born later are already old at heart); it is *Storm Warning*, edited by Al Purdy (McClelland & Stewart, $2.95). Out of this group, Purdy believes, the next Establishment will emerge, and he may be right, for already the leading poets of the day as Geddes reveals them in *Fifteen Canadian Poets* are different from those an anthologist working ten years ago would have presented. Then Purdy, Cohen, Mandel, would have been regarded as junior members, doubtful borderline cases; now, next to Birney, Souster and Layton, they seem the elders in Geddes' collection, and even George Bowering and Margaret Atwood, of whom very few had heard in 1961, have become accepted literary personalities; the only real newcomers to the group are Victor Coleman and Michael Ondaatje. Even in five years, some of Purdy's unknowns or half-knowns will obviously have moved into that little circle of celebrity whose light we in the world of letters call fame.

Fifteen Canadian Poets is a finely chosen anthology, picked mainly — though not entirely — from poems written during the Sixties, avoiding over-familiar works, and convincingly demonstrating the imaginative and textual richness of the best Canadian poetry produced during the decade that has just ended. There are other poets I would have included — P. K. Page and Miriam Waddington certainly and George Jonas perhaps — and at least two of the poets included I would have left out, but it is precisely in such debatable cases that the intangibilities of taste take over from the relative certainties of critical judgment. And despite differing preferences, I doubt if any anthologist could have composed a selection which *as a whole* is more effective than *Fifteen Poets*. I suspect the limitation in the number of poets, like the very lucid notes on them, was primarily intended to make the book useful to students and teachers, but for the general reader as well this kind of selective anthology is the ideal supplement to a classic general collection like A. J. M. Smith's *Modern Canadian Verse*. Smith is extensive; Geddes is intensive. We need both views.

My strongest impression on reading *Storm Warning* was of the obvious pre-eminence of David Helwig among the poets Purdy has collected. He is older, of course, than at least four of the Geddes Fifteen, and he writes with a sureness of rhythm and a clearness of imagery, a positively visual evocativeness, that place him — and have placed him since his first book — firmly within the major tradition as it exists in Canada.

So far as the other poets are concerned, I like to consider *Storm Warning* in

relation to two collections of work by younger poets which The House of Anansi has recently published: *Soundings* ($2.50 paper, $6.00 cloth), a selection from "new Canadian poets" made by Andy Wainwright and Jack Ludwig, and *Mindscapes* ($2.50 paper, $7.50 cloth) which is devoted to four poets — Dale Zieroth, Paulette Jiles, Susan Musgrave and Tom Wayman.

In general Purdy's collection gives an impression of greater fluency than Ludwig-and-Wainwright's, and this one can relate to the flowing pace of Purdy's own poems which is reflected in his taste for other poets' verse. Though some of the items included are common to both volumes, *Soundings* projects a dryer, more "brainy" flavour, a faint smell of damp coats in creative writing seminar rooms. But the cumulative effect of the two collections, combined with the larger batches of poems in *Mindscapes*, is a modestly exciting one. There are, as in most recent anthologies, poems that are pretentious and dull, poems that are mechanically experimental, poems that have reduced simplicity to poverty — and by that I don't mean the transfiguring poverty of which anarchists speak, but a destitution of the word, a positive desiccation that has made the task of reading through so much recent minor poetry resemble the trials of an explorer condemned to traverse the Gobi desert with no other sustenance than Shredded Wheat. Both anthologies, in other words, have their share of non-poets busily writing themselves into impasses. But when one counts these out, and when one suspends hasty praise of those authentic voices that need more exercise (such as Gail Fox, Terry Crawford and Andrew Susnaski, all of whose work may well reward the following), there are still a number of poets who stand out not merely as individuals but as portents of a deepening of the general poetic stream which recently has been running so widely but shallowly through the rapids of easy publication. (For the poetry explosion, like the population explosion, while it proceeds geometrically, still produces geniuses only in arithmetic proportion.) Let me name some names: Kenneth Belford, Brenda Fleet, Patrick Lane, Dennis Lee, Sid Marty, Tom Wayman. These are poets who not merely promise; they have already, and in notably varied voices, achieved.

They have grown out of the breathing exercises and funny spelling games which made a kind of literary Palm Springs out of a good deal of recent Canadian — particularly west Canadian — poetastery. They have learnt, by various ways of solitude, that the histrionics of the reading circuits may earn easy money and heady applause, but do nothing for a poetry that is meant to be more than a transient succession of happenings. They are allowing their inner voices to speak and deepen, they are acting as if craft — as it does — presages art, they are

clarifying their images; they are acknowledging that a poem is not a mere episode, that it may begin in passion and incite to action, but, if it is to achieve its intent, must be transmuted into an artifact detached from the poet and eventually contemplated by those whose only access to its final depths will be — despite Maitreya McLuhan — that still aperture in the jabbering wall of multiple consciousness which the white window of the page can offer.

I confine myself to brief impressions, since these are poets whose work will certainly be reviewed more intensively in *Canadian Literature*. In general terms, the three tendencies I find attractive in such poets are: (a) a veering of emphasis from the alienation of industrial society towards reintegration by a direct return to the natural world; (b) a beginning — at very long last — of the transmutation of new radical styles into real poetry of social significance, as one used to call it in the Thirties, with — again at very long last — some of the Thirties passion and purposiveness; (c) an inclination to return to a poetry of memory and continuity, in which the past is again recognized and a historical view is recreated.

The first tendency appears in some variety in the work of Kenneth Belford, Patrick Lane and Sid Marty, all of them writing from experience of the wilderness or its margins, and together forming the vanguard of what may be a new Canadian mythology, replacing Frye's garrison mentality by a guerilla mentality which, to adapt Mao's image, sees the poet swimming like a fish in the waters of the natural world. As Kenneth Belford puts it in *The Post Electric Cave Man* (Talonbooks, $3.00):

> The literal nature
> of this
> country. The
> geography of
> it.
> Leading me somewhere.
> And I willing.

That is perhaps an unfair example of the verse these poets are producing. Most of it is much less laconic and elemental, but Belford in this case uses his spareness, I think, to make a necessary point. Among these mountain men poets, it is Sid Marty, so far — I gather — volumeless, whom I find the most varied and rewarding.

During the later Thirties there came a time when social protest turned from an invigorating to a debilitating element in poetry; that was when we began to

see how the Stalinists had betrayed the Left in Spain. Something like this may well happen again, but at present we are still in the invigorating stage so far as the better Canadian poets of rebellion are concerned (though I have also seen some abominable Stalinoid crudities coming from West Coast rhymesters). I find a deep appeal, for instance, in the superimposition of anger on a lyrical gift which Brenda Fleet demonstrates in a poem like "Quebec" (included in *Storm Warning*). But in social poetry it is necessary not only to appeal, but also to shock and to stir sardonic laughter, and here it is Tom Wayman who, in all the three collections of young poets I have mentioned, but particularly in *Mindscapes*, emerges as one of the true originals in contemporary Canadian poetry. Wayman has convictions, but he does not produce propaganda, and, whatever group may have his affiliations, he is no party slave in his writing. He has moments of controlled, grave lyricism even in his most committed poems, of the kind that makes his "Dream of the Guerillas" not only impressive as a statement of position but also convincing as an artifact, a work that may well survive — if mankind survives at all — to take a future reader for an instant into the heart of such idealism as exists in our age.

> And night quiet
> after the dream.
> Street lights burn on.
> The slogans are calm on dim walls. The clock,
> the clock says: now
> the guerillas are coming and you must go with them.

There are Wayman poems of intense bitterness against the ruling system, poems of honesty about the weaknesses of new radicals and new radicalism (such as one had ceased to expect in so self-righteous a Movement), poems of sardonic comedy in which the counter culture for once observes and mocks its own clowning. Thus, as a bonus to their great poetic vigour, Wayman's poems — like all good poems of social interest — have a genuine documentary value.

Dennis Lee's recognition of the past, of the sweep of history necessary for the understanding of a present which, whatever our romantic instants may demand, is never comprehensible merely as the everlasting Now, sharpens his political bitternesses with a there-but-for-the-grace-of-God admission that statesmen are often merely the scapegoats for other men's inertia, complicity and shame:

> . . . Doesn't the
> service of quiet diplomacy require dirty hands?

(Does the sun in summer pour its warm light into the square
for us to ignore? We have our own commitments.)
And then if it doesn't work one is finally
on the winning side, though that is
unkind. Mr. Martin is an honourable man, as we are all
Canadians and honourable men.

But Dennis Lee's talents are already recognized, as a poet and above all as the superbly resourceful publisher of experimental fiction and poetry at the House of Anansi. Dale Zieroth, though he appears in *Storm Warning, Soundings* and, at some length, in *Mindscapes*, has not yet published a volume, and his quite exceptional poetry has, to my knowledge, been little praised. Yet Zieroth may well be that genuine recollective poet of the prairies for whom we have been waiting. What Bowering, Mandel and Newlove do occasionally in their poems remembering prairie childhoods and journeys, Zieroth does in depth with the reconstruction, in images of dark and almost Proustian luminosity, of life in a minority community of a small and remote prairie town. He writes, as Purdy and Tom Wayman do, in fluent long-line verse, logical and sequential, based on sentences and their appropriate rhythms rather than on a mosaic of phrases, and mostly avoids the voice-constricting narrow column which nowadays has become as monotonously usual as the iambic pentameter once was. It makes Zieroth's poetry all the more effective that, again like Proust, he does not merely involve himself in recollections of a childhood environment. He has moved as a countryman to the city, and that experience is intertwined with the rural past, and the two are cemented by descriptions of revisitings, so that past and present establish a continuum, and the life of the prairies is seen in the context of a way of existence familiar to most contemporary Canadians. "Prairie Grade School", "The People of Lansdowne", "Father", "Journey into Winter", are perhaps the key poems in the structure of this recollective vision, though the individual poem that impressed me most of all, and that incidentally brings Zieroth near to the mountain men (and especially to Patrick Lane's "Wild Horses" with its similar casting of man rather than the natural world as the aggressor) was "The Hunters of the Deer". The hunters go out and kill and return to the farmhouse, and after feeding, all but the farmer depart.

And when they leave, the man sleeps
and his children sleep while the woman
waits and listens for the howling of the
wolves. To the north, the grey

she-wolf smells the red snow and howls.
Tonight, while other hunters sleep, she
drinks at the throat.

For my taste, Sid Marty, Tom Wayman and Dale Zieroth are the best of the younger poets who have recently emerged in Canadian magazines and anthologies. But they are by no means all who are worth watching, as my month's impressionistic survey of the products of the little presses convinced me.

IF I HAD TO NAME the half-dozen men who have done most to stimulate interest in Canadian poets during the last decade, I would pick Robert Weaver for instigating CBC patronage to scores of poets, A. J. M. Smith as the master anthologist, Jack McClelland and Dennis Lee as general publishers, and Louis Dudek and Fred Cogswell for their small press activities. Picking my way among the presses from east to west, I begin in Fredericton with Cogswell. He has now withdrawn from editing the magazine *Fiddlehead*, but he continues under its imprint to publish a great variety of pamphlets and small books of verse. I have never been able to find any principle on which Fred Cogswell makes his selections, unless it is that any dedicated poet of even the most modest ability deserves an edition of 500 copies to try his work out on something wider than his immediate circle of friends. I have twenty-two of these little books in the pile before me, and that is not a year's whole *Fiddlehead* list. Indeed, year by year, such brochures appear in greater numbers. Only a few are the work of poets who have really found their way; the rest are at best notes for poetry. Cogswell himself seems to recognize a hierarchy by printing a few and mimeographing the rest, and it is the printed booklets that include all but one of the *Fiddlehead* poets worth watching in this batch. I mention especially, among the younger poets, Gail Fox's *The Royal Collector of Dreams*, Marc Plourde's *Touchings*, Derk Wynand's *Locus*, and Marg Yeo's *Game for Shut-ins*.

Not all the poets Fred Cogswell prints are young writers. Some have names that echo, even if faintly, down the decades. Neil Tracy's *Voice Line* is perhaps representative of them. Tracy can best be described as a competent archaicist. His disgust for the present is so great that he not merely uses outdated language but also sets most of his poems in a pioneer past. There is an outworn poeticism about much of Goodridge Macdonald's work as well, yet there are verses worth any critic's respect in his *Selected Poems*, and especially that chilling piece, "The Harried Hare", where man's life finds its analogy in that of the beast he hunts.

And if at last
Fence-leaping, circling over snow and moss,
Over the rocks of broken pasture land
And frozen furrows of the farm's fall ploughing,
Backtracking among trees, at night he comes
Alive, to a burrow under log or stone,
Eluding the last hunter, knowing
That the last hound has now been whistled home,
And snuggles into sleep: — Then comes the stoat
Whose teeth slit to the jugular while he sleeps,
And all his little life is sucked away.

As the snow falls again upon the fields
And the wind cries across the frosted fields.

That, it seems to me, is a good farewell from the last of the old Fredericton clan of poets.

One encounters much more rarely than even ten years ago the kind of Tennysonian-Georgian pastiche that was produced in such quantity by the good old ladies of the Canadian Authors' Association. Most of its practitioners, I imagine, have departed. Yet traditional verse is still being written; it is only that the tradition has shifted forward to Lawrence and Eliot and even Wallace Stevens, and conservatism tends to be in form and image rather than in sentiment and vocabulary. The poets who work in such an idiom often find themselves in the same position nowadays as painters who do not happen to fit in with the ascendant and sometimes spurious modernism that has taken the place and authority of the old academy; the neophiliacs are in, which means that the traditionalists are out, and that is no more just than the old situation. In their own manner traditionalist poets nowadays are inclined to be more competent and flexible in their techniques and to have more to say than the CAA versifiers who preceded them, and one welcomes a venture like the Ladysmith Press in Quebec, whose recently established series of traditionalist poets includes Alan Shucard's *The Gorgon Bag*, Sean Haldane's *The Ocean Everywhere* and Marnie Pomeroy's *For Us Living* (all paperbound, $1.75).

Moving westward, Montreal has several small presses that publish mainly poetry. The most justly prestigious is, of course, Delta Canada, which Louis Dudek founded. Glen Siebrasse is now Managing Editor. Delta has taken the first risk on an astonishing number of young Canadian poets who have now become Establishment figures, and has kept in print a number of older poets who have somehow missed a wider recognition. Far from resting on the laurels the

past has brought (too meagrely in my view), Delta's editors now are planning a broadening of their activities, and it is evident that, far from being exclusively dedicated to the new and the instant, they see poetry in its proper temporal context. I quote from a recent letter from Glen Siebrasse:

> Poetry is, for us, historical as well as living fact. Our titles, then might be divided into three broad categories:
>
> the poem as contemporary event,
> the poem as historical fact,
> critical studies in poetry.
>
> In the first category, we have concentrated on publishing the work of younger writers; first and earlier books account for some 70% of all our poetry.
>
> The second and third categories are also important ones. We feel that concentration upon the contemporary, without equal emphasis on the historical, destroys continuity, fragments the reader's perspective, and reduces the possibility of accurate critical judgment. Ideally, we would like to see reprints of all important early Canadian poetry made available for study in the classroom. While we have not, as yet, done much in the third area, we hope to move, more ambitiously, in this direction this year.
>
> All of the above, of course, falls within a general context of Canadian publishing. Our concern is with *our* literature: its assessment, encouragement and promotion.

In recent months the two leading publications of Delta Canada have been Louis Dudek's *Collected Poetry* and Eldon Grier's *Selected Poems*, and these books of the first importance will shortly be reviewed by *Canadian Literature*. Meanwhile, among the briefer recent Delta books, I found of particular interest Stephen Scobie's *In the Silence of the Year* (I especially liked — perhaps because it touched a shared vein of nostalgia — the recollective "Poem for my Father") and Douglas Barbour's *Land Fall*. Another of Barbour's books, *A Poem as Long as a Highway*, has recently appeared from Quarry Press of Kingston ($2.00). As the titles suggest, Barbour is a travelling topographer of a poet, with a close feeling for the natural surface of the earth, its emanations, its inhabitants, its destroyers. He is not one of the emotively direct mountain men poets, but a watchful traveller who, in poems like "The Distances", etches the chill naunces of life in our land:

> Say only an uncoiled spring
> a singing wire
> stretched
> across the deep white valleys

the cold, the seasons of
death:
say only this, say only the hope
the urge expressed
in the movement outwards the
sweeping gesture of construction;
and isn't this enough and
can't we say, and saying
comprehend
its magnanimity:

to whisper
across this frozen country
certain possible words.

The latest and smallest Delta venture is a series of superslim chapbooks, Quarterbacks, which give slight samplings (five to eight pages) of the newest poets. Eight have appeared, at 25 cents each; those by Bruce Elder and Robert Currie made me want to read more than the four poems given in one case, and six in the other.

A TORONTO PUBLISHER told me recently that in his view the West Coast presses were "somewhat promiscuous", and if he meant that they publish a great many titles without a great deal of editorial discrimination, he is probably right. They are — it is a disorder that afflicts all of us on the Pacific to some degree — inclined to act like playboys in a mythical western world. So many good poets have passed this way (and quite a few remain) that it does not always seem unreasonable to assume that the Castalian Spring has abandoned Delphi and come bubbling up on the slopes of Seymour Mountain or perhaps somewhere on the Malahat. Alas, British Columbia may be God's and Bennett's Own Country, but the Muses are still merely on visiting terms. And so, when one mail brings me ten little glossy-bound volumes from the Sono Nis Press (which Michael Yates now edits from the Queen Charlotte Islands), and another mail brings me seven greyly mimeographed bundles of heady verse and pictorial typography sent out by Bill Bissett from the Blew Ointment Press, and a batch of very elegantly printed material in almost perfect visual taste arrives from Talon Press, I remember how little effect even a gargle and a footbath at the real Castalian Spring had upon my own poetic powers, and I read with caution.

The Sono Nis Press was born under a bush called Creative Writing, and its productions have largely tended to display that combination of inverted academicism and competitive ambition which characterizes the ingrown atmosphere of the writing classes. Now Sono Nis — like its creator, has withdrawn from academia, but the signs of the shift are slow in appearing. The uniform series of $2 booklets which the Press is issuing has almost every initial point in its favour. The 28 pages to which all the booklets run is a sufficient length to give a fair sampling of each poet; they come with a quite attractive surrealistic drawing or photomontage on the front cover and a romantic chiaroscuro photograph of the author on the back cover, and they are printed in a clean and legible typewriter facsimile process on good paper. Yet one bites into many of these attractive fruit, and the dust of pretentious failure dries one's palate. Reading them, one seems to hear the sneakered tread of the legions of *poètes manqués* tramping away from the writing schools of North America with those fine diplomas which may make them teachers in other writing schools but will never alone certify that they are poets.

Yet there are exceptions among the Sono Nis booklets, and three of them impressed me: three out of ten — a good publishing score! *File of Uncertainties* brings forward once again the extraordinary baroque talent of Andreas Schroeder, a poet of metaphysical cast and verbal fertility who already stands out among the young poets of the Far West. *Private Speech: Messages 1962-70* is the work of an established and accomplished elder poet, Robin Skelton; the "messages" are, in the better sense of the word, notes for poetry, wellings-up which the poet has wisely left unrefined. Finally, there is *In the Meshes*, the work of Mieszko Jan Skapski, a poet who appeared fairly widely in little magazines, but has never before published a volume. Skapski is a working fisherman who for six years has operated his own boat off the coast of British Columbia — this after a Paraguay boyhood. He is in the process of turning deeply felt experiences into a poetry awash with correspondences.

> Currents corrode currents.
> The onwash breaks on iron rocks.
>
> He wakes the days it drizzles —
> Caulks the open seams in existence:
> Rot tangles in his nets.
>
> Twilight finds him turning home
> At the upper reaches of this tributary.

The shore breezes turn back to the sea.

Blew Ointment Press sends out its books like those guerillas whose ostentatious carelessness of dress betrays them immediately. Everything is done on a highly economical scale, on paper that takes ink badly, and by processes, of which Bill Bissett holds the secret, so devastating that my copy of a set of neo-surrealist montages by Gary Lee Nova (*Cosmic Comics*) tantalizes with mere hints of a visual wit almost completely concealed by the baffling greyness into which everything is blurred. That baffling greyness, indeed, seems to epitomise Bill Bissett's achievements, obstinately and by principle amateur, indefatigably performed in the shadow of arbitrary persecution, all of which can only inspire in one an esteem he perhaps neither wants nor reciprocates, so much a man of the tribal outside inside he has made himself. One encounters the uncompromising outside insideness even in his poetry, which he so fences in with arbitrary spelling and bad mimeography that one advances into it seemingly against the poet's will. The primitive warrior pointing his spear, white blade flashing out of shadows of grey ink, on the cover of his latest mimeo-pamphlet, *S TH STORY I TO*, seems to have more than decorative intent. There is a no-trespass atmosphere about it all which contrasts, even among like-minded experimenters, with bp nichol's disarming and inviting elegance. Yet in these enormous wads of tangled typescript (deliberately avoiding anything that might be remotely suspected of visual attractiveness in the same way as the poems themselves avoid audial gracefulness); in the vast minglings of zany fantasy, and life style propaganda, and political criticism, and piteous lyricism, and batik-like typewriter patterns, and drawings that recall Cocteau's *Opium*, one is reminded that to most people who first read them Pound's *Cantos* seemed equally chaotic and devoid of meaning at the core; they still do to many, including some of Pound's self-proclaimed disciples. There *is* a meaning in what Bissett has to say, but it is as diffused as Monet's light. One does not *read* that meaning; one absorbs it by osmosis, surrendering oneself to the baffling greyness, to the god who appears as a potent fog. Bill Bissett, I conclude, is both a myth and a mythmaker.

I have mentioned Monet's light and bp nichol, and this brings me to Talon Books, last of the presses whose books appear in my pile. Talon's publication of Ken Belford's *Post Electric Man* I have already mentioned; the press's most original recent publication is something very different — a little black box filled with white cards each bearing a few words or even one word printed in sans-serif type. It is an artifact — one can hardly call it a book — by bp nichol, named

Still Water ($2.50). Visually the still water is represented by a square of bright, slightly crinkle-surfaced silver paper on the lid of the box. This forms a mirror that floods with fragmented impressionist light, all the colours in it purified and intense. One lifts it and is astonished to see a shimmering portrait — oneself painted by some instant Bonnard; one beams it over one's shoulder and the backs of books gleam out in tones as intense as far northern flowers; one lives, for the instant, in an irradiated world as of the eye made innocent by childhood or mescalin. With a certain reluctance one lifts the lid; the contents are elegant, but slightly anti-climactic, refining George Herbert's old game of shaping his words to represent visually the altar or the cross of which he writes. And so we have word picture poems like this:

moon

owl

tree tree tree shadowy

The effect is to create out of a few words and their relative positions a web of association from which springs a visual image that a poet writing descriptively would need a verse and perhaps thirty words to explain. Amusing? Definitely; the box and its contents are a successful play object. Poetry? Art? All I can say is that after a time some of the pages stirred me in the same way as a conventional poem, and clearly because I had been collaborating, and had filled what I wanted into the maker's skeleton of words. But as I write, a vague recollective image of something very similar comes into my mind; I see some pages of an issue of *New Verse* about the time of the Surrealist exhibition in 1936. Not that I am suggesting imitation. Even unconsciously, this is an era when pasts are much relived.

THERE HAS BEEN a great deal of the random in this article. I took the books that by chance had accumulated after those by established poets had been sent out for review, which explains the absence of known names. Some presses are not mentioned because they have not been sending in books with enough regularity for any to be lying around; others because nothing they had produced in the last few months stirred my interest. But the exercise, however chaotic, however subjective, seems to have been worthwhile, if only in showing how every year new and interesting poets emerge into the light, as they have done each season since *Canadian Literature* began.

THE POETRY OF P. K. PAGE

A. J. M. Smith

OF THE CANADIAN POETS who led the second wave of modernism in the Forties and Fifties, P. K. Page holds a curious and somewhat anomalous position; she had certainly not received the critical attention that the remarkable fusion of psychological insight and poetic imagination which characterizes and individualizes her poems would lead one to expect. Perhaps the effort to discriminate between the subjective and objective elements of her work, or between image and symbol or memory and desire, has been thought by the critics too unprofitable or found too fatiguing. There is no doubt that she is a difficult poet — at least I have found her so — and the difficulty is not intellectual. Her moons are not reason's, so that what the reader who is to get the maximum enjoyment needs — or the critic who is to get the maximum comprehension — is a sensibility and an intuition that have to be nourished and educated by the poems themselves as he reads and re-reads them. Though I feel a certain presumption in approaching this subject, I can say that I have found the experience of trying to come to terms with it an absorbing one. Her gardens may be imaginary, but more than the toads in them are real; and are not her angels also?

Of course the fact that P. K. Page has not received the attention that has been given to some other poets of her generation can be partly accounted for more charitably and more prosaically. Her output has not been large. She published only three volumes of verse at rather long intervals — *As Ten, As Twenty* (1946), *The Metal and the Flower* (1954) — which won the Governor-General's Medal — and a retrospective selection, *Cry Ararat!* (1967), which contained seventeen new poems. For some ten years of the Fifties and the early Sixties she was out of Canada with her husband, who was in the Canadian diplomatic

service in Australia, Brazil and Mexico, and for much of this time she gave up writing (or publishing) poetry for painting. "Gave up", of course, is not really true; her painting and her poetry complemented one another; each, I think, made the other better, or made it more deeply what it was, which is much the same thing. And then the immersion in the language, landscape and mythology of the strange, intense, and perhaps intensely unCanadian places had a stimulating and enriching influence on all her latest poems. One does not have to rely on the evidence of the poems alone to corroborate these remarks — though that would be ample. In the tenth anniversary issue of this journal, she wrote her own account of her experiences during the years of fruitful "exile", and in an article entitled "Traveller, Conjuror, Journeyman" in *Canadian Literature* 46, she gave an account of her philosophy of composition and of the part played by memory, dream, sensation and technique in both her poetry and her painting. These essays and her recent poems will mark, I believe, the beginning of a new, far juster and far higher estimate of her standing among our poets.

The comparative lack of attention given to P. K. Page's early work, published in the little magazines of the Thirties and early Forties when she was an active member of the *Preview* group in Montreal, is due partly no doubt to the fact that they were overshadowed by the flashy political poems of Patrick Anderson and the simpler satirical or amatory verses of Frank Scott. Even when she was most herself she was associated in the mind of a critic as alert as Milton Wilson with Anderson as a writer of "decadent pastorals. . . , whose glass-tight but vulnerable aquarium leaves me gasping for air."[1] This did not prevent Professor Wilson from giving us some just, discerning, and generous analyses of one or two of the most striking of the early poems.

No critic or literary historian, however, has made any serious attempt to deal at length with Miss Page's poetry or to define, illustrate, and evaluate her psychological symbolism and her strongly personal treatment of the universal themes of isolation and frustration — much less point to their transfiguration in certain epiphanies at the close of some of her remarkable poems. This, for want of a better workman, I shall try to do.

I BEGIN WITH a few generalizations and then shall turn immediately to a close reading of some of her finest and most characteristic poems. This will perhaps enable us to isolate the special quality of her excellence and help place her in the developing pattern of modern poetry in Canada.

There are certain themes that occur over and over again in her poetry and a number of archetypal images and symbols that stamp their impress on most of the best poems in each of her three books, and in her work as a whole.

Her subjects are:

Childhood, its innocent eye, its clarity of vision, and its imaginative richness of invention, all leading to the discovery of a new and other reality than that of adulthood and reason;

Love, either faithful, happy and unifying, or faithless, disillusioned and lonely — the end-point of self-regarding love — that must be mastered by a conscious effort of the will;

and lastly, Dream, where child, poet, artist and wit live and have their being in what in some poems is a garden of innocence, Eden before the Fall, and in others a briary wilderness or a sinister painted arras.

Her images and symbols are White and Green, images of snow, winter, ice and glass; or of flowers, gardens, leaves and trees; or else glass again, and salt, the transparent green suffocating crystal sea. Her symbolic world seems mostly mineral or vegetable, but there are symbols also of birds, the swan and the peacock especially, and fish. And there are breathing human creatures also: girls, adolescents, lovers, and some selfish, isolated, lonely men. But what most vividly lives and breathes here is the Eye, the Lung, the Heart, and the feeling and perceiving Mind.

What is most strange and most revealing in this world is that the workings of its Mind are almost unconscious, often as in dreams, and that even the wit is controlled from Elsewhere. Hers is in its final effect a poetry of vision, and it demands a quality of sympathy in the reader that its poetic richness helps to create. Indeed, to speak for myself, it casts a spell that has made it possible to value it not as vision only but as revelation.

I would like then, from the point of view of theme and imagery to discuss, analyse, or perhaps just talk about some of the poems that have impressed me most deeply. A rough classification might go something like this:

Poems in which images of winter predominate, where White is the colour, and ice, snow, glass, and a breathless cold make the mind and senses tingle — among these are "Stories of Snow", "Photos of a Salt Mine", "The Snowman", "Now this Cold Man", and many lines or stanzas of other poems, such as the last few disillusioned or awakening lines of "Images of Angels."

Poems of flowers and gardens, where vegetable dominates mineral, and Green is the primal symbol; many of these are dream gardens, and there are two

opposed or contrasting gardens, gardens of innocence and grace, and gardens of imprisonment or exile, or perhaps they are one garden, before and after the Fall. Until its close "Images of Angels" is of this group; so in part is "Stories of Snow". In this group also are many of the poems that deal with childhood and some of the newer poems such as "After the Rain", "Giovanni and the Indians", and "The Apple", which is followed by its sad and desolate retrospective sequel, "To a Portrait in a Gallery". The garden songs of innocence give way to songs of experience, and here are the most intense and powerful of all the poems. Close to these in theme is "The Metal and the Flower", though perhaps the antidote for the poison it contains is found in the much later "This Frieze of Birds".

Along with the poems centred around snow and ice, or green gardens of pleasure or terror — not too strong a word for "Arras" or "Nightmare" — are those where image and symbol are derived from the sea — the sea of poet and psychologist, where sleep is a drowning and the submarine world is the world of the unconscious. Among the most striking of these are "Element", "Portrait of Marina", "Boy with a Sea Dream", and "In a Ship Recently Raised from the Sea".

Other classifications might list poems under such heads as Childhood, Love, Self-love and Dream; but in all of them the same dichotomy of innocence and experience, happiness and despair, or good and evil could be discovered. Classification carried too far defeats its own end; it is time to come to a close reading of some of the poems I have named.

"Stories of snow" grows out of memories, reveries, and dreams of childhood — "some never-nether land" — where snow storms are held "circular, complete" in the crystal globes kept in a high tall teakwood cabinet. Encapsulated here are evocations of innocence and perfection opening "behind the sprouting eyes" caught in the "vegetable rain". The conciseness and allusive richness of the language and imagery of the brief opening stanza set the tone at once and imply as a leading theme the contrast between childhood's innocence (or ignorance?) and the safe and changeless purity of the sterile snowflakes imprisoned or preserved in the small glass globe where the child (or poet) may shake up a storm. The major contrast in the poem, however, is that between the white world of innocence and art and the lush tropical landscape of "countries where the leaves are large as hands/ where flowers protrude their fleshy chins/

and call their colours," which stands for the natural world of instinct and appearance, of uncontrollable organic growth, that strangles and betrays but which child and poet, or poet as child, can escape from into what the couplet that ends the poem names "the area behind the eyes/ where silent, unrefractive whiteness lies."

This somewhat esoteric ending is led up to through a series of anecdotal pictures that seem like a multiplication of the famous ice-locked swan of Mallarmé — but with a richness and dramatic variety that needs more room than the sonnet can offer.

The illustrative central part of the poem begins with the lines "And in the early morning one will waken/ to think the glowing linen of his pillow/ a northern drift, will find himself mistaken/ and lie back weeping." The dreams of this wakened sleeper in a land of fleshy flowers proliferate out of the opening stanza, become the whole poem, and lead to its climax. In Holland, in winter — we realize now that the "never-nether land" of the opening was the embryo of a pun — hunters, their breath in plumes, "part the flakes" and sail in their white winged ice-boats over the frozen lakes to hunt the swan. All the images here are of whiteness and no-colour, of snow-flakes and ice, and we see that the innocent world of the child's glass globe has taken on a new, beautiful but sinister significance.

> And of the swan in death these dreamers tell
> of its last flight and how it falls, a plummet,
> pierced by the freezing bullet
> and how three feathers, loosened by the shot,
> descend like snow upon it.
> While hunters plunge their fingers in its down
> deep as a drift, and dive their hands
> up to the neck of the wrist
> in that warm metamorphosis of snow
> as gentle as the sort that woodsmen know
> who, lost in the white circle, fall at last
> and dream their way to death.

"Stories of Snow" is the outstanding success of P. K. Page's first volume, comparable in magnificence and complexity to "Images of Angels" in her second. These are perhaps the finest of the many very individual poems that seem to grow like beautful flowers out of childhood memories, recurring dreams, and a crystal clairvoyance. Innocence and experience, illusion and disillusionment, find

expression in an overflowing of powerful emotion, remembered not in tranquillity but with a craftsmanly excitement and an exquisite shiver that sets the rhythmical pattern of all her most moving poems.

"Images of Angels", like "Stories of Snow", "Photos of a Salt Mine", and some of the newer poems, "After Rain" and the finest of all "Cry Ararat!", is a kind of sentimental education — *sentimental* not in any pejorative or ironic Flaubertian sense — that, recognizing worlds without love, seeks to explore ways of transforming them or coming to terms with them. Here images of ice and snow give way at the beginning to the daisy fields of childhood. This is the sharpening contrast to the close of "The Snowman", the poem immediately preceding "Images of Angels" in the inclusive volume of 1967. Here are the concluding lines of "The Snowman":

> And as far as I could see the snow was scarred
> only with angels' wing marks or the feet of birds
> like twigs broken upon the snow or shards
>
> discarded. And I could hear no sound
> as far as I could hear except a round
> kind of an echo without end
>
> rung like a hoop below them and above
> jarring the air they had no need of
> in a landscape without love.

And here is the beginning of "Images of Angels":

> Imagine them as they were first conceived:
> part musical instrument and part daisy
> in a white manshape.
> Imagine a crowd on the Elysian grass
> playing ring-around-a-rosy,
> mute except for their singing,
> their gold smiles
> gold sickle moons in the white sky of their faces.
> Sex, neither male nor female,
> name and race, in each case, simply angel.

This gives us the traditional almost Sunday-school picture-card of the Angel, innocent, whimsical, happy, but it is done with the wit and knowledge of the mature and *critical* grown-up poet. The angels are white, and gold, and holy; but they are to be pitied — they were made (by Whom?) "never to be loved or

petted, never to be friended". Almost at once a sinister note intrudes. Somehow the angels are realized now to be "mixed with the father, fearful and fully/ . . . when the vanishing bed/ floats in the darkness . . ."

In the body of the poem we have three witty and dramatic characterizations — representative figures who might be thought of as imagining angels: the "little notary", the financier or business man,[2] and "the anthropologist, with his tidy science".

For each the Angel is a special symbol. For the little notary — the scene is surely Québec — "given one as a pet", it is his private guilt, and might, if discovered, be his private shame, and he keeps it "behind the lethal lock/ used for his legal documents", guiltily shut up. Reading this today one thinks of the legal and political repression of the Duplessis days before the Quiet Revolution, an allusion impossible to have been in the author's mind when the poem was written in the early fifties. This is an illustration, I think, of the growth into an even wider significance that some poems undergo with time.[3]

The eleven-line stanza devoted to the business man is lighter in tone than the rest and more frankly witty; could this be the reason it has been omitted from the reprinted version? "Angels are dropping, angels going up."

> What business man would buy as he buys stock
> as many as could cluster on a pin?

But the stanza ends by humanizing the business man by filling his heart with uneasiness and shame as he remembers childhood tying a tinsel angel to his children's Christmas tree, and the poem returns for a moment to the world of such innocent poems as "Christmas Tree — Market Square."

For the anthropologist, the Angel is the miraculous transcendence and perhaps the condemnation to futility of all his classifiable observations. Where in the writings of philosophers or poets has the triumph of imagination over reason been more brilliantly and wittingly put than here?

> The anthropologist with his tidy science
> had he stumbled on one unawares,
> found as he finds an arrowhead, an angel —
> a what-of-a-thing
> as primitive as a daisy,
> might with his cold eye have assessed it coolly.
> But how, despite his detailed observations,
> could he face his learned society and explain?

"Gentlemen, it is thought that they are born
with harps and haloes,
as the unicorn with its horn.
Study discloses them white and gold as daisies . . .

as they were described, indeed, at the beginning of the poem. This is the tone and language of light verse and intellectual prose, but the poetry rises out of the thought as naturally and inevitably as in Marvell. The union of the homely and the profound is so quietly accomplished that hasty readers may never notice it. Somewhat in this vein the poem ventures other perceptions: "Perhaps only a dog could accept them wholly/ be happy to follow at their heels . . ." and again, "Or, take the nudes of Lawrence and impose/ a-sexuality upon them; those/ could meet with ease these gilded albinos."

The next and penultimate stanza returns to the child's world and the child's faith of the beginning, where the sphere of consciousness and imagination is reduced to something as small and self-contained as the glass globe of "Stories of Snow". This prepares us for the close of the poem — unexpected and very strange: the summer imagery of daisies, sun-dazzle, and lamb-white gives way to the white of cold and snow. The child, "*this* innocent", (the poet herself) "with his almost unicorn" (his imaginary angel, the poem up to this point) "would let it go . . ."

and feeling implicated in a lie,
his flesh would grow
cold
and snow
would cover the warm and sunny avenue.

Does this ending repudiate imagination, faith and the fairytale world of childhood so convincingly recreated not only in this poem but in many others such as the beautiful "Christmas Eve — Market Square" and the pieces gathered in the last book under the title of one of them, "The Bands and the Beautiful Children"? I do not think so. These closing lines are an affirmation of sincerity and of an integrity that is moral as well as aesthetic — a look at the worst as the images in so many poems of flowers and sun and summer are an attempt to find the best.

BEFORE ATTEMPTING an analysis of "Arras", which I think is the finest, if among the most difficult of the poems, let me jot down a few notes on some in which imagery and symbol are drawn from the sea and from

salt or metal. In some the sea is clearly, like sleep, a symbol of the unconscious and, indeed, for the sensitive and perhaps easily hurt spirit of the poet a dark place of refuge. This is the theme of one of the shortest but most explicit, the beautiful and touching "Element": "caught and swung on a line under the sun/ I am frightened held in the light that people make/ and sink in darkness freed and whole again/ as fish returned by dream into the stream." Although the key statement is the line "I am not wishful in this dream of immersion," the poem ends with the agonizing image of "gull on fire or fish/ silently hurt — its mouth alive with metal."

Much more objective and therefore free to be more witty, but inevitably less intense is "Boy with a Sea Dream". Here are images of masts of ships, ancient hulls, and keels rusting in the iodine air — a dream of immersion again "where like a sleep/ strange men drown drowsily/ spiralling down the sea's steep underlip. . ." Once again the sea is a symbol of dream as the cinema of the unconscious, but without any of the jargon of the clinical psychologist. For the critic, who like the poet ought to have a poetry-crammed head, the associations are with the music and imagery of "Lycidas", "Full Fathom Five", and the "Voyages" of Hart Crane.

The end is strange and subtle, a sort of inside-outside reversal recalling, distantly, of course, some passages in Jay Macpherson and Robert Graves.

> . . . like the perfect schooner which is pushed
> through the slim neck to fill a bottle's shape
> his dream has filled the cavern of his head
> and he, a brimful seascape,
> a blue brine,
> with undertows and sudden swells
> which toll his bells
> and watery laws to be obeyed
> and strange salt death to die

Images of sterile salt and metallic cold are found in a number of poems that analyze self-love with what can only be described as a kind of cold fury. Among these are "Isolationist", "Only Child", "Foreigner", "Man with One Small Hand", "Mineral" and "This Cold Man". The last three are particularly impressive for the concentrated angry wit that turns experience into a new universal and instant myth.

A striking quality of many of these poems is the sudden immediacy of perception and emotion.

Look, look, he took me straight
to the snake's eye . . .

begins "The Apple" — a magnificent opening, equalled only perhaps by Anne Hébert's awakening in "La Chambre fermée" —

Qui donc m'a conduite ici?
Il y a certainement quelqu'un
Qui a soufflé sur mes pas . . .

It is these quick exclamations of bewilderment, horror or agony that give so much of its intensity to the haunted dream garden of "Arras". Here the perfection and purity of the classical Eden has been violated by a strange and somehow sinister intruder:

. . . a peacock rattling its rattan tail
and screaming
has found a point of entry. Through whose eye
did it insinuate in furled disguise. . . ?

The agonizing questions come thick and fast: "Who am I/ or who am I become that walking here/ I am observer, other. . . ?" "What did they deal me in this pack?" Alice's looking-glass garden has grown menacing and lonely. "I want a hand to clutch, a heart to crack . . . the stillness is/ infinite. If I should make a break . . ." Then the truly terrifying line:

The stillness points a bone at me.

And now the prisoned dreamer breaks under the reiteration of the self-imposed questioning:

I confess:
It was my eye.
Voluptuous it came.
Its head the ferrule and its lovely tail
folded so sweetly; it was strangely slim
to fit the retina . . .

This fearful magnificence gives way to a simple homely cry, which in its context has a grandeur beyond the reach of rhetoric — "Does no one care?"

This poem alone would be sufficient to place P. K. Page among the fine poets of this century, and it is good to know that while it is perhaps the high point of her achievement it is also the high point of a school of symbolist Canadian poets

among whom I would name Anne Wilkinson, Anne Hébert, Jay Macpherson, Daryl Hine and Gwen MacEwen.

These are the poets in Canada who write not for the immediate moment alone. They are the poets who will live when the urbanized hitch-hiking social realists or the lung-born egoists of instant experience have been long forgotten.

Postscript

THAT GREAT MAN, Frank Underhill, once sent me a collection of his political essays, not ironically but too modestly inscribed, as to a poet, "these prosaic offerings." When I read the poems of P. K. Page and her equally profound notes[4] on poetry, painting and magic I am conscious of how prosaic *this* offering is. My hope, however, is that it may lead other critics to write of her work with their own perceptions.

NOTES

[1] "*Other Canadians* and After," in Masks of Poetry, ed. A. J. M. Smith (Toronto, 1962), p. 126.

[2] The stanza on the business man has been deleted from the poem as it appears in *Cry Ararat* (1967). I enjoyed the passage and cannot feel that it is out of keeping with the rest of the poem.

[3] Poems by Shelley, Auden, Anne Hébert and Frank Scott might be cited in further illustration.

[4] The article in *Canadian Literature* 46 referred to above, and the earlier and briefer "Questions and Images" in *Canadian Literature* 41.

THREE POEMS

P. K. Page

LEVIATHAN IN A POOL

I

BLACK and white plastic
inflatable
a child's giant toy
teeth perfectly conical
tongue pink
eyes where ears are
blowhole (fontanelle
a rip in a wet inner tube
Third Eye)
out of which speech
breath
and beautiful fountains flower

So much for linear description
phrases in place of whale

This creature fills that pool
as an eye its socket
moves, laughs like an eye
shines like an eye — eyebright
eyeshaped, mandorla

of meeting worlds
forked tail attached
and fin like a funny sail

It is rotund and yet
flexible as a whip
lighter than air going up
and heavy as a truckload of bricks
It leaps sky high — it flies
and comes down whack
on its freshly painted side
and the spectators get wet
drenched, soaked to the hide

Tongue lolling like a dog's
after a fast run
pleased with itself and you
it seems to want to be petted
rears its great head up
hangs it, its tiny eyes gleam
Herring, minute as whitebait
slip down its throat
Dear whale, we say, as if to a child
We beam

And it disappears. Utterly
With so dark a thrust
of its muscle
through silver tines
of water
only streamers of brine
tiny tinsels of brine remain

II

"SWIM ROUND the pool vocalizing," the boy says
and "Toot" they call through their blowholes
"Toot toot. Toot."

At sea they will sometimes sing for thirty minutes
cadences, recognisable series of notes, songs which carry
hundreds of miles. Sing together. Sing singly.
Here in a small pool they vocalize on command
joyous short toots, calls.

Why am I crying?

III

HAIDA AND NOOTKA respond to whistle signals.
Each whistle has its own pitch
and each whale knows which is which.

Haida and Nootka respond to hand signals.
Fresh from the wild Pacific
they answer to hand signals.

(The words are for us
who have not yet learned
that two blasts
mean:
'Give your trainer a big kiss'
or a flick of the wrist
means: 'Vocalize.')

Chimo white as Moby
albino and still a baby
is deaf
and has poor vision
like white cats

(white men and women?)

so Chimo
cannot respond to hand or whistle.

Yet this high spirited
'lissom'
girl of a whale

unexpectedly pale
as if still not dressed
responds:
she leaps like Nootka
flaps like Haida
vocalizes.

What are her cues and signals
in what realm
do her lightning actions rise?

I lean upon the pool's wet rail
through eyes'
sightless sideways glances
seem to see
a red line on the air
as bright as blood
that threads them on one string
trainer and whales.

PREPARATION

Go OUT of your mind.
Prepare to go mad.
Prepare to break
split along cracks
inhabit the darks of your eyes.
Inhabit the whites.

Prepare to be huge.
Be prepared to be small
the least molecule of
an unlimited form.
Be a limited form
and spin in your skin
one point in the whole

Be prepared to prepare
for what you have dreamed
to burn and be burned
to burst like a pod
to tear at your seams.

Be pre-pared. And pre-pare.
But it's never like that.
It is where you are not
that the fissure occurs
and the light crashes in.

CULLEN REVISITED

CULLEN AT FIFTY, arsonist, set fire
to the whole accumulation. Rings, wrongs, rights
from buds of flame burst into flower
burned like magnesium, white, or red as rags.
The bag of tricks banged off — flared, fumed, smoked.
Butt ends of jokes, lexicons, old chains like briars
glowed on the night sky, dimmed, spluttered, blacked out.
The conflagration could be seen for miles.

Cullen among the charred remains, himself
down to the bone, scuffed, shuffled, poked,
recognized nothing. The span of his life reduced
to nails, pearl buttons, gravel, twists of wire
all hard, all black, all useless. Cullen smiled
and a wind arose like the wind the Holy Ghost
bears in its wings and the flames broke out and smoked
and flickered in white and gold before they died
for the second time in a feathery ash as grey
and soft as feathers plucked from a dove.
Cullen departing stubbed his toe, upturned
— darkened face of the moon in solar eclipse —

a disc, heart-sized and heavy for its size,
makeweight, touchstone, lodestar? And this he kept.
It squinted where he rubbed it, like an eye.

So Cullen began again. Trees bloomed. Sun shone.
And he, the Ace of Wands, green-sprigged, was borne
high in a Giant Hand through a running sky.
At night in a rain of shooting stars he slept.
Parrots, peacocks, miraculous plants and jewels
in underground caverns filled his head.
Veins on fire he slept the grey days through
like a wintering bear.
He waked
to tea-colored kings and queens upright as staves
small, wren-boned, walking in purple, heads
bound in embroideries, braceleted wrists —
and all reflected as though in water, twinned
as royalty in a card deck. Cullen slept
and tall black naked warriors like divs
sprang from the earth like grain — green at the groin —
constructed walls of intricate mosaics, each stone
polished and cut and then exactly placed.
He waked again. The rubbed disc winked and shone.

All this was in World One.
World Two was where
he explored the golden ship — cabins and hold,
hoisted its golden sails and from its gold
crow's nest sighted the Third World
hazy at first and seen from his position
half way between earth and heaven
half blinded by the sun — seeming to rock and hum.

A GIFT OF LOVE

Lampman and Life

Bruce Nesbitt

ARCHIBALD LAMPMAN is rightly remembered for the few nature poems illuminated by his personal "small clear flame". Unfortunately we are still waiting for a definitive biography to deal with all that annoying ash, those refractory clinkers that have to be swept away without putting out the fire. A tantalizing clue to the most important and disturbing single influence in Lampman's life, for example, was not made public until 1959, when Arthur Bourinot published some correspondence between Duncan Campbell Scott and E. K. Brown. These letters reveal the connection between a manuscript copy-book of Lampman's poems — acquired by the University of Toronto Library in the 1940s — and a Miss Katherine Waddell.

This copy-book is in fact one of five in which Lampman transcribed his poetry as he wrote it, and was presented by him (probably in 1893) as a gift of love to Miss Waddell. The volume, tentatively titled "Poems" (1889-1892) is the second of four that follow in a definite chronological sequence from 1883 to 1894. As well as containing 129 of the nearly 3500 lines of Lampman's poetry that remain unpublished, it also affords an interesting commentary on the effects of what Duncan Campbell Scott tactfully called in 1925 "an intense personal drama" concerning his friend Lampman. By 1943 Scott felt free enough to publish "A Portrait in Six Sonnets" in *At the Long Sault and Other New Poems* as "the record of a friendship strong in affection, and, to judge by the last Sonnet, high in emotional value." But to whom do these infuriatingly oblique glances refer?

Katherine Thompson Waddell was twenty-one, four years younger than Lampman, when she joined his office in the Post Office Department on 18 January 1887. According to Scott, whose impressions were recorded by E. K. Brown in a private memorandum, their "love began in the early nineties and was still a powerful thing at the end of Lampman's life."[1] His sole confidant during these stormy years was E. W. Thomson, who was having an affair in Boston at the same time. Scott must have been less a friend to Lampman than he thought, for he only learned what happened from W. D. Le Sueur, Lampman's office chief, after the poet's death.

Part of the cause of their entanglement, Scott suggests, was devastatingly simple: Lampman "found his wife unsympathetic to poetry although she was very devoted to his study and practice of it — and thought that in this girl he would find a spiritual mate. The idea of spiritual affinities was very important to Lampman. . . . His wife was not such an affinity." Although Lampman was sure that Katherine was a soul-mate, she was apparently unresponsive.

In a (mercifully) unpublished and untitled poem written in September 1893, Lampman expressed a quaintly ambiguous and tepid passion:

I may not love you dearest
  And you may not love me
Tho' one in truth and nearest
  I think our hearts must be

And so from fear not knowing
  What advent, what surprise
Might bring the overflowing
  We meet with coldest eyes

For fear of things sincerest
  We pass and let it be
I may not love you dearest
  And you may not love me.

By the following February it is clear that Katherine was determined merely to be polite, while her less than ardent suitor plunged himself in misery:

Couldst thou but know my secret heart
  The sorrow that I dare not tell
The passion that with bitterest art
  I hide so well . . .

Ah couldst thou know this and descry
  The sorrow and the dull despair

Wouldst thou but smile and pass me by,
Or wouldst thou care?

Scott firmly attests that Lampman failed to circumvent the moral propriety of Ottawa and Miss Waddell; the affair remained "spiritual", since at its height Lampman's wife bore him a son, and apparently remained a good friend of Katherine. Although Scott was a very coy witness concerning his friend, another unpublished poem that Lampman confided only to his scribbler in 1895 suggests that Scott was right:

Sweeter than any name
Of power or blessing, tumult or of calm,
The pride of any victory with its palm,
Than praise or fame —
The love we bear to women in our youth
When ardour cleaves to ardour, truth to truth,

When Beauty cuts her sheaf
And flings its loaded ardour at our feet
But bitter, bitter! even as this is sweet
The gathering gulf
Of passionate love misplaced, or given in vain
The love that bears no harvest save of pain.

While it would be unsound to imply that Lampman's poetry was profoundly affected by his friendship with Miss Waddell, it is clear that his inability to resolve his personal conflicts, and particularly his love for Katherine, heightened his instability to the point of creative breakdown. There exists positive documentary evidence, moreover, to indicate that at this time his vaguely humanistic sentiments were being sharply focussed into poems of social protest. Lampman's letters to E. W. Thomson describe his "spiritual revolution"; the MS book he presented to Katherine reveals some of the results of this disturbance.

In the MS version of "Winter-Store", written in December 1889, Lampman had simply declaimed the joys of recollecting summer's fruits in the tranquillity of winter. In the version published in *Lyrics of Earth* (1895), however, he dropped this view, together with the opening twenty-eight lines, to substitute a bitter poem first published in the Toronto *Globe* for 19 November 1892. The "time of songs" of the original version became, through the rearranged stanzas of "Vision" from the *Globe*, a time of spiritual desolation as intense as the "nameless hunger of the soul" that seized the poet at the end of the poem. When

Lampman suggested that we must stop "refashioning what was once divine", he was speaking of man, not Gatineau timber-farms.

At the same time Lampman had long been "constitutionally sensitive to a morbid degree", and it might be difficult to ascribe the tone of his unpublished "Individual Duty" (alternatively titled "Life") to Miss Waddell's influence, much less Poe's. Although it is the opening poem in the MS book he presented to her, it was possibly written before she rejected him:

Housed in earthen palaces are we
  Over smouldering fires,
When through the flames creep witheringly,
  Doubts and hot desires,
And our souls in that dense place
    Lose their grace.

Some forever grope and climb
  Toward the outer air,
Some into the nether slime
  Slip and stifle there,
Others with alternating mind
    Wander blind.

Yet each palace — this we know —
  Hath one central tower,
Round about it breathe and blow
  Winds for every hour,
And its spire through ether driven
    Enters heaven.

At its base a narrow slit
  Gleams and that is all;
And the daylight slants through it
  Like a solid wall.
Enter lest thou find that door.
    Nevermore.

It is no accident that the spire of each palace enters heaven, for Lampman could always see beyond the "vast seething companies" of frustrated mankind to "the banner of our Lord and Master, Christ." He was less certain of the role of a Church he regarded as corrupted. In "The King's Sabbath," probably written as early as 1884, the King replies to a priest's petulant reminder that it is Sunday by holding the burning bush in his bare hands. By the 1890s in an untitled piece in the Toronto MS Lampman is rather more direct:

How dealt the world, Oh Christ, with thee,
  Who shrank not from the common rod,
Whose secret was humility?
  They mocked and scourged, then hailed thee God!

And built out of thine earnest speech,
  Whose gift was for the simplest needs,
Whose meaning was in all men's reach,
  The strangest of phantastic creeds.

While Lampman's more bitter and despondent poetry may usually be termed poetry of social protest only by broad definition, it is significant as an early contribution to that thin stream which is as figuratively seasonal as the Canadian economy. We might also take it nearly as seriously as Lampman himself did, if we accept his statement written three years before his death:

> We form an ideal of ourselves and claim what seems to be due to that ideal. The ideal of myself is entitled to love and approbation from my fellow creatures — but the love and approbation does not appear and I feel and abuse the constitution of things. To the ideal of myself money and power and practical success are no doubt due, but they do not come and again I abuse the constitution of things.

Lampman's letters and unpublished work suggest that Katherine Waddell's "love and approbation" came to be his greatest hope, and their denial his most frustrating disillusionment. It is scarcely surprising, then, to discover that with three possible exceptions — "The Vagrant" (still unpublished), "The King's Sabbath", and "Freedom" — his poetry of social protest was written during and after his "crisis" over Katherine.[2] We may properly suspect that Canadian literature lost no great poet of social protest at Lampman's premature death in 1899. Nevertheless as one of those "poor shining angels, whom the hoofs betray", both in his poetry and his semi-tragic life, Lampman continues to typify an aspect of that curiously thwarted radicalism which every Canadian appears to carry within him.[3]

FOOTNOTES

[1] Public Archives of Canada, E. K. Brown Papers. The following three poems are also transcriptions in the Brown Papers made by E. K. Brown from Lampman's notebooks.

[2] See Library of Parliament, Ottawa, four holograph MS copy-books by Lampman entitled *Miscellaneous Poems, Alcyone, David and Abigail,* and *The Story of an Affinity.*

[3] Remaining unpublished poetry from the Toronto MS is: an untitled four-line fragment, and the four-line stanza originally concluding "The Land of Pallas" (called in the MS "The Happy Land" and, in the identical version in the *Alcyone* MS, "The Country of the Ought-to-be"), both noticed by F. W. Watt in his "The Masks of Archibald Lampman", *University of Toronto Quarterly*, XXVII, 2 (January 1958); a complete 54-line poem "The Old Berserker", dated October 1889; and seven lines from "After Rain", originally the third stanza. The stanza appearing in the Memorial Edition of Lampman's poems was written on 27 April, 1895, and appears as a revision of f. 7^{v} of the MS.

THAT FOOL OF A FEAR

Notes on "A Jest of God"

George Bowering

MANITOBA was taken from the Cree, and the name means God's country. Neepawa means land of plenty. Margaret Laurence sets many of her stories in Neepawa, Manitoba, and calls the town "Manawaka". For a person such as Rachel Cameron, aware to much of irony in her life, the Cree names for her home might be taken as a jest of God. Anyone knows that in novels set on the Canadian prairie, place is a determinant, sometimes even a character. Margaret Laurence has been lately speaking of a sense of form for the novel. She would begin with a sense of form for the place. Not simply the flatness and the river, but also, in *A Jest of God*, the changing advertising signs over the front door of the funeral parlour Rachel nears as she is walking home. In the mid-fifties, when I arrived in rural Manitoba, I was told that this is God's country. You must be joking, I replied.

The town is split into two parts, each making the other feel guilty, and so is Rachel. Manawaka speaks with two voices, Scots-Canadian and Ukrainian. Rachel speaks with two voices that are unheard except when she speaks in voices, as in the tabernacle, or later in the ecstatic utterances concerning her experience of Nick. One gets the sense of place correctly when one gets the language right. Margaret Laurence is the rare Canadian writer who shows a care for the novel as good writing, language shaped to find literature. Serious writers know that the "content" of their work is no reality — all content is made-up or referential. In your language, in your voice, you can strive to make a record of the real, at least in so far as the written word may be taken as score for the tongue's workings.

In *A Jest of God*, seen as formally failed by some nineteenth-century reviewers, Margaret Laurence assays a responsive vocal style, the voice in the ear pursuing Rachel's mind even into the deep places where the most superior fiction (Joyce, Beckett, etc.) comes from. Instead of doggedly getting on with the "story", the draggiest part of a book, the writing begins in its place and expands outward from the keystone province.

From my reading I have a nice visual sense of the place, looking out from those eyes. It is not the narrator's grabbing control of her scene, because she doesn't have it as a prospect. That way vocal: instead of a sifted and settled version of Rachel's summertime adventure we get close with her most private mind in the present tense. We hold a present, and it is tense. If we can do so, we should read the book aloud.

Then we may hear Rachel's tense mind as she sits for the first time in the Pentecostal tabernacle. The reality is tolled by the music, as in poetry:

> Oh my God. They can sit, rapt, wrapped around and smothered willingly by these syllables, the chanting of some mad enchanter, himself enchanted?

The rime tells the time. Here is a rare privilege in our fiction, the enjoyment of hearing the mind moving, rather than being on the receiving end of recollection, arrangement, description, and expression.

So I praise the process, beginning with place and voice, leading to that third thing hard to name, something like the risk or gift of getting naked, so that your nakedness may touch something that is not yours. The form of the novel, first-person and present tense, works as Rachel's opening-out does, to get naked. Margaret Laurence shows uncommon courage making this book, to confront social and deep personal stupidities and fears in the womb of her narrator. There is no prince charming waiting at the neck of the womb, but we inlookers are led to see Rachel finding herself, who had always been appalled by open utterance, expressing her desires physically, with tenderness and violence that both frighten and liberate her sensibilities to an extent. To an extent we are not urged to believe but simply allowed to witness.

MANAWAKA is in the brown middle of one of the world's widest countries, a long way from exotic, or so it would seem for anyone desiring elsewhere. Rachel has a mind, that is more important than any reveiwer has no-

ticed, and she feels as if her mind has already removed her from her town, as if the town is holding her by circumstances opposed to her mind. In this way she is fixed there by her mind. We are introduced to this state of mind as she listens to the children's skipping songs in the spring of the book, as Rachel's ears pick them out:

> *The wind blows low, the wind blows high*
> *The snow comes falling from the sky,*
> *Rachel Cameron says she'll die*
> *For the want of the golden city.*
> *She is handsome, she is pretty,*
> *She is the queen of the golden city* ——

and a paragraph later we are similarly introduced to a sensing of the town's mindless dislike for the exotic, as the children sing:

> *Spanish dancers, turn around,*
> *Spanish dancers, get out of this town.*

But poor Rachel is not allowed even to associate herself with the Spanish dancers, who are hated not only for their strangeness, but also for their grace. She sees herself as an awkward crane-like creature, or a streak of chalk, or a "tin giant."

Writing as she does, from inside Rachel's neurotic head, Mrs. Laurence feels that she has to go to some objective means of presenting the town's kitschy insularity, and the entrapment of dreams. So she presents to the reader sitting behind Rachel's eyes a number of ikons such as the children's skipping songs. When Rachel goes to the teenage hangout Regal Cafe she sees venerable Lee Toy, "his centuries-old face not showing at all what he may think of these kids." Lee Toy is still sending money to his wife in China, a woman he has not seen in forty years. Rachel knows that like him she is isolated and secret, but fears that unlike him she is not relentless. Lee Toy's patient resistance is shown in the two pictures on his cafe's wall: a Coca-Cola poster and a painting, "long and narrow like an unrolled scroll, done on grey silk — a mountain, and on the slope a *solitary* and *splendidly plumaged* tiger." [italics mine.] The painting is that old Romantic trick, the dream stuff, in this case delicate and exotic.

So that when Rachel has her self-induced masturbation dreams, the image must be removed from the town that has taught her repression. The faceless fantasy-lover enters her in a forest or on a beach. "It has to be right away from everywhere." At one time it is a gaudy Hollywood orgy in ancient Egypt, Rachel as both escapist and voyeur, dreamy outsider in a tangle of flesh.

When she does finally lie naked with a man they are on the ground outside the town, but more important, her lover is a Ukrainian immigrant's son, whom she tries to picture as exotic barbarian rider from Genghis Khan's hordes. This lover has a face, of course, one that interests Rachel because of its slavic near-oriental cast, a face unlike the Anglo-Scottish faces of her ancestors. Mrs. Laurence makes much of the hold maintained by her people's ancestors. In *A Jest of God* that notion makes up a good portion of the sense of place.

Manawaka is a symbolic Canadian town, originally Scottish, with a patina (or mould, depending on your side of the tracks) of more recent eastern European immigration. Mrs. Laurence simply sees the Scottish side teaching emotional repression, but also that Rachel's notion of the exotic in the poorer section is a normal stereotype.

Thinking on another ikon, the sign over the undertaker's door, Rachel remarks on how it has been replaced and reworded more than once through the years in order to soften the idea of death, at least for the Scottish Protestants of the town:

> No one in Manawaka ever dies, at least not on this side of the tracks. We are a gathering of immortals . . . Death is rude, unmannerly, not to be spoken to in the street.

Spanish dancers, get out of this town. Rachel's closest ancestor is her mother, who runs about tidying the house every night so that it will look "as though no frail and mortal creature ever set foot in it." When Mr. Cameron the undertaker had been alive, Mrs. Cameron had put doilies on all the furniture so that his corpse-touching hands would not touch the place of her habitude. She apparently felt the same way about his touch on her body, an interesting fear of the touch of both death and life, a double fear that her daughter has picked up. It is only after she allows herself to be touched, and after she then inaugurates the touching, that she takes some open-eyed control of her own life, and even over that of her mother.

Previous to that time, we may see Rachel's curious suspension in her attitudes toward the two churches. She can feel superior to the uppity Protestants who want their church to be bloodless and quiet, but she herself squirms with embarrassment at the very thought of being seen in the Pentecostal tabernacle. When she is in the middle of the famous service at the tabernacle, she suddenly associates the loud singing with her childhood dream of the horsemen of the Apocalypse. At that time her mother had wakened her to say, "Don't be foolish

— don't be foolish, Rachel — there's nothing there." Mrs. Cameron goes to her church every Sunday morning and there is nothing there, and she is no fool, has no chance now of becoming a fool, God's fool or her own. Later, when Rachel goes to her doctor with her fear of becoming a mother and finds that she has a uterine irregularity, she thinks

> I was always afraid that I might become a fool. Yet I could almost smile with some grotesque lightheadedness at that fool of a fear, that poor fear of fools, now that I really am one,

really am the town fool, the object of its children's songs, and its potential teacher, not satisfied to be its grade two teacher.

The untaught town is realized by its language, the reported clichés of mother May's card-playing cronies: "I guess they must keep you pretty busy, all those youngsters" — poor vision of the teaching process, and "Well, I think it's marvelous, the way you manage" — no insight into Rachel's problem with managing. This catching of ordinary real dialogue is Margaret Laurence's first easy accomplishment, the stuff her earliest writing was based on, and useful here as the antagonist to Rachel's interior verbal trouble, just as the town is that speaks that way. At the extreme, Mrs. Laurence manhandles it into unconscious irony versus Rachel's overconsciousness, as when, speaking of a movie, one of the old women says, "The one next week at the Roxy is *The Doomed Women.* I can't imagine what *it* can be about."

The town teaches not only repression but also the desire to put up a good appearance. Constantly the town is accurately described to show that the outsides of buildings are misleading declarations, as Rachel's appearance might be. The quiet brick houses are too big for their remaining occupants. "Nothing is old here, but it looks old." Hector, the current undertaker in the building with the rose window, is the agent of the people's wishes to have someone unfamiliar and well-dressed take care of confrontation with a crisis in life. For him it is a business; as in the Scottish church it is the business to make a good appearance. Here is the cheapened hold of the ancestors. Calla's mother named her after the lily, probably because both sound and picture gave the appearance of prettiness, but Calla is not conventionally pretty. The calla lily is the symbol of death — death and a good though not exuberant appearance, basic white, like the town. But Calla rejects the mortuary flower and paints her door a lilac color, thus offending her neighbours, as Nick's father would have if he'd left his house painted the bright colours he wanted. While flinching at that openness, Rachel

tells Nick that she has always envied it, thinking of the Ukrainians as "not so boxed-in, maybe. More outspoken. More able to speak out. More allowed to — both by your family and by your self . . . In my family, you didn't get emotional. It was frowned upon."

PART OF RACHEL'S QUANDARY springs from the condition of her female-dominated world, a world that mitigates, by its condition, against her growing naturally out of her adolescence, perhaps. That condition traps her as much as the isolation of the shrinking town. Most of the males she sees are no help because they are remote or they are symptomatic of the town — Lee Toy, Hector the undertaker, Willard the school principal, the teenage boys in the coke cafe. Only James Doherty and Nick, two figures of outward, offer any surcease or hope.

James' mother, to begin with, is atypical of the mothers in Manawaka. She lets her son run free in nature when he is supposed to be suffering under the town's indoctrination in school. When she casually touches him, arousing Rachel's jealousy, he squirms away, and his mother "smiles, not unpleased that he wants to be his own and on his own." One feels that this mother would not urge her child to believe that there is "nothing there" in his dreams.

The danger and sadness of corrupting youthful optimism was a theme running through Mrs. Laurence's African stories. Rachel sees that she, desiring to be a mother especially to her favourite pupil, is in danger of fulfilling the role of typical Manawaka mother; and her relationship with James is more complicated than that. She knows that children can quickly detect falseness in their teachers, and become adversaries. She has a rather strong fear of becoming James' enemy, so she becomes his tormentor, because she also knows that if she shows her liking and admiration of him, he will be made to suffer by his classmates, who have been taught by their community to detest and ridicule tender human touch. So she hits him with a ruler (for a moment unable to rule herself) or speaks sharply to him: "It's so often James I speak to like this, fearing to be too much the other way with him." She projects on to him her longing to realize her uniqueness: "Looking at his wiry slightness, his ruffian sorrel hair, I feel an exasperated tenderness. I wonder why I should feel differently toward him? Because he's unique, that's why." (None of us is unaware of the sexual attraction, but that's not my direction here.) But a paragraph later she betrays her

mind-forged manacles when she thinks of Calla, "If only she looked a little more usual." But she allies herself with James' uniqueness and independence of imagination, comparing him favourably with the majority of the pupils, who are given a "free choice" drawing class and have to wait for suggestions, their own (sad) houses, what they did last weekend. James draws a splendidly complicated and efficient spaceship, a vehicle to get him away from here, in all senses. Rachel may at times identify with James, or feel that she tacitly collaborates with him against the town's trap, or see him as potential wish-gratification, as parents normally do. "He goes his own way as though he endures the outside world but does not really believe in it," she thinks. Before she observes the unassuming rebellion of his mother Grace, she simply envies her, thinking that "she doesn't deserve to have him."

But, curiously, James also focusses the realistic part of her mind. Ordinary repressed people like Willard can go ahead and strap a boy like James, protesting that it is a duty he doesn't relish, but Rachel considers that she at least realizes her odd sexual botherings while ordinary people do not. "*I am not neutral — I am not detached — I know it. But neither are you, and you do not know it*," she imagines herself saying to the young married-man principal. (Such realization is often missed by readers of Rachel's book.) From that realization to directness of expression is where Rachel will have to go when she gets close to Nick, but she finds it taught by Grace during a scene in which she talks to James' mother about his truancy. Rachel offers the woman an excuse so that she can "save face," but Grace simply admits that she sometimes allows James to run around in nature instead of going to school. Rachel is so startled that she doesn't know what to say, strange position for an authority-figure to find herself in. She has found out that this mother simply loves her son, and wants for him what she would want in his place. Rachel's own mother characteristically says that she simply cannot understand why Rachel would want to do certain things, generally things that contravene the mother's poor wishes. So when James later hides from Rachel what he is drawing, she makes an "open utterance," striking him on the face with her staff of office, her ruler. Her response is similar to the end of the tabernacle scene — she is not sure she can distinguish between her spoken words and those she bottles-up inside. She is not sure she can watch her words.

As far as the community is concerned, little James has a lot of the Old Nick in him; and for Rachel, the older Nick is a kind of extension of what the son-surrogate James presents to her confusion. At first Nick, the boy who escaped the town, intensifies the normal battle within her. In their first conver-

sation he simply asks, "Been here long, Rachel?" and before speaking her hesitant answer, she thinks: "There is something almost gentle in his voice, and suddenly I long to say *Yes, for ever,* but also to deny everything and to say *Only a year — before that, I was in Samarkand and Tokyo.*" He, on the other hand, is immediately open; he begins to tell her his family stories right away — he is the Ukrainian milkman's son. Rachel thinks: "He's easy to listen to. Easy as well, it almost seems, to reply to. If only it could be that way." She is, then, still thinking of herself as the acted-upon, the conditioned. Nick will teach the teacher to act upon her world and her words. As a beginning, she finds herself, unlike herself, pouncing for the telephone so that her mother may not beat her to Nick's voice.

Nick provides a curious balance for Rachel's incipient schizophrenia. His twin brother died as a boy, so that he is survivor of that relationship as well as his upbringing in the town. "I wanted to be completely on my own. And then it happened that way," he says. Now his closeness will offer one of Rachel's selves an opportunity to assert itself free from its unidentical twin. One might also remember that Nick's brother had been the more approved by his parents, just as Rachel's complying self is approved by her mother and the other controllers.

Nick suggests what he may do with Rachel, when on entering his parents' house with her, he goes to the windows and opens the curtains, to let the sun in. (She later refers to Nick as the sun.) We have earlier been told that Rachel's home is surrounded by the ancestors' trees to protect it from eyes (including the sun's) outside. Windows let light in, and they also let eyesight out. When Nick then enters her body and leaves his sperm there, she curiously thinks of herself in language that might speak of a house: "the knowledge that he will somehow inhabit me, be present in me, for a few days more — this, crazily, gives me warmth, against all reason." However, it is also language that could describe a disease, the dis-ease that Rachel is filled with when she imagines her body and her self occupied by foetus or tumour, or the eccentricities of advancing age and the town's influence. Reason, indeed.

Contrary to the invasion is Rachel's excursion, the risk she learns to take for the first physical love that comes to her in her thirties. She reaches out to him now; it is she who goes first to the telephone. She suggests to Nick that he could teach in Manawaka instead of Winnipeg, and is at once struck by her openness, her loss of pride: "No, I have no pride. None left, not now. This realization reaches me all at once calm, inexplicably, and almost free. Have I finished with facades? Whatever happens, let it happen. I won't deny it." Here is a lesson she

is learning from Nick, from time, and from her reading of St. Paul up in Calla's room. (Paul said to allow yourself to become a fool in order to find wisdom. That is, share in God's joke, don't be its butt.) The next time they are alone with one another's bodies, it is she who reaches out to touch first, to ask for it, and of course it is he who moves away first afterwards, saying that he is not God, that he can't solve anything. Finally, in the hospital in Winnipeg, the little tumour, which like a child she takes as a personal gesture from fate, departs, and with it goes Nick's inhabiting of her. Now she can move into that house, and when she does she arranges the furniture as she wants. Literally, she packs up and moves to Vancouver, where fools may live in God's grace, making their own traditions.

I SEE THE CHANGE in Rachel's consciousness as a result of her getting in touch with her body, that part of self the Scottish Christians preferred to cover with rough wool and to forget. Rachel's mother, poor dear, was mortified that her husband made his living by handling bodies, and kept his hands off hers. The first thing we see of Rachel is that she is displaced from her own body — on the first page of the book she imagines her eyes looking from a pupil's desk at Miss Cameron, the "tin giant". Odd metal for "the queen of the golden city". At other times she pictures her body, seen in fugitive reflections from hall mirror or street window, as a "stroke of a white chalk on a blackboard" (again two-dimensional, like tin), a "goose's feather", a "crane of a body", either bird or construction machine, such juiceless things.

We are also quickly introduced to her fear of aging and dying, especially poignant because she hasn't gone through all the steps of the life cycle thought appropriate to a woman of her age. The mature part of her consciousness joins with her immaturity in looking for the signs of her becoming an eccentric old woman. But her mother treats her as if she were "about twelve". Rachel is displaced from her womanhood's age as well as from her body: "What a strangely pendulum life I have, fluctuating in age between extremes, hardly knowing myself whether I am too young or too old." There is an operative irony in the fact that the story is being told in the present tense.

Rachel seems to prefer her inside to her outside, because it is abstract and hidden from outsiders, hence untouchable for two reasons. But her desire to be opened does battle with her sense of good taste and behaviour. While discussing

the misdemeanour and punishment of James, she concentrates her glance on her own nicely manicured fingernails with their colourless polish, and realizes that she desires to touch Principal Siddley's furry hands though they repulse her. She makes "reasonable" excuses to soften the guilt of her masturbation. She blames her rising during the climax of the tabernacle scene upon the touch of her neighbours who lifted her to her feet as a consequence of their movement. She is relieved by her own anger when Calla's kiss scares her away from her friend. Characteristically she tries to pass her fear of self-exposure off as disgust. About the people in the tabernacle she thinks: "How can they make fools of themselves like that, so publicly?" To become a fool one must cast off fear, not disgust, sometimes the Protestant fear disguised as disgust. If you like your inside better than your outside, there should be no obstacle to revealing it, certainly no reason for poor snobbery.

Taste is another idea that confuses things for Rachel. How can she be sure that her response to the awful beehive hairdoes of the town girls is not simply a mixture of her snobbery and her alienation from the present? She is jealous and hurt when she thinks that these empty-headed sillies are probably being touched by boys in farm fields and Fords every night. Later, Rachel sees herself as graceless and hasty in her scramble to get her clothes on after her first pastoral scene with Nick.

Any way, shortly after seeing the young beehive heads on the streets of town, she goes to sleep, and before conjuring her erotic onanist images, she is assailed by a vision of herself trapped by time, a giant clock:

> The night feels like a giant Ferris wheel turning in blackness, very slowly, turning once for each hour, interminably slow. And I am glued to it, or wired like paper [two-dimensional again], like a photograph, insubstantial, unable to anchor myself, unable to stop this slow nocturnal circling.

In one sense time must simply be co-operated with — it is the earth, after all, that circles slowly and endlessly in the dark, the earth that Rachel has not moved over. But time, or the using of it, can also be a control device for the good folks of town. There is a second scene in which Rachel catches herself staring at Willard's hands — "with them he touches his wife" — and she quickly looks at something else, the familiar royal blue Bank of Montreal calendar, which "is not so frivolous as to display any picture." The hands and the calendar act dramatically here as objective correlatives of the conflict in Rachel's consciousness. But to this point Rachel is still caught being favourable to the closed

attitude. When Willard takes off his protective glasses and shows a look of vulnerability, Rachel feels almost affectionate, and moves backward instead of towards him.

During the tabernacle scene, too, Rachel is embarrassed by vulnerability that leads to people touching one another even in spirit. Calla explains that the "deep and private enjoyment" of making "ecstatic utterances" leads to a sharing of the ecstacy among people who have got together. This is a pretty obvious comparison with sexual experience, as are the words of the hymn the congregation sings: "*In full and glad surrender, / I give myself to Thee.*" Mrs. Cameron's church, by contrast, is then seen as antagonistic to both spiritual touch and sexuality, a place were people present only their protective coverings to one another, and probably to the Holy Ghost. "I don't think it would be very nice, not to go. I don't think it would look very good," says Mrs. Cameron to her daughter. Furthermore, she says it would not be nice for Rachel to go in her orange scarf, because it is too bright. The old woman would be "shocked" if her minister ever spoke to his God with emotion or sincerity, as if God were actually there. Even this church's Jesus is beyond and out of touch:

> . . . a stained glass window shows a pretty and cleancut Jesus expiring gently and with absolutely no inconvenience, no gore, no pain, just this nice and slightly effeminate insurance salesman who, somewhat incongruously, happens to be clad in a toga, holding his arms languidly up to something which might in other circumstances have been a cross.

This is another of the many pictures Rachel's eyes and mind fall upon, the reflectors Mrs. Laurence is fond of holding up for the mind she has chosen to write from inside of. For instance, compare that Christ with the image of Rachel the lapsed Protestant when she is around Pentecostal Calla: "I hold myself very carefully when she's near, like a clay figurine, easily broken, unmendable," something you ask your visitors not to touch.

Part of the time Rachel feels like a rube, unenlightened, and much of the time she is bookish, as if that separates her from her environment, for good or for bad. But small towns usually contain a few bookish rubes, the untouchables, who are not the same as the town fools. When Nick gets through to Rachel, she turns against her bookishness, rejecting the words of "some nitwit in Shakespeare," but the words still come. Rachel perhaps sees herself as a character in a novel; she is unfortunately analytical. She is prepared, because she knows herself as someone like Willard does not, to know it all.

But she has to learn that touch can come before and lead towards knowing — "yet I've touched him, touched his face and his mouth. That is all I know of him, his face, the bones of his shoulders. That's not knowing very much" — and even that touch touches both ways, both people at once, so that knowing yourself happens from the skin inward. That touching of two makes "possession" irrelevant, her mother's phrase, "*a woman's most precious possession*", something to reject in oneself. Her mother said of her father, "he was never one to make many demands upon me." In contrast, Rachel finds "this peace, this pride", when her body is touching Nick's. They are most un-Protestant feelings for the soul. So also is her new way of viewing. She finds herself fixing on "a leaf with all its veins perceived, the fine hairs on the back of a man's hands," rather than accepting the Protestant and spinsterish "abstract painting of a world".

Not only does touch lead to knowing, it leads to wanting to know, by touching: "Then I want my hands to know everything about him, the way the hair grows in his armpits, the curve of his bones at the hips, the tight muscles of his belly, the arching of his sex." It is here that she is inevitably touching herself, getting past the two-dimensional pictures of her own body.

Now, too, her obscure sex-fantasies are being replaced by dreams of herself in bed with actual Nick, and the scene is no longer distant unnamed beaches, but "a Hudson's Bay point blanket on the bed, scarlet", something real to anyone who has felt such cloth on his bare skin. During the same daydream, Rachel notices that her cloudy fears have been touched away: "I've felt a damn sight better since I stopped considering my health." This is not to say that Rachel is cured, but she is changed, and that is very much to the point for the woman halfway through her life who could have settled for declining sameness in the small isolated town. Still she fantasises, but now about marriage, and now the fantasy is rejected not so much from shame and guilt, but from a sense of reality.

Now she does not hurry past the mirror. She stops to look into it and sees actual woman, with blood running in actual veins. With a similar courage she descends for the first time to the funeral chapel below-floors, and makes another open utterance: "Let me come in," directionless, or towards the site of her father's peculiar laying on of hands. She feels some small surprise that she will do such a thing, but sloughs it off: "Suddenly it doesn't matter at all to me." When Hector tells her that her father chose a life in which he need not touch living flesh, she first says why mourn, then changes it to why cease from mourning.

In the following scene, Rachel goes to see Calla, and is now disconcerted to

see the fear she has instilled in the woman who would like to touch her. To find herself capable of such control now that she has learned how good it is to abandon oneself to two-way touch is source for a new kind of guilt, but one that leads to instruction. It is echoed in the words of St. Paul, as read here by Calla, who does not realize their immediate application: "*If any man among you thinketh himself to be wise, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.*"

That is a version of Margaret Laurence's theme.

Rachel has pondered it another way just before hearing those words. She thinks that "if you think you contain two realities, perhaps you contain none." I like to think that the operative word here is "contain." Reach out, Rachel, fill yourself up. Something has to give. "My trouble, perhaps, is that I have expected justice. Without being able to give it," she admits to God, who is not there, of course. She is going to lose Nick, but it was his body her fingers pushed against to send feeling back into her own.

One of the lovely things about Margaret Laurence's novel is the gradualness of change. It is not that Rachel realizes steadily. Her early weakness and confusion, her thirty-five-year old character traits are still there, at the end of the book. They are just not so bad now. They are accompanied by the later knowledge and experience that alternate with them in her mind, and modify them somewhat. For example, when Rachel goes to the Parthenon Café to think about her pregnancy, her tired mind talks to Nick. At first she wants him to be there so that she can see him and speak with him, not asking to touch him. But two pages later, after she has faced her self in the middle of crisis, thinking of abortion, she admits that she could forego speaking with him if she could hold him and lie down beside him. Touch is the first thing she wants now. She manages to go again to Calla, to touch her with an admission of her trouble, to establish greater intimacy than they have ever known. At the same time, Rachel decides to shake her mother's formerly awful control: "My mother's tricky heart will just have to take its own chances." There is confiding and confidence, outside and inside.

Margaret Laurence has spoken of Rachel's experience as part victory, part defeat. The woman has managed to step outside her own mind for a little, to see the eyes looking back as not totally stupid nor totally ridiculing. While Dr. Raven is touching her womb to find life or tumour, Rachel has a moment of seeing the real world, one in which any individual person has to make his own way. Dr. Raven, the old family friend, is "one well-meaning physician who wants to help me pull myself together and yet can't help having an eye on the clock, the

waiting room still full." All life goes on, everyone's, and time is not just a tyrant tying lonely Rachel to some monster clock. He hasn't the time to concentrate on her.

So Rachel steps into the middle ground she could not reach earlier because of the grip of her ancestors. Whereas she had formerly been seen by her mother as child, by herself as ageing spinster, and perhaps by the reader as arrested adolescent, she now becomes woman and mother in a weirdly symbolic birth scene. After the tumour is removed and she is lying in the Winnipeg hospital bed, she hears herself saying "*I am the mother now.*" She is referring largely to the relationship between herself and old Mrs. Cameron. She will complete the age-old cycle, becoming the mother of her ancestors, those people we all see as children, socially or historically. When Rachel begins to assert herself and take over control of the family affairs, including especially the leaving of the old town, her mother makes the complaint of all children being moved, that she cannot stand to leave all her playmates. Her mother says to Rachel, "you're not *yourself*," and either she is or she is not.

Rachel has changed somewhat, and change is life, as they say, though not often enough in Manawaka. When she encounters Nick's parents on the street back home, she is surprisedly open in introducing herself to them. But as Mrs. Laurence cautions, this is a story of real life, not a Hollywood movie set in New England. When she speaks to Nick's parents and finds that Nick lied to her about his being married, we have another in a series of unsurenesses about misunderstandings; we still have a woman near middle-age, waving her hands at the mist of life and its meetings. I am changing and coming into focus, but who am I?

ONE OF THE REASONS for my attention to *A Jest of God* is the seriousness of the work as literature. Margaret Laurence is an unusual bird among Canadian novelists, in that she works on the premise that form (not "structure") matters pre-eminently in the endeavour to simulate reality. What happens happens *in* the writing, not in front of it. One sees through the eye, not with it. Mrs. Laurence is not talking *about* life; she is trying to re-enact the responses to it. I differ from most commentators in praising the success of the present tense and the interior, confused, first-person narrative. The subject of the book is Rachel's mind, and the realism consists in our separation from it by

virtue of its unsureness and confusions. That separation brings us so close. Because we are in the position of wanting to talk to Rachel.

We are early convinced of a versimilitude of thought, while being introduced to young James in the classroom. Rachel's mind is on him, asking herself why she speaks so harshly to him in particular when it is to him that her feelings go out most longingly. Then before thinking on him some more, she asks herself why she didn't bring a coat to work, as the spring wind makes her shiver, and a cold will pull her down so surely. We know then that in some way her spinsterish fear of aging and getting cranky about her declining health is related to her desire to love a son, especially one who exhibits the independence of mind that Rachel has betrayed in herself.

Mrs. Laurence engages the reader continuously this way, inviting and obligating him to evaluate Rachel's thoughts, not simply to receive them toward a narrative completion. We remember that we are at all times privy to Rachel's speaking to herself, and must, for instance, evaluate her adjectives. When she says to herself, "My great mistake was in being born the younger. No. Where I went wrong was in coming back here, once I'd got away. A person has to be ruthless. One has to say *I'm going*, and not be prevailed upon to return," a reader may want to substitute "courageous" for "ruthless." Yet the reader is still the half of the dialogue who is holding his tongue. He should extend to her some of his imagination, *i.e.* sympathy; he should not condemn her, or her vision of reality. Somewhere between that "ruthless" and "courageous," or whatever the second adjective may be, rests the real. The real is like the real in real life — it is mainly encountered in dialogue, encountered but never totally characterized in words.

Similarly the reality of character is found in how the person talks more than in what he says. Mrs. Laurence engages this poetic discovery as a literary approach. So the language with its rhymes and cadences reveals the condition of Rachel's shocked mind as she finds herself speaking ecstatically in the tabernacle:

> Chattering, crying, ululating, the forbidden transformed cryptically to nonsense, dragged from the crypt, stolen and shouted, the shuddering of it, the fear, the breaking, the release, the grieving —
>
> Not Calla's voice. Mine. Oh my God. Mine. The voice of Rachel.

What I mean to say is that Mrs. Laurence does not seek to use words to explain (L. *explanare*, lit., to make level.) the important things that are hap-

pening. Take for instance Rachel's words on her wishing that something bad will happen to her mother:

> You mean it all right, Rachel. Not every minute, not every day, even. But right now, you mean it. Mean. I am. I never knew it, not really. Is everyone? Probably, but what possible difference can that make? I do care about her. Surely I love her as much as most parents love their children. I mean, of course, as much as most children love their parents.

Rachel's mind picks things up and lays them down like a distracted woman walking through a department store. As we have seen, she gets a purchase on her life after she discovers that she is no longer the child, but something like the new mother. In the passage just quoted, Mrs. Laurence does not introduce the product of Rachel's mind. She shows the motion of the machinery. No fooling.

One small section of the novel is told in the past tense, the first four pages of chapter eleven. It is the scene in the Winnipeg hospital, a scene that is both interlude (the only time told outside of the little town and Rachel's day-to-day confrontations with its people), and dramatic keypoint. The past tense both fills in the news and provides a sense of Rachel's mind taking control of her situation, especially striking after ten chapters of up-close hesitancies in the immediate present.

Certainly when one speaks to God one has to use the present tense (*cf.* Stacey, in *The Fire Dwellers*), as Rachel does at the end of chapter nine, through her irony, declaring her decision to have a child of her own for a change. If God is alive he may or may not be having his little joke. If this happens in the present tense, it happens to you, and that makes it more important than funny. God's jests are not just vocal — the word is made flesh, *i.e.* the eternal present. It is in understanding this that Margaret Laurence chose wisely to write in the present tense, to present the fool made wise by folly.

God's grace shines on fools. Poetry is hospitable to the fool's tongue, and *vice versa*. Rachel's acceptance speech is poetry:

> All that. And this at the end of it. I was always afraid that I might become a fool. Yet I could almost smile with some grotesque lightheadedness at that fool of a fear, that poor fear of fools, now that I really am one.

EVERY MAN IS AN ISLAND

Isolation in "A Jest of God"

C. M. McLay

"No man is an iland, intire of itselfe," quotes Ethel Wilson in *Hetty Dorval*, for Wilson like Donne believes in human community, and the novel examines the effect upon mankind of the wilful isolation of one of its members. Yet this truth is only partial. Margaret Laurence in *A Jest of God* suggests a complementary truth, that every man is an island, a theme more typical of the twentieth century and already apparent in the "Marguerite" poems of Matthew Arnold, with their overpowering sense of isolation and human incommunicability:

> Yes! in the sea of life enisled,
> With echoing straits between us thrown,
> Dotting the shoreless watery wild,
> We mortal millions live *alone*.
> The islands feel the enclasping flow,
> And then their endless bounds they know. . . .
>
> Who order'd that their longing's fire
> Should be, as soon as kindled, cool'd?
> Who renders vain their deep desire? —
> A God, a God their severance ruled!
> And bade betwixt their shores to be
> The unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea.

In her essay in the Tenth Anniversary Issue of *Canadian Literature*, Margaret Laurence observes that after the African novels her theme became "Ten Years' Sentences", "survival, the attempt of the personality to survive with some dignity,

toting the load of excess mental baggage that everyone carries, until the moment of death," and adds that Rachel's partial victory in *A Jest of God* is due to her "beginning to learn the rules of survival". Yet Rachel's acceptance of life is attributable to her acceptance of her central predicament, her essential aloneness. She cannot escape through dream, fantasy or nightmare: "I'm on my own. I never knew before what that would be like. It means no one. Just that. Just — myself." And with this comes the simultaneous realization that every one else is alone too, that even the closest human relationship cannot cross the barrier of self. She cannot bear the problems of her parents, even know them, nor they hers. Returning to the Japonica Funeral Chapel, her father's undertaking establishment, many years after his death, she meditates:

> Everything looks just the same, but now it does not seem to matter much that my father's presence has been gone from here for a long time. I can't know what he was like. He isn't here to say, and even if he were, he wouldn't say, any more than Mother does. Whatever it was that happened with either of them, their mysteries remain theirs. I don't need to know. It isn't necessary. I have my own.

It is her recognition of this overwhelming truth that frees Rachel from her past failures, with her father, with her mother, even with Nick, and enables her to face her future with fortitude. And it is Laurence's ability to capture this truth, to recreate in fiction the sense of isolation, where human beings reach out to each other and reach out futilely, which makes *A Jest of God* and the earlier *The Stone Angel* notable achievements in Canadian and in world literature.

All the characters in *A Jest of God*, minor as well as major, are isolated. Only the young seem to be unaware of this, and Rachel envies their surface sophistication, their other-worldliness. The girls of sixteen are "from outer space.... Another race. Venusians"; the young lovers in the cemetery exist in and for themselves, and James Dougherty pulls away from his mother, wanting "to be his own and on his own". The old huddle together pathetically, to evade a sense of their own isolation, their subjection to time. The old men sit in the sunlight on the steps of the Queen Victoria Hotel, or gather by the oak counter in twos and threes to recall the past, their faces crinkled and unshaven, their throats scrawny with prominent adam's apples. The old ladies play bridge and gossip, yearning for the days of Claudette Colbert and Ruby Keeler, their voices "shrill, sedate, not clownish to their ears but only to mine, and of such unadmitted sadness I can scarcely listen and yet cannot stop listening". Mrs. Cameron at first seems shallow in her martyred and predatory coyness, but later to Rachel's

sharpened perception she becomes pathetic too, fearing the outside world as a child fears a dark cellar; Rachel has always blamed her mother for her father's withdrawal from life, but the rejection, she comes to see, was on both sides, and Mrs. Cameron mumbles in half sleep "*Niall always thinks I am so stupid*". And the middle generation too are alone. Calla lives with a songless canary, who does not even notice her, for she finds comfort in listening to some movement in the darkness of the night, and Rachel asks herself at the Tabernacle, as she sees her in new circumstances, "Don't I know her at all?" Willard Sidley, the self-possessed principal who has both attracted and repelled Rachel, she now views in a new light as asking her for something, perhaps condolence, and she wonders: "if he's asked for it before, and if at times he's asked for various other things I never suspected, admiration or reassurance or whatever it was he didn't own in sufficient quantity." And even funny little Hector, her father's successor in the Japonica Chapel, she sees for a moment of truth "living there behind his eyes".

Human relationships, then, are a reaching out, an attempt to cross the barriers of the "unplumb'd, salt, estranging sea". But the contact is spasmodic, momentary. In Arnold's poem, the lovely notes of the nightingale echo across the channel of calm, moonlit nights, and join the islands momentarily. Then each draws back into its separate world and the moment is lost.

ON A SUPERFICIAL LEVEL, *A Jest of God* is a love story with an unhappy ending. Yet the central relationships are not confined, static, but multiple and ambivalent. Rachel both protects James and threatens him; she loves her father yet hates him for his rejection of her. She loves her mother "as much as most children", yet wishes her dead. She longs for a child, yet she hesitates:

> The process doesn't end with birth. It isn't just that, to be reckoned with.... You're left with a creature who had to be looked after and thought about, taken into consideration for evermore. It's not one year. It's eighteen, maybe. Eighteen years is quite a long time. I would be fifty-two then. All that time, totally responsible. There would not be any space for anything else — only that one being.

She searches for permanent relationships, with father, lover, child, to escape from her sense of isolation, yet isolation too brings invulnerability, an escape from the present, as she recognizes in the mournful train voice and the lonely call of the loons at Galloping Mountain:

> They were mad, those bird voices, perfectly alone, damning and laughing out there in the black reaches of the night water where no one could get them, no one could ever get at them.

Even the relationship between twins is complex and shifting. Rachel considers Nick and Steve and wonders if twinship itself is an insurance against loneliness: "Would it make a person feel more real or less so? Would there be some constant communication, with no doubt about knowing each other's meanings, as though your selves were invisibly joined?" But Nick denies this:

> I used to be glad we [Nick and Steve] weren't the same. . . . How would you like there to be someone exactly the same as yourself. . . . People used to group us together, although we were quite different. He never seemed to mind. He just laughed it off. But I hated it. . . . I wanted to be completely on my own.

Rachel's desire for sexual love, although it seems central to the novel, is in fact another aspect of her desire to reach out, to escape out of herself into another's identity. In the early part of the novel, the dream lover serves this function, and later, Nick. Rachel runs her fingers along Nick's ribs "just to feel you living there under your skin", to reach through skin and bone to the unique being underneath. For the moment of union, flesh, skin, bones and blood are connected, but only for this moment; when they pull apart they become again two separate, inviolate personalities. And Rachel comes to realize that the Nick she knows, like her father, exists only in her mind:

> I talk to him, when he is not here, and tell him everything I can think of, everything that has ever happened, and how I feel and for a while it seems to me I am completely known to him, and then I remember I've only talked to him like that when I'm alone. He hasn't heard and doesn't know.

But the dominant relationship of the novel is not between lovers, but between mother and child where, for a period of several months, two human beings do exist within one skin. The child, Rachel thinks, "is lodged there now. *Lodged*, meaning living there. How incredible that seems," and again:

> It will be infinitesimal. It couldn't be seen with the human eye, it's that small, but the thing will grow. . . . It will have a voice. It will be able to cry out. . . . [You] could see that it has the framework of bones, the bones that weren't set for all time but would lengthen and change by themselves, and that it had features, and a skull in which the convoluted maze did as it pleased, irrespective of theories, and that it had eyes.

Even in Part II, the summer with Nick, the desire for this child to replace her

loneliness is strong. The second time after she and Nick have made love, she whispers urgently to herself: "*Nick, give it to me.*" And it is this demand for a child which ultimately destroys her relationship with Nick:

> 'Nick — '
> 'Mm?'
> 'If I had a child, I would like it to be yours.'
> This seems so unforced that I feel he must see it the way I do. And so restrained as well, when I might have torn at him — *Give me my children.*

Nick's reply, "I'm not God, I can't solve anything," is primarily a protection of his own independence, his ego, but it is also a recognition that Rachel demands too much of human relationships. Like her sister Stacey and Gracey Dougherty, she seeks a child for her own fulfilment, to escape her isolation as a separate being, and God alone can grant her freedom.

In the first part of the novel, Rachel satisfies her maternal instincts through her classes of seven-year-olds, although even then she realizes that the phrase "my children" is a threat to her as it is not to Calla. She faces the summer with regret, for "this year's children will be gone then, and gradually will turn into barely recognized faces, no connection left, only *hello* sometimes on the street." Later she tries to explain to Nick:

> I see them around for years after they've left me, but I don't have anything to do with them. There's nothing lasting. They move on, and that's that. It's such a brief thing. I know them only for a year, and then I see them changing, but I don't know them any more.

Her affection for James Dougherty, her "exasperated tenderness", her belief in his uniqueness and her contempt for the moronic mother who "doesn't deserve to have him", are clearly the result of such a substitution. For after the summer, as she watches the children entering her classroom, "two by two, all the young animals into my ark", she realizes that there will never be another James, "no one like that, not now, not any more".

Yet it is in Part I that she learns the true nature of the mother-child relationship. She has despised the possessiveness which leads her sister Stacey to rush home to Vancouver and her children after only a week's visit: "I know they're quite okay, and safe, but I don't feel sure unless I'm there, and even then I never feel sure — I don't think I can explain — it's just something you feel about your own kids, and you can't help it." After observing Grace Dougherty with James, Rachel comprehends:

> Her [Grace's] voice is filled with capability. She gains strength from his presence. This is what happens. I've seen it with my sister. They think they are making a shelter for their children, but actually it is the children who are making a shelter for them. They don't know.

But while she understands this in principle, she has not accepted it in fact; she too wants a child to shelter and be sheltered by, and the discovery that she carries not a child but a tumour she attributes to "a jest of God". Her wail is like that of the other Rachel "wordless and terrible", and Rachel "weeping for her children . . . [who] would not be comforted because they are not." The children of Rama were real; their destruction was real. Rachel Cameron's child is an illusion; yet it is Rachel's recognition of this illusion which ironically frees her.

"*I am the mother now*," Rachel's apparently cryptic remark under anesthesia, indicates her acceptance of her role as adult and mother to her ageing child. She comes to see that, under her mother's foxiness, her calculated emotional appeals and demands, lies a terrible fear of isolation and desertion which is the lot of every human being, even mothers. Her mother is like a child, totally dependent, totally trusting: "She believes me because she must, I guess. If I came back late a thousand nights, I now see, and then told her I'd be away an hour, she'd still believe me." And while Rachel resents her mother's dependence, even wishes her dead, she concedes, "I do care about her. Surely I love her as much as most parents love their children. I mean, of course, as much as most children love their parents." She agrees that, to take her mother to Vancouver, away from home and memories, is cruel, unfair, and may even cause her death. But she also realizes: "It isn't up to me. It never was. I can take care, but only some. I'm not responsible for keeping her alive." Her present child is elderly; her future children may be only her school-children, yet she comprehends at last that the tie of motherhood does not ensure immunity from isolation: "It may be that my children will always be temporary, never to be held. But so are everyone's."

While human relationships are an attempt to counter isolation, death is a recognition of it, and thus it plays a central role in *A Jest of God*. Donne's statement, "any man's death diminishes me, because I am involved in Mankinde" approaches death as a destruction of human community. In Laurence, however, death merely accentuates our consciousness of an isolation which already exists. Nick and Steve, though twins, are separate identities, and the death of Steve does not effectually alter the personality of Nick. Rachel's father and mother are separated not by death but by life, and similarly, Rachel lost her father long

before he entered the world of the dead which he had always preferred. Rachel's "child" is lost, yet it has been not living but dead, a symbol of Rachel's negation of life. It is only in facing death that we are able to assess life, and to recognize our own isolation.

IT IS BECAUSE death reveals the true nature of individuality that its truth is evaded by the people of Manawaka. Hector changes "Japonica Funeral Chapel" to read "Japonica Chapel" because "lots of people aren't keen on that word." People do not die; they "pass on". When Rachel suggest that death is unmentionable, Hector replies: "Let's face it, most of us could get along without it." He succeeds as a business man because he understands the human psychology of death. "*What am I selling?*" he asks Rachel, and answers himself: "One: *Relief*. Two: *Modified Prestige*." He alleviates the panic of the bereaved when faced with the body, and handles all the details according to three price ranges, to simplify problems of choice concerning oak or pine, velvet or nylon: "They want to know that everything's been done properly, of course, but the less they have to do with it, the better. . . . You take your average person, now. It's simply nicer not to have to think about all that stuff". This refusal to face death reaches its extreme in the cosmetic skills of the undertaker who paints and prettifies "the last dried shell . . . for decent burial". It is not merely a denial of reality for appearance but an attempt to make death look like life, to negate the difference. The ultimate form of this denial is seen in Mr. Kazlik who, in his senility, asks after Rachel's father and calls Nick by the name of his dead brother.

Yet this denial of death is healthier than Rachel's fascination with it which both obsesses and frightens her. She emerges out of a background of death, as the daughter of the local undertaker who prefers his silent companions downstairs to friends or family. As a child, Rachel was not allowed to go down into the funeral parlour, and she came to believe that there must be some power of the dead which might grasp and hold her as it had held her father. Her mother is morbidly concerned with death, saving the pink nylon nightgowns sent by Stacey every Christmas "for hospital and last illness, so she'll die demurely." Even the house itself, with the Japonica Chapel downstairs, represents a world of shadow and nightmare; the dense growth of spruce trees surrounds Rachel and separates her from the world outside:

> No other trees are so darkly sheltering, shutting out prying eyes or the sun in summer, the spearheads of them taller than houses, the low branches heavy,

> reaching down to the ground like the greenblack feathered strong-boned wings of giant and extinct birds.

From the beginning of the novel, Rachel is caught between the world of dream and the world of nightmare and death, as indicated by the childish jingle she overhears and remembers: "Rachel Cameron says she'll die / For the want of the golden city." Here the contrast is accentuated between the real world of wind and snow and the illusory world of the child and adolescent. "She is handsome, She is pretty, / She is the queen of the golden city." The choice is simple: the dream or death, and it is her failure to move from the simple alternatives of the child to the more complex understanding of the adult which marks Rachel's delayed development.

In Part I, Rachel's world alternates between dream and nightmare, love and horror. The images of the night are Poe-like, demonic. Night brings "*Hell on wheels*"; it becomes "a gigantic ferris wheel turning in blackness, very slowly . . . interminably slow. And I am glued to it, or wired, like paper." The essence of Hell is its isolation, its annihilation of humanity by sucking it into the maw of meaninglessness or tearing it apart, skin from bone:

> The slow whirling begins again, the night's wheel that turns and turns, pointlessly. When I close my eyes, I see scratches of gold against the black, and they form into jagged lines, teeth, a knife's edge, the sharp hard hackles of dinosaurs.

Countering these horrors are scenes of love: the dream lover with blurred features, under the sheltering wall of pine and tamarack, or the Egyptian girls and Roman soldiers, banqueting on oasis melons, dusty grapes and wine in golden goblets, and copulating sweetly under the eyes of slaves. The sexual union of the love scenes counters the isolation of Hell and death, but these scenes too merge into death. In the first, the shadow-prince disappears to be found downstairs among the bottles and jars, king of the silent people. And in the second, the scenes of copulation fade into nothingness: "The night is a jet-black lake. A person could sink down and even disappear without a trace."

THE JUXTAPOSITION OF LOVE AND DEATH occurs not only in the dream world but in the real one. The sequence of Rachel's first visit to the Kazlik house and her conversation with Hector in the Japonica Chapel is central to the structure of the novel. But earlier, Rachel comes upon the young lovers in the cemetery, as spring replaces winter and the crocuses bloom palely against the

grass of last year "now brittle and brown like the ancient bones of birds". In Part II, when Nick and Rachel first make love, Nick quotes the lines of Marvell: "*The grave's a fine and private place / But none, I think, do there embrace.*" And as they pull apart after Rachel demands her child, and return finally to their separate selves, Nick comments, "I never realized you could see the cemetery so well from here."

Despite her fascination with death in Part I, Rachel fights for survival even here. She wears a white raincoat so that she can be seen by a driver on a dark night; she worries that she might set fire to the house by smoking in bed. The turning point in her movement away from death and back to life occurs in the scene with Hector in the Japonica Chapel, where she relinquishes her hold upon the past and the dream of her father, not as he was but as she wanted him to be: "Nothing is as it used to be, and there's nothing left from then, nothing of him, not a clue." She recognizes in her voice a bitterness, "some hurt I didn't know was there", and concedes the truth of Hector's claim: "I would bet he had the kind of life he wanted most." Her father had chosen his own path in life, isolation from human contact and communication with the dead. In turning away from this, Rachel comes to accept both her father's right to his choice and his rejection of her:

> If my father had wanted otherwise, it would have been otherwise. Not necessarily better, but at least different. Did he ever try to alter it? Did I, with mine? Was that what he needed most, after all, not ever to have to touch any living thing? Was that why she came to life after he died?

She refuses suicide — "*They will all go on in somehow, but I will be dead as stone and it will be too late then to change my mind*" — and faces life, with resignation: "Everything is no more possible than it was. Only one thing has changed — I'm left with it." And she accepts too a limited form of free will: "I will have it [the child] because I want it and because I cannot do anything else." Laurence's "modified pessimism", as she calls it in "Ten Years' Sentences", is the recognition with Edgar in King Lear that life must be endured, that we are not free to determine the manner of our death any more than our birth:

> We must endure
> Our going hence, even as our coming hither;
> Ripeness is all.

While death isolates, then, love is an attempt to cross the barriers of isolation. But isolation may involve not only separation from other human beings but a

separation from God. The modern doubt of God which implies too a sense of loss is conveyed by Arnold's lines: "Who renders vain their deep desire? / A God, a God their severance ruled!" and the vagueness of "a God" suggests the vain searching for some power of justice and order beyond human life, a theme more explicit in "Dover Beach". Laurence's title "A Jest of God" in itself suggests that the novel is concerned with something beyond human limitations, with a God all-powerful but mocking who as an outsider looks down upon a world "distorted, bizarre, grotesque, unbearably a joke".

The people of Manawaka evade a real recognition of God as they do of death. The church the Camerons attend is tasteful and controlled, essentially unreal like the scene on the stained glass window of "a pretty and clean-cut Jesus, expiring gently and with absolutely no inconvenience, no gore, no pain, just this nice and slightly effeminate insurance salesman who, somewhat incongruously, happens to be clad in a toga." The minister is "careful not to say anything which might be upsetting," for the large part of the congregation is like Mrs. Cameron: "If the Reverend MacElfrish should suddenly lose his mind and speak of God with anguish or joy, or out of some need should pray with fierce humility as though God had to be there, Mother would be shocked to the core." The superficiality of this view of God is underlined when Rachel invokes Him as the only authority on her mother's heart, in place of Doctor Raven: " 'God?' she shrills, as though I had voiced something unspeakable," and then, as an ex-choir member, she hastens to concede: " 'Well, certainly, dear, of course, all that goes without saying'."

Specifically contrasted with this empty ceremony are, on the one hand, her father's professed atheism and on the other, the flamboyant exuberance of *The Tabernacle of the Risen and Reborn*, with its pictures of Jesus "bearded and bleeding, his heart exposed and bristling with thorns like a scarlet pin-cushion." Its pulpit is draped in white velvet, and the wood is "blossoming in bunches of grapes and small sharp birds with beaks uplifted". While the congregation of the Reverend MacElfrish denies sensation and a direct communication with God, the people of the Tabernacle flaunt emotion in a form of eroticism. To Rachel with her tight restraint, the Tabernacle suggests a Hell, dark, cold and "foetid with the smell of feet and damp coats. It's like some crypt, dead air and staleness, deadness, silence." The room becomes claustrophobic, "swollen with the sound of a hymn macabre" and the people "crouching, all of them, all around me, crouching and waiting". Their exhibitionism is, to Rachel, indecent: "People should keep themselves to themselves — that's the only decent way." Yet the

congregation of the Tabernacle uses religion to escape from themselves and their own isolation into a relationship with those in their circle and with God. Their escape may be momentary; Calla must return to her room and her songless canary. It may be unreal, for the speaking in tongues too is illusionary. Yet Rachel is horrified not because she understands the unreality, but because she fears public exposure of her inner self. It is not only Calla's admission of love for her which makes her feel violated; it is her denial of commitment, not only to Calla but to God. She cannot share Calla's religious experience for she will not accept its premise:

> In full and glad surrender,
> I give myself to Thee,
> Thine utterly and only,
> And evermore to be.

Rachel's relationship to God is ambivalent. She observes the Sunday ritual of church to save argument with her mother, but she does not believe: "I didn't say God hadn't died recently, within the last few years, but a long time ago, longer than I could remember, for I could not actually recall a time when He was alive." Yet she cannot accept His non-existence. After her exposure in the Tabernacle, she remarks, "If I believed, I would have to detest God for the brutal joker He would be if He existed." And later, when she learns of the "child":

> I could argue with You (if You were there) until doomsday. How dare You? My trouble, perhaps, is that I have expected justice. Without being able to give it.

Doubting the reality of God, she demands His existence. She comes to admit the exaggeration of both her "monstrous self-pity" and her self-abasement, indeed her uniqueness to God among millions of beings. And she confesses her deep need:

> Help — if You will — me. Whoever that may be. And whoever You are, or where.... We seem to have fought for a long time, I and You.... If You have spoken, I am not aware of having heard. If You have a voice, it is not comprehensible to me. No omens. No burning bush, no pillar of sand by day or pillar of flame by night.

Yet even when she turns to God, not through "faith, or belief, or the feeling of deserving anything" but through desperation, she has not yet renounced her own desires. For having accepted life instead of death, the child instead of abortion, she is not prepared for the final irony, the tumour: "*Oh my God. I didn't bargain for this. Not this.*"

Thus she finally faces her own isolation. Even God cannot solve her problems. She has admitted earlier that she imagined horrors, exaggerated them, to make the real ones seem lesser. Now there are no more horrors, for she no longer needs them. She has feared to be a fool, but now she has no more fears, for "I really am one." Like King Lear, she achieves wisdom through folly; as St. Paul has said: "*If any man among you thinketh himself to be wise, let him become a fool, that he may be wise.*" Her reply to her mother's question, that God may know her future, surprises Rachel herself, although she does not yet know whether this is "some partial triumph . . . [or] only the last defeat". But her new wisdom brings compassion, not only for men, isolated and alone, but for God Himself, isolated from man: "God's mercy on reluctant jesters. God's grace on fools. God's pity on God."

Thus *A Jest of God* represents Rachel's descent into the world of nightmare, the "Everlasting No," and suggests too a return to life, a modified "Everlasting Yea," as anticipated in the quotation from Sandburg's "Losers": "[With Jonah] I was swallowed one time deep in the dark / And came out alive after all." The tone is more bitter, more ultimately pessimistic than either *The Stone Angel* or *The Fire-Dwellers*, for both Hagar and Stacey affirm the importance of human relationships to give meaning to an unstable universe. Yet despite adverse criticism, the novel is on the whole more universal than *The Fire-Dwellers*. Rachel's world is no more confined than our world; it has the same potentialities, the same failings. Her thoughts, however trivial and self-concerned, reflect our thoughts and momentary reflections if we record them impartially. Her view of Calla, her mother, Nick, is one-sided, uncorrected by an omniscient narrator; Laurence rejects what is, after all, only a fictional device for a technique closer to reality. For this is indeed her primary message, that we can never truly know another human being, never penetrate behind their facade, since words which reveal also conceal. We must accept others as they appear to us, reach out to them in compassion, yet be free to stand alone.

A Jest of God, like *The Stone Angel*, deals with a universal human problem, and the protagonist is close to the primitive essentials of love, birth and death. In the moment of facing death, both Hagar and Rachel affirm life. While Rachel's predicament is essentially feminine, it is also human. If the child were real, Rachel would become dependent upon another human being for her existence; she would live for the child. But the "child" does not exist, and Rachel is forced to face the essential isolation of the individual: "We mortal millions live *alone*."

review articles

HOW CANADIANS SPEAK

G. L. Bursill-Hall

MARK M. ORKIN, *Speaking Canadian English. An informal account of the English language in Canada.* General Publishing.

AT A TIME IN THE HISTORY of this country when national consciousness and a quasi-phobia about foreign influences are constant themes, it is a sobering thought that there is no single adequate account of the brand of English spoken by native-born Canadians; it is indeed a sad commentary on the English and Linguistics Departments of Canadian universities that they seem to have failed to produce scholars who are prepared to devote at least part of their scholarly activity to making an acceptable description of one of our national languages. My critical remarks are not intended to embrace that small group of linguists scattered around Canada who have laboured to create an awareness of Canadian English, but theirs is, I fear, a herculean task. The same strictures can certainly not be made of the efforts to describe the French language of Quebec. But surely it is part of a Canadian's meaning to sound like a Canadian, by which I mean that there *is* a distinctive form of English which can be called Canadian English, and just as surely it is part of a Canadian's heritage to have on hand an account of his language written by competent scholars.

Under these circumstances, one has to be pleased at any attempt to add to our meagre knowledge of Canadian English. *Speaking Canadian English*, by Mark M. Orkin, is one of the more recent attempts to say something about Canadian English. The book consists of a preface, a list of words and phrases, a bibliography, and nine chapters which set out the origins, ingredients, and characteristic features of Canadian English as well as its pronunciation, grammar, lexicon, and onomastics, the last two chapters being a discussion of Canadian slang and the future of Canadian English.

It is a book which contains a lot of useful information, but it is a difficult book to review. It is not that its subject matter is controversial or that the author has not done his "home-work"; *Speaking Canadian English* is written with considerable elegance and has been a pleasure to read. It is obvious that the author has done considerable research, his bibliography alone is quite impressive, and he has exploited his sources to the full in order to provide his reader with a great deal of factual information about the history of Canadian English. However, Mr. Orkin is not a trained linguist; this

is revealed by his uncertainty in the use of certain technical terms, the serious gaps in his bibliography, his unfamiliarity with recent developments in general linguistic theory and their implications for dialect study, and above all his failure to state adequately his criteria. One might well get the impression from reading the book that the English spoken in Ontario is the norm for Canadian English; there are nods of recognition at the English spoken in other regions of Canada but there is little or no attempt to relate these varied references to regional differences in Canadian English. It is perhaps a little unfair to criticize Mr. Orkin in these terms and it is certainly not intended as any animadversion of his efforts, but I fear that his book for these reasons will not have much appeal to the professional linguist.

The core of the problem is once more the professional versus the amateur, even if, as in this instance, the amateur is well-intentioned and the professional the real object of our criticism. The difference is revealed quite clearly in the author's account precisely of those areas which are of greatest interest to the professional, and it would not require much effort to dismiss parts of the book as being of little interest or else written in such as way as to be close to useless. The amateur, particularly when dealing with language, often fails to recognize that a language is much more than pronunciation, lexical items, and place names; the amateur will inevitably reveal his unawareness of the significance of metalanguage and of the necessity of accuracy in the use of the metalanguage of linguistics. One cannot successfully talk about the central features of a language in common-sense terms, and the reason is that ordinary language is inept when it comes to talk about itself; therefore the linguist has no recourse but to resort to the more exact and refined language of linguistic science. This is not a matter of jargon (and I am among the first to condemn the implicit mystification created by the needless proliferation of technical terms); to use such a term in this context would be to reveal one's amateurishness. I am not suggesting that Mr. Orkin commits this particular error. However, despite all his good intentions, he does expose himself by his lack of scientific rigour to the destructive criticism of the professional linguist who may well have failed to perceive his intentions and is looking for a more adequate account of the phonology and grammar of Canadian English.

It would be easy to pick out certain statements which are extremely frustrating to the linguist, e.g. p. 142, where we are told that the cluster [nt] between vowels is modified to [nd], but in fact in words such as "winter, twenty, plenty", the consonant is a nasalized flap. I am not sure what the author means by a "bugle 'u'" (p. 137), but I am assuming that he means a palatalized consonant followed by a high-back vowel. Such inadequacies could be multiplied, and it is perhaps unfair to draw attention to these, but it is precisely this type of statement that mars a chapter that otherwise contains a lot of interesting information about the speech habits of Canadians and which reveals an alert and observant ear. It is a pity that the author did not consult a phonetician (rather than a phonologist) for this section, since he might then have been saved from statements which are bound to make the professional linguist look at the whole book with a marked degree of scepticism. Of the

chapter "Spelling and Syntax", little can be said; its value is questionable (compared to other sections which are rich in factual information), and it reveals no familiarity with contemporary work on syntax, meaning, and the creative nature of language. It would, therefore, be easy to criticize Mr. Orkin for the lack of theoretical sophistication. But is there then, any good reason why he should have to demonstrate a close familiarity with technical linguistics in order to make statements about his mother-tongue? All I am saying is that he could have improved certain parts of the book by making more specific use, not so much of the findings of the linguist, but of the methods of descriptive statement developed by the linguist. I can say this because despite the fact that the author has given as the sub-title an "informal account" of the English language in Canada, he does make certain claims and statements, viz. p. ix, which could well expose him to the attacks of the linguist.

Despite these and many other strictures, this is a very readable book and its admirable style could be a model for many practising linguists who so often lack any elegance of language. Even if I could not recommend it to students of linguistics as a successful account of English as spoken in Canada, it is nevertheless a book which could be enjoyed, even by the professional linguist when he has overcome his feeling of unease, and certainly by anyone interested in and concerned for the linguistic well-being of Canada. The author is to be congratulated and applauded for his courage in attempting this study while the professional linguists of this country by their very pusillanimousness conspire in the perpetuation of an appalling ignorance about Canadian English. Mr. Orkin rightly says (p. 5) that "the greatest barrier to the investigation of Canadian English has always been a lack of scientific information"; the question must therefore be asked, what has the linguist done to rectify this?

Let me conclude this review with something close to a personal plea. It ought to be a matter of shame to the linguists of Canada that it has been left to the non-professional to record our ignorance of one of the two official languages of this country. It is time that something more than lip-service was paid to language study and linguistics in this country — Royal Commisions are no answer! National consciousness is tied closely to the language of the country just as human consciousness is closely related to an awareness of language. Programmes in Canadian Studies are springing up in the universities of this country; they cannot achieve anything more than a hollow success if they are not structured around a systematic study of the English (as well as the French) languages of Canada. I am inclined to think that the picture borders on the shocking when one realizes how little is done in English Canada, compared to the amount of work done in Great Britain, America, or for that matter in French Canada; this linguistic myopia is all the more unforgivable in view of the need for well-trained teachers of English (Canadian English) as a Foreign Language. How many Departments of English or Departments of Linguistics in the English-speaking parts of Canada offer courses which aim at a systematic description of Canadian English? It is no argument to suggest that students might be bored by such a study; it is the teaching, not the subject, that

produces boredom, and I for one believe that Canadian students would be very much attracted to such a study because it would increase their awareness as Canadians. It is therefore high time that one university at least in English Canada should create a centre (with adequate support from the Canada Council and other agencies, e.g. C.I.D.A.) for the scientific study of Canadian English. I subscribe to Mr. Orkin's hope that the English language in Canada will continue to flourish, but I must add that this will be so only if it is seen for what it is, a distinctive type of English, and it will remain and be seen as a distinctive type of English only when an organized effort is made to dissipate our colossal ignorance of our language. This not a matter of jingoism, or vulgar nationalism, or for that matter of "Canadian content"; language, the knowledge of one's own language, the characteristic marker that every man possesses of his humanity, is ultimately the only real key to self-knowledge.

GARNER'S GOOD EAR

Miriam Waddington

HUGH GARNER, *A Nice Place to Visit.* Ryerson. $6.95.

HUGH GARNER has often been praised for his good heart when it is really his good ear and sharp eye that deserve our admiration. It is no use to praise him for his compassion because it is a matter of grace whether a writer has it or not, and a matter of cultural conditioning whether a reader values it or not. But a good ear for dialogue, speech rhythms, and local semantic nuances cannot be brushed aside as easily as mere goodness of heart.

The way a novelist hears words and uses them, has to do with all the complex problems of language, and even of culture. Speech is a form of action, and in the area of dialogue — which is action between characters — Garner stands out among his Canadian contemporaries.

His seventh novel, *A Nice Place to Visit* is full of rich casual alliterated lines like "from Newfy to Nanaimo" and such spirited outbursts as: "the lifetime shout of a world filled with nonentities disguised as taxi starters, restaurant hostesses, elevator operators, parking meter attendants, security guards and others of their ilk, the sorority-fraternity of the failed and fallen." Garner also makes a completely selfconscious and natural use of local place names, brand names and celebrity names. Any Canadian reader will easily recognize, scattered through Garner's pages, his own favourite beer, political party and TV show; he'll even find his most familiar moral dilemmas. And if anyone is still searching for that elusive now-you-have-it-now-you-don't Canadian identity he need search no further. Canada may claim two or more identities, but Garner conveys at least one of them through the conversations, attitudes and secrets of the characters who inhabit his small town. He is also the only writer I know of who has managed to capture what E. K. Brown

called the mysterious and obnoxious quality of Toronto, and he certainly catches the furtive suspiciousness of its outlying small towns.

A Nice Place to Visit is the story of Ben Lawlor, a fifty-nine-year-old free-lance journalist, divorced, sometimes alcoholic and nearly always penniless — a man with nothing left to lose. He has a middle-aged woman friend and the relationship between them, peripheral as it is, is one of the most touching in the book. As the story opens he gets an assignment to go to Graylands and uncover the facts about an eighteen-year-old youth who is serving a sentence for the murder of a pregnant girl. A citizens' committee in Toronto, whose members believe the boy to be innocent, has organized a lobby to re-open the case.

During the process of finding the facts, a lot happens, and we meet a host of characters. There is the town drunk (who is also the local historian with an unpublished book in his drawer), the unfortunate homosexual, the old-maid school teacher, the bully policeman, the married Don Juan, the local welfare case, a few hippies and chippies, and the rich landowner who is also the unmarried father of the boy who was convicted for murder. And they say that Canadians are colourless!

Garner's plot is so loud and complicated that I forget the details and only remember the people. They are as memorable as poems and participate in a number of archetypal, or as we used to call them, stock situations: the personal fate becomes the typical fate; there is a fight, a tavern scene, a comic sexual encounter, a pot-smoking session and the final completion of the assignment. These incidents are sharply observed, the details fastidiously accurate. I personally can't tell a mutation mink from a muskrat, but Garner can. He can also recognize Irish twist tweed, cuffless trousers and stylish lapels. He not only tells us what people look like, how they dress, how much they earn, and what they think, but he goes some way towards interpreting these facts and their implications.

Ben Lawlor is not especially tolerant; he (or is it Garner himself?) heaps scathe and scorn on Toronto's "grounded jet set," the black-painted doors of their town houses in the annexe, poets who are dumb enough to drink their Pernod with seven-up at parties, and "jerk editors" who needlessly mark up a writer's copy. To Ben, they all seem as false, pretentious and as heavily ironic as the sign outside Graylands which proclaims it to be a nice place to visit. At fifty-nine Ben has gone a long way towards divorcing himself from the world but he still clings to one morality; truth.

Garner's concern with truth places his work in the realm of social realism. The typicality and representativeness of his characters reinforces this literary position. I am defining realism according to George Lukacs, who suggests that in realist novels, man is portrayed as a social being and not an isolated one, as he appears to the modern existentialist view. Lukacs has pointed out that in the modern naturalist novel, social norms no longer exist, while collective values have been replaced by a myriad of individual ones. In addition, the modern novel more and more denies the existence of objective reality; it has moved the theatre of human action from the outside world to some inner stage. In such a world time cannot exist; there is no past, no history and there can therefore be no future, no

hope. There is only the eternal static present in which nothing can change except the individual's states of consciousness.

In realist fiction, however, characters change as a result of their encounters with objective reality. The world acts on them, and dynamically they also act on the world. This happens in *A Nice Place to Visit*, even though it happens in a very odd and surreptitious way.

Ben discharges his obligation to the Citizens' Committee to find out the truth. He also uncovers other truths which Garner sometimes fails to deal with, except as he deals with them unconsciously. Just as Ben is the hero, Alex Hurd, the owner of the Graylands furniture factory, is the villain. Yet throughout the novel the latter remains shadowy and unindicted as a villain, and fails to come through as a man whose motives are believable.

Hurd is well-mannered, rich, and handsome, even at the age of sixty-three. He has made it a lifelong custom to use his housekeepers as sexual conveniences, and when Ben visits him he notices an Indian girl of thirty-three who now fills that role. Tommy, Hurd's son by a former housekeeper, is the youth who is serving the sentence for murder. By his own admission, Hurd has also fathered other illegitimate children in Graylands and elsewhere, and it is common knowledge in the town that he has had a long series of casual sexual involvements with working-class women both before and after his marriage. Yet we are asked to believe that he had these affairs because all along he was, and still is, really in love with his own wife, a good and beautiful woman of his own class; unfortunately she was driven mad by sexual jealousy, so that now she is doomed to spend the rest of her life in a mental hospital. Yet Hurd talks glibly about his love for his son, lies to Ben about the trial, and keeps two fierce watch-dogs, who in the course of the story, mangle and kill a man.

It is therefore astonishing when you stop to think about it that neither Ben nor anyone else in the novel ever has any hard feelings or critical thoughts about Hurd. The latter, sure enough, because of his wealth and power proves to be handy in a crisis. He knows how to give orders; his long business experience with manipulating men and affairs have not only made him skilful in sexual seduction, but have also taught him how to manage prosecuting attorneys and village police forces.

Surely Alex Hurd is the villain of the story even if Garner does not recognize it or allow him to emerge as one. Neither Ben Lawlor nor Garner seems conscious of the cruel and humiliating significance of Hurd's housekeepers, or the falseness of his feelings towards his wife and son, or of the effects of his power over Graylands. What finally saves the novel, and Ben as well, is unconscious ethics and intelligence. Since Ben is the hero, and thus represents an aspect of collective or social morality, he acts in the only way, at the end of the story, which can reveal Hurd's cold grey-haired concupiscence for the destructive force that it is. Ben shows that up through the episode with the hippie which remains episodic, while with Hurd the sexual episode has become the life style.

After Ben returns to Toronto with his assignment completed he collects his fee and decides to marry his middle-aged mistress. Ben's decision to get married seems to take place almost in spite of

Garner. Lawlor does not share the class values that apparently prevented the author from seeing Hurd as the reader must. Or, maybe, as sometimes happens in novels, a good character knows better than his creator how to act so that his story can achieve artistic balance. It's the fact that Garner leaves Ben free to act — almost in spite of his own novelistic plan — which proves his worth as a writer.

POETS EN MASSE

Stephen Scobie

JOHN LACHS, *The Ties of Time*, $1.00. MICHAEL HARRIS, *Text for Nausikaa*, $2.50. EUGENE MCNAMARA, *Outerings*, $1.00. WALLY KEELER, *Walking on the Greenhouse Roof*, $2.50. ALAN PEARSON, *14 Poems*, $1.25. All Delta Canada publications.

IN ONE OF HIS POEMS, John Lachs speaks of a "future without art." It may well be that this dystopian cliché will come true: but not yet, and not in Canada, if the present mass publication of small books of poetry is any indication. The latest issue of the newsletter of the League of Canadian Poets lists 59 new books of poetry. In this kind of situation, the quality of what is being published is bound to be variable; and this is certainly true of these five books from Delta in Montreal. Though none of them is without interest (what book ever is?) I feel that only two of them can be strongly recommended to the reader picking his way through those 59 titles.

In his introduction to John Lachs' *The Ties of Time*, Glen Siebrasse tells us that since the writing of these poems "Lachs has been concerned largely with the philosophical essay." Certainly the greatest strength of this book is its firm hold on ideas; Lachs is a writer who knows what he wants to say, and does so in clear, direct language and images. The sequence of poems in the book is also carefully ordered.

The book begins with a series of character sketches, or short narrative poems. The people presented are the losers of society: a man imprisoned by his sister, a drunk and importunate friend at a party, a university graduate whose contentment with his extremely limited life and accomplishments is presented with savage irony. The tone of these concise, bitter narratives is well exemplified by "Father":

> When father goes to see his only daughter
> in the foster home where she is treated well,
> hat in hand he stands before the butler
> and the foster mother says "O it is that
> man" —
> her eyes descend to search him on the
> landing
> as she whispers warning in his daughter's
> ear.

Implicit also in these poems is the decay of the body and the mind: flesh collapses and erodes, "below the elegant / mouth lurk degenerate kidneys"; an 18-year-old Helen "wheezes and puffs" with one lung removed. This decay is seen as the natural and inevitable state of man: the "permanent enemies" who assault the body are "also my citizens".

Yet the reader may well feel uneasy, by the time he has worked his way through nine or ten of these poems: the cynicism comes to seem a bit forced, to be almost a pose, of always looking at the bad side of things. Do the birds which "taught me slow affection" always have to die and leave only hate behind? Are there no Helens with whole lungs? These questions do not seem to me to be naive, but rather realistic.

With the poem "Conversation with a Drunkard", Lachs begins to open his book out to include not just the individual losers but the whole society which produces them. He begins to present a society of "machines to make machines", the "future without art". A contrasted pair of poems, "Lake Superior" and "Montreal", indicates that there is no escape, either in so-called "nature" or in so-called "civilization". In "Darkness" and "The Office Building", the losers lose even the individuality of names (the Jud Mikens, Joe, Ed, and June of the earlier poems), to be defined only by their function within the system: commuters, clerks, supervisors. Their dreams of escape are reduced to sordid sexual fantasies, which dehumanize the worker into a creature "with the plateglass eye / of a fish"; and the picture of the office workers' home life is presented with a distaste amounting almost to loathing:

> At supper nobody wants to eat,
> the stomach and the small intestines are
> shot to hell by the thick beer,
> so we go and watch from bed
> a vapid T.V. show.

Against this background, the faint hope expressed at the end of "The Office Building" seems scarcely credible; and the book returns, in the poem "Lipstick", to its air of savage distaste.

A final small group of poems sees this dead society as a microcosm of "a self-tortured universe in pain", and the old Deist idea of God as a clockmaker is invoked with Lachs' characteristic sour twist in the final poem of the book:

> the clock universe needs winding
> this universe runs down.
>
> Each as stupid as a star:
> was this the Maker's art?
> A mechanic
> of very moderate skill
> could have done as well and
> conceivably will

I said at the outset that the book's greatest strength was its firm hold on ideas; but this is also, of course, its greatest weakness. The very fact that the book lends itself so easily to the kind of analysis I have just attempted speaks of a certain schematic rigidity of outlook. Siebrasse, in his introduction, speaks of the book's "corruscating force", but for me that force is rather diminished by its single-mindedness and predictability. Further, I do not really believe that good poetry can be written out of disgust and loathing; the greatest satire is always informed by an underlying love. Lachs writes: "The ties of time are stronger than/ the ties of love"; but there is very little in his poetry to convince the reader that he really knows what the ties of love are.

Whereas Lachs deals, fairly precisely, in ideas, Michael Harris's *Text for Nausikaa* is much less precise. It deals with atmosphere, feeling, suggestion; it evokes rather than states. A good deal of this is implicit in the physical appearance of the book: from the brilliant typography of the title through all the tricks and changes of type in the poem itself. I'm not sure to what extent Harris in-

tends the word "Text" to be understood in the kind of way a theoretician like Max Bense uses it, but certainly he evinces more concern with the "text-ure" of his writing than do any of the other poets under review.

"All knowledge if concrete and projected is spherical," Harris writes in the final stage of his sequence (the words themselves in a circular arrangement), "and words do not undo the possibility." The problem, of course, is that words are normally linear rather than spherical: Lachs, for instance, follows a direct progression of language, so that the image for his book would be a straight line rather than a circle. In order to project his "perfect circle", Harris has to break words away from linear patterns, distorting the conventions of syntax, typography, and semantic usage. Hence the physical appearance of the book; hence also the static, circular nature of its central images. The book presents, not a progressive line of ideas, but two situations, neither of them changing, in relationship to each other. There is Ulysses, trapped in Dante's hell, talking timelessly with Diomedes: "And the other people / go about their deaths much the same way." And there is Harris himself, or his persona, in Montreal without enough money to get his bed off the floor. Between these two loosely defined situations, the poems exist: harsh words, love words, imprecisely evocative words, words "because for this moment there are no others," the words spoken because "there is /not much else / to do." The reader is not invited to change this into something else, something explained or interpreted: he can either take part in it, as an experience, a state of being; or he can regard it as, perhaps, Nausikaa would: a text, a complete *thing* in words, naked on a beach one morning.

Having said that, I must confess that I have reservations about this book also. It is not an easy book to come to terms with, and its rewards may not seem to everyone commensurate to the effort. The texture is perhaps *too* dense; and if Harris is indeed working somewhere in the general area of concrete poetry, then I rather long for the clean lines and classic simplicity of the best concrete work, and for its sense of exhilaration. It's not an easy book to find critical terms for, but my own emotional response is to feel it as dark, glowering, and a little stodgy.

For all my reservations, however, I think both *The Ties of Time* and *Text for Nausikaa* are very interesting and worthwhile books which I can strongly recommend. I am less sure, however, about the other books under review.

Eugene McNamara's *Outerings* is really far too short for the reader to get any strong impression of its writer's personality and capabilities. (Why, why, why include *seven* blank pages at the end? It you're going to use the paper anyway, why not put some poems on it?) There is a long, ambitious poem, "Dark at the Closing," which isn't long enough to fuse together its very impressive parts into a developed whole; there are a few very fine short poems, such as "The Sleepers" and "January"; some others which seem more like creative writing exercises, without enough feeling behind them; and a rather laboured humorous poem, "The Rime of the Antient Studd", which just doesn't work at all. But for what is good in the book, especially the stirrings of really powerful work in "Dark at the

Closing", I would have liked to see those seven extra pages.

The feeling that McNamara's collection is too short is strongly reinforced by the 109 pages given to Wally Keeler's *Walking on the Greenhouse Roof*. Keeler is a fresh and pleasant young poet, to whose work the word "adolescent" might be applied in all of its good senses and surprisingly few of its bad ones. But he comes to us weighed down with the expectations aroused by such a large selection and by a glowing introduction from Alec Lucas. "There is nothing here," Lucas writes, "of the pellet-like trait often apparent in volumes of slim verse squeezed out year by year. There is nothing here of a fear of words and of unduly cautious polishing." Or in other words, here is a diffuse, repetitive poet who has not yet learned to control words, and who is still capable of referring to his penis as a "pregnant jewel." But my complaints about this book are not really directed at Keeler, but at the absurd inflation of the presentation. A good, critical editing could have produced from this MS a 20-page book which would have left most readers happy and eager to hear more from Wally Keeler; but I confess that by the time I reached page 109 ("May pus forever be / limited to teenagers"), I felt, most unfairly, that I couldn't care less if I never heard from him again.

"Cautious polishing" might also be recommended for Alan Pearson's *14 Poems*. The book is full of good ideas, but practically none of the poems comes off. Poems which appear to be going places get lost in the middle; others arrive, but at nowhere in particular. There is another the-wilderness-is-bigger-than-us poem; another poet-on-suburban-bus-congratulates-himself-on-being-more-sensitive-than-his-fellow-passengers poem. Yet there are continual touches that suggest Pearson is really capable of writing: "Montreal Summer Evening" starts as fine description before becoming a bit overwrought; "In the Museum" has a fine central idea but gets bogged down in the middle stanzas; "Shamsville" and "Spring II" are both funny without quite being funny enough; in "Waiting for Sleep" the women beautifully described as being "nameless as birds" suddenly lapse into "what elemental noise / of lovely voices." If I too may lapse, in conclusion, into the oldest cliché of reviewing, I look forward with interest to his next book. And to the 58 others.

books in review

ELDON GRIER

ELDON GRIER, *Selected Poems: 1955-1970.* Delta Canada. $5.00 cloth. $2.50 paper.

THE PUBLICATION of a poet's *Selected Poems* is always a literary event, and this handsome edition makes it exactly that for the painter turned poet, Eldon Grier, whose work has been shamefully neglected by the obtuse and academically-incubated critics we have. In a way, this book is his life story. It contains poetry culled from a half-dozen previous volumes over the past fifteen years, from *A Morning from Scraps* (1955), published when he was thirty-eight, to *Pictures on the Skin* (1967), and many new poems never collected in book form.

Lyrical sketches of persons and places, and poems about European painters fill the first twenty pages of Grier's book. The sketches are often shaded in with ironies obscure and obvious, while the poems on art exhibit a facile, sometimes organic use of metaphor. These particular traits attest the ingenuity of Grier's style. And his ability to see all the relevant data in meaningful relationships amounts to a keen intuition. To give an example of this, take his poem *In Memory of Garcia Lorca* (which stands out in my mind as innovative since it sheds new light on the dark side of human life). Now enough poems have already been written about Lorca's death, the tragic circumstances, the poetic truth he represented, etc. But Grier's poem goes beyond the sentimental reportage and apotheosis of Lorca. He links Lorca's execution with poetry, history, society, and poetry again, in plain powerful language. Lorca's poetical self becomes his undoing: "Did you guess/ the brilliant words/ had made you alien/ and (strangely) evil?" His dubious place in the Spanish politics of military fascism branded him as bourgeois, thus: "Granada let you die/ like any freak;/ forgot the day,/ forgot which pit it was." Franco still lives, and Lorca's death proved nothing. "Gypsies, farmers, generals,/ priests, tourists,/ and the quiet rich,/ now pass blandly/ overhead." This is what Grier is getting at, the ineffectiveness of poetry on most people. Franco continues to live a comfortable life; Franco, the one responsible for Lorca's death. At least the last lines of the poem reveal the state of poetry: "Ask around./ Somewhere,/ buried,/ is a silver skull." It's unfortunate, but true. Poetry hasn't changed a thing. It manages, somehow, to survive like Lorca's "silver skull."

Grier's negative capabilities are manifest in *Season of Uneasiness.* Even moral scepticism underlies the achievements of science. The poem is a Romantic-Symbolist summing up of the present:

> I would like that special sound,
> something so distinct that I might
> sit in bars on one-time disaster
> days and not be overcome by
> the sadness of the exhausted,
> or the early bluster of the
> newest breed of world possessors.

And it conveys the tension in Grier's empirical self. His total commitment to poetry is perhaps a talisman of health and sanity, a talisman because poetry, or art for that matter, takes on a religious significance, and for it to be fully successful it must replace God, without

being opposed to science. This is the poem's inference, and the other stanzas support it: "The moon . . ." "The element of stillness . . ." ". . . the lake . . ." All become philosophical in retrospect.

I'd like to quote *Four Pastoral Stanzas* in its entirety, so poignantly does it make its point. Man's alienation from nature; the poet trying to serve as mediator, and the growing impossibility of this. "A climate of intensities/ leaves the average poet hostile to/ his neighbours in the wood." But all is not lost or hopeless: "In spite of this the poem finds its word/ as darkly as the striking flesh/ reveals its origins . . ." Again poetry must be listened to and understood if man is to live in peace and harmony with nature. The final stanza ends on a note of despair though, but the despair is realistic in essence due to man's destructive nature: "I walk, a man released from crime . . ." "And now instead of mirroring and mime/ the lake rots at my feet."

Grier's long poem, *An Ecstacy*, is in twenty parts. This poem is a mosaic of themes concerning man and his environment, and the forces and things which contribute to its growth and decay. The poet is described as being "prodigious, magical and just —" And people must be like him, sharing his feelings and awareness. "From now on/ the poet will work in the bank/ and the banker will write poetry,/ to his own astonishment." Some beautiful and intelligent lines follow: "Closeness has become an infinity/ purity has turned to spawning cells —/ we are at the beginning." Space exploration and the supposedly ameliorative effects of technology are considered: "Look up at the colourless dark/ that may soon become as familiar to us/ as the green of grass." A storehouse of meaning is contained in the simple imagery of those lines. A reconditioning process inevitably sets in, whose purpose is motion:

> Look about at our blue-bound world,
> at the gentle rivers flowing like smoke,
> at the women, young and erect,
> at the marvellous invitation
> of their breasts.
> Life must come from their life.
> And beauty risk rebirth in strange
> surroundings.

A regression into instinct, an atavistic longing for mindlessness and the primal source are explicit. Section (13) of this poem is the real winner though, since it concerns the Anglo-Saxon tradition. "Sensible is the label which most suits us — ". Dull people who live in their supersaturated society. Grier says: "As a poet I need to experience ecstasy." Visions of Rimbaud. (English poetry never went crazy, a Frenchman said. It was not a compliment.) And come to think of it, no Canadian poet ever committed suicide. This fact is strangely relevant. Bourgeois liberalism rarely breeds good poetry. "Our poets must give themselves to a kind/ of unsensible madness;/ they must hear music not meaning as they write." Perhaps this accounts for the recent drug craze among North American youth. Not to write poetry, but because the human spirit is sometimes perversely opposed to comfort. Section (19) is a tremendous realization of the times, and what can be done about it. Grier's technique is superb, and his language hums with vibrant urgency.

Other poems, equally strong, round out the book: *I Am One Who Sleeps in the Lap of an Old Port, Kissing Natalia, Van Gogh at Arles, Of Walls and the Sea, Picasso at Antibes, I Was Brought Up by the Sea, Bonnie Parker, Cimate,* and maybe a few more. In form and free

association of images, Grier has affinities with the American Negro poet, Bob Kaufman, and the Russian, Andrei Voznesensky. Of course, some of his archetypes can be traced to Apollinaire, Reverdy, and Neruda. He really doesn't have too much in common with other Canadian poets, except Milton Acorn. Both of them are so universal in their treatment of subject matter. They are not bogged down by petty parochialism, but freely encompass whatever moves them to write.

With this book, Eldon Grier firmly establishes himself as a major Canadian poet, and there should be no doubt in anyone's mind about that. Critics pay attention, a poet strides among you. "There are words that are the incomparable beasts/ of our imagination." And Grier has given them not a syntactic zoo, but the wild freedom of their rightful domain, in music and beauty.

LEN GASPARINI

RYGA IN PRINT

GEORGE RYGA, *The Ecstacy of Rita Joe & Other Plays*. Edited by Brian Parker. new press, $3.00 paper.

I SAW *Indian*, the first play in this new collection, on the C.B.C. programme *Quest* in 1963, and it impressed me greatly at that time; now, eight years later, reading the script for the first time, I find myself even more impressed. *Indian* is short; it is a one-act play and is about an identity crisis in a young Cree Indian labourer. The action confines itself to one extended scene (landscape a "flat, grey, stark, non country") in which the Indian is harassed by his bossman, Watson, and later by a nameless Indian Affairs Agent. The Agent does not have the clear-cut malignancy of Watson the bossman; he is simply your average well-meaning white liberal. However, he finds his ethics severely abused when the Indian tells him how, after his brother had been critically injured by a cave-in whilst digging a clay pit, he (the Indian) performed a mercy killing. At the end, the Agent flees the scene, his car driving dust across the stage, and the Indian is left driving his hammer at the head of a post, an indicator of what he would like to do to the white "sementos", the soul traders of the world.

A good play. Beautifully written. The dialogue is dead-on, and the conflict (so necessary to any stage play) is totally credible. There is one excellent monologue (about the clay pit) and, although the plot is minimal, this allows the characters and the theme to emerge as the play's main concern. The coarse texture of the black and white television picture in George McGowan's *Quest* production was particularly suitable for rendering the harshness of the landscape (itself a reflection of the psychic condition of the Indian). The play also reads well, and I hope that this publication will lead to its production by some of our small drama groups across the country. My only criticism concerns the hero: in spite of his fragmented dialogue, I find him extremely sensitive and articulate, and I cannot find this convincing. Ryga has romanticized him in order to make him a sympathetic character (white bourgeois audiences are always responsive to the "noble savage" motif). But what illiterate, Indian or otherwise, would bemoan the loss of his soul? (There is an equally romantic and unconvincing line in *Rita*

Joe when Jamie Paul cries "Gimme back my truth!") However, given that, I think Ryga has scored the essential mystical truth concerning not only the Canadian Indian but Man himself; the *who am I* of the human situation is brought out very clearly.

The title play, *The Ecstacy of Rita Joe*, comes second in the book. I find it a weak play for several reasons. Technically, it is prehistoric. It is set in a court-room (turn on your television any night of the week and what do you see?) and indulges in a series of meanderings through time and space (to the reservation, to a jail cell, to a railway crossing, etc.) where we meet the key figures in Rita Joe's life (a priest, a teacher, her father, her boy friend, etc.). On stage this is accomplished by a gruesome split-focus technique of shifting spotlights and playing areas; the clumsiness of this method is particularly acute at the climax of the play where an awkward flux of melodramatics (taped "consciousness" flashbacks, and the heavy-handed symbolism of The Three Murderers) develops. Rita Joe's boy friend Jamie Paul is beaten by The Three Murderers who drop him on the railway tracks and he is killed by the train; Rita Joe is then beaten and raped and dies. I know Ryga has a fondness for the form of classical tragedy but this is too much; at this point his romanticism has driven him into outright sentimentality. If it were not for the humanitarian instinct behind this play, I would have to condemn it as pretentious claptrap; instead I suggest that *Rita Joe* would stand better as a movie than as a stage play; the continual splitting of focus is much better suited to the rhythm of the moviola than that of the proscenium stage.

The third play, *Grass & Wild Strawberries*, is the weakest of the three. The plot is banal. It concerns the classic generation gap and focusses on the alienation of a pair of teenage lovers, Allan and Susan. Allan's father is the stereotyped bourgeois mess and Susan's appears to be identical. The cops are pigs, and Captain Nevada is a completely unconvincing space preacher who draws his archetype from the much abused Timothy Leary. Nevada has all the plastic unreality of, say, Liberace playing a California motorcycle heavy in a '50's Hollywood beach-party flick aimed at the drive-in audience. (I *know* he is a parody, but even parodies have to be convincing). Uncle Ted, although he becomes tragic in the end, seems to have no bona fide function in the play other than feeding us left-wing propaganda. The characters, every one of them, are clichés, and as a consequence the play bogs down in irrelevancies, and an overview which once again smells of romanticism and roses. The Vancouver Playhouse production, of course, was popular because it utilized the Collectors rock group, but here, on the printed page, the play reveals itself to be nothing more than a collage of clichés. If I did not know Ryga, I would be tempted to say that the play was an attempt at cashing in on the youth culture . . . but no; Ryga is a totally sincere person.

Brian Parker's introduction does not ignore the obvious weak points in Ryga's drama. He says: ". . . most important is (Ryga's) concern with the 'oft-told', his sense of the importance of the commonplace and typical in popular art, which has led to his being criticized (occasionally with justice) for falling into the clichés of soap opera and agit prop."

Parker's introduction is beautifully written and impressive in its analysis of Ryga's work; however, his recurring defence of Ryga's clichés, although interesting and fair, is totally false; the true redundancy of Ryga's drama is not in *what* he says, but in *how* he says it. In his eagerness to propagandize . . . or *humanize*, he tackles subjects too big for the stage (time and space are his leading problems), subjects which are better suited to a C.B.C. documentary or a Walter Cronkite newscast (you can't put the universe *on* the stage but you can put the stage *in* the universe). Ryga, like Brecht, believes that you can change people by talking to them; thus, like Brecht, Ryga makes his stage a pulpit for lecturing the audience. Fine. If the lecture is well-deserved, then perhaps the play will be good. However, in 1971, how many people want to sit and hear a lecture?

George Ryga is a self-taught man (he left school after seven years) and he makes his living as a professional writer — something which few Canadian writers are able to do. He has a good ear for dialogue and, when he sticks to realism, his characters are authentic (he knows his peasants better than his priests) and his humour sharp and appropriate. There is a texture to his writing (even when it suffocates from romanticism) which cannot be denied; I refer here to his ability to infuse his writing with "landscape". When you read Ryga, you feel he has felt what he writes. *The Ecstacy of Rita Joe & Other Plays* is full of this sense of "landscape" and it is this "landscape" which indicates the authenticity of his writing.

LAWRENCE RUSSELL

ORNAMENTS AND EMBELLISHMENTS

JOHN ROBERT COLOMBO, *Neo Poems*. Sono Nis. $5.95.

THE POEMS in this book are like a light fluffy dessert — whipped cream, or a delicate parfait. Dessert is fine, of course, but it should follow a main course. By itself it is not nourishing. Also, if you eat too much you are surfeited. So it is with *Neo Poems*; a few calories but no sustenance.

If found poems came from the landscape — from advertisements, street signs, cereal boxes, old texts, this "new" form derives its raw material from the minds' terrain. The poetry consists of random ideas, thoughts, clichés, and puns arranged in barely connective or unconnective lines. The intent behind this is to confront the reader, to get him involved. The reader can attempt the associations, he can shrug his shoulders and pick up another book, or he can fall asleep in the middle of the poem, but regardless, he has been confronted.

This idea of participation has provoked critics to herald Colombo as an "innovator", a "trendsetter", and one who has "a rare feeling for the contemporary scene". McLuhan has praised "involvement in depth", and the activist is our new culture hero. The problem with all this, in terms of Colombo's "neo" poems, is that there is very little of substance to be derived from the readers' participation. Thus the readers' activity is negated. Unlike games, which offer "rewards", no matter how artificial, Colombo's poems offer practically nothing.

In the first poem of the book, "Whatever Happened To", the reader is offered a number of suggestions which are supposed to stimulate a flurry of ideas and unlock the memory.

> Whatever happened to
> Anastasia
> The angelic Archers of Mons
> The Angels who danced on the Head of
> the Pin
> Atlantis

As a parlour game this could be fun, but the poetic message is weak.

Colombo states that his book is influenced by Kurt Schwitters, "the German artist of collage". I doubt if the influence has been absorbed. What was present in Schwitters' poems, paintings, and constructions was a sense of daring. Likewise with other experimenters. Everything was surrendered to chance when Tristan Tzara pulled words out of a hat; you can feel the bombardment of the modern world in the newspaper, telegraph, advertising collage poems of Blaise Cendrars; you are aware of the immediacy of Dos Passos' Camera Eye sequences; Burroughs' cut-ups and fold-ins vividly reflect contemporary sense-assault of images.

Colombo's "neo" poems lack not only the imagination and freedom inherent in the work of these men but the seriousness and dedication of "conventional" poetry as well.

Colombo has a firm grip on the establishment life-line. He is most assuredly "the lieutenant of the Canadian literary establishment". There is no reason why he should be the wild-eyed experimentor of Canadian literature; he could go back to writing nice prosy poems like those in *The Varsity Chapbook* of 1959. But, if he assumes the roles of "innovator", he

should be willing to take a few chances. As it is he risks nothing, and the result is poetry devoid of emotion, intellectual stimulation, a sense of humanity. E.g. from "Materializations":

> There are cultures that do not flow into world culture. They may record breath-taking achievements, but submerged or suspended, they disappear forever. Canada's might be one of these.
>
> "Here was a man and the things he loved." Words for an epitaph.
>
> There are those that *are*; and those that *be*.

Colombo does offer some interesting information, mostly aphorisms and quotations, but they exist alone, not in any poetic context. At its best *Neo Poems* indeed, could be considered an information bank in which, if you search diligently, you will discover some true gems.

> "Try in your sleep to exist." — Jean-Paul de Dadelson.
> quoted in "Heliotropes"

> "In the long run we are all dead," said Keynes.
> from "La Grande Permission"

> "All you owe the public is a good performance," said Humphrey Bogart.
> from "A Said Poem"

> *I write, write, write,*
> *as the Wandering Jew walks, walks, walks.*
> (H. P. Blavatsky to W. B. Yeats).
> from "Levitations"

Yes, the adjectives "witty", "urbane", "civilized" are applicable to Colombo's poetry. Louis Dudek was most accurate when he described Colombo as "a definite ornament on the literary scene." Look to Colombo for embellishment; elsewhere for the life-body of our literature.

JIM CHRISTY

DOUBTS AND RESERVATIONS

MICHAEL GNAROWSKI, *Archibald Lampman.* Ryerson. $3.95.

Archibald Lampman, a collection of eighteen essays about this late nineteenth-century Canadian writer, is the third in the "Critical Views on Canadian Writers" series published by Ryerson Press. Edited and introduced by Michael Gnarowski, who is also the Series Editor, the volume anthologizes a variety of comments on Lampman's poetry. The first — and earliest — selection is an excerpt on *Among the Millet* (1888) from Agnes Maule Machar's "Some Recent Canadian Poems", a review article in the *Week* in 1889; the last — and most recent — Frank Watt's "The Masks of Archibald Lampman" from the *University of Toronto Quarterly* in 1958. Essays on Lampman by Arthur Stringer, Louis Untermeyer, W. E. Collin, John Sutherland, Desmond Pacey, and Louis Dudek are also reprinted. Gnarowski introduces the collection by analysing briefly each of the articles. A "Bibliography" listing "Principal Works by Archibald Lampman" and some secondary sources about him concludes the volume.

Theoretically, such a work on a Canadian writer, especially one who is respected but rather neglected, should be useful. One problem for the student of Canadian literature has been the lack of accurate, complete, and readily available bibliographical information on, and secondary sources about, Canadian writers. In the past ten years, of course, publications like the *Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature,* the *Literary History of Canada,* and *Cana-*

dian Literature itself have alleviated the difficulty. Still, I agreed to review *Archibald Lampman* with the thought that a work with Michael Gnarowski as editor and Lampman as subject would be particularly illuminating.

In some respects I was not disappointed. Although *Lyrics of Earth* (1895) and *Selected Poems of Archibald Lampman* (1947) are listed without annotation in the bibliography of primary material, for each of the other entries Gnarowski provides a paragraph that capsules important information about the book being described. His "Introduction" is also valuable because it sketches a history of the criticism of Lampman's poetry and outlines the characteristics of his work which have preoccupied the critics.

The essays provide the colours and shades. Lampman's poetry is praised and damned. The quality of his earlier vs. his later work, of his sonnets vs. his other lyrics, and of his "nature" vs. his "social" poetry is debated. Individual poems are analysed for their techniques, their "Hellenism", and their relation to non-Canadian poetry. There is often a tone of "high seriousness" in the articles — much of Lampman's poetry invites this approach — but there is also wit, humour, and refreshing honesty. I particularly enjoyed Leo Kennedy's explanation of why his generation of Canadian poets were "over prone to greet the versified manifestations of both [Lampman's] inheritance and outlook with a Bronx cheer" ("Canadian Writers of the Past — v: Archibald Lampman", *Canadian Forum*, 1933). Finally, if one purpose of reading secondary sources is to stimulate the reader's interest in a writer and a second is to drive him back to primary material, then *Archibald Lampman* is a success. I have been rereading Lampman's poetry.

Still, I have doubts and reservations about the book. I wonder why a more complete bibliography of secondary sources on Lampman was not included. *On Canadian Literature 1806-1960* lists articles published before 1960 omitted in Gnarowski's bibliography; more, besides Roy Daniells' chapter on "Lampman and Roberts" in the *Literary History of Canada*, which is mentioned, have been published since. Bruce Nesbitt's "Matthew Arnold in Canada; a dialogue begun?" deserves a note, for it suggests that Lampman's poetry was known to, and admired by, Louis Fréchette (*Culture*, 1967). Despite Gnarowski's assertions in the "Introduction" that "there is no real need, in this instance, for another account of Lampman's life" and that "there is a good deal of biography" in the critical selections, an outline of his life, similar to the "Chronology of Important Dates" in the "Twentieth-Century Views" series, which "Critical Views on Canadian Writers" resembles, should have been included. If it did nothing else, it would at least clarify some points made in the articles.

I am also puzzled about the choice of some essays. In his description of "Critical Views", Gnarowski states that "the emphasis is on a selection of *representative* and *essential* critical writings bearing on a particular subject within the framework of a *modern* point of view" [Italics mine]. In the "Bibliography" he mentions "other valuable sources on Lampman not included for reasons of length or ready accessibility elsewhere". While these are good reasons for exclusion, they have not always been used. At least two

of the articles are readily accessible elsewhere. In *Masks of Poetry* (1962) A. J. M. Smith has anthologized a passage on Lampman from W. E. Collin's *The White Savannahs* (1936) that is very similar to — in fact the final version of — his earlier work on the poet. Desmond Pacey has republished his reading of Lampman's "Heat" in *Essays in Canadian Criticism 1938-1968* (1969). Furthermore, I think that Duncan Campbell Scott's "Memoir" on Lampman should have been included. It is long, but it is not readily available and it is more essential than some essays that are reprinted.

Actually, the choice of articles seems to depend on the term *modern*. Not only does it appear in the description of the series, but it is also used in the "Introduction": "Bernard Muddiman's paper coincides, more or less, with the beginnings of modernism in poetry in the English language" ("Archibald Lampman", *Queen's Quarterly*, 1915); "with Raymond Knister's essay on Lampman we mark the beginning of a modern approach to the poet's work" ("The Poetry of Archibald Lampman", *Dalhousie Review*, 1927); "the Kennedy article is interesting historically in that it represents an assault on lingering elements of Victorianism made by the modernists of the Twenties and Thirties". Since the comprehension of much of the "Introduction" to the volume, the choice of articles in it, and the *raison d'être* of "Critical Views on Canadian Writers" all depend partly on the meaning of *modern* and its variants, somewhere they should have been explained. If these terms were more fully defined, perhaps I should not be left with doubts and reservations about the complete success of *Archibald Lampman*.

MARY JANE EDWARDS

USES OF THE GROTESQUE

ROCH CARRIER, *Il est par là, le soleil.* Editions du Jour. $2.50.

ROCH CARRIER has now proven that the language fireworks, the scenic brilliance and the comic diabolics of *La Guerre, yes sir* were not a one-night stand. With *Il est par là, le soleil* (It's over there, the sun) he completes the trilogy which began with *La Guerre* and continued with *Floralie, où es-tu.* The expression "trilogy", however, is used loosely by Carrier. Certain of the fascinating characters introduced in *La Guerre* reappear in the two other novels; the protagonist of *Il est par là* is Philibert, son of the grave-digger Arsène. But the third novel, like the second, is quite different in spirit from *La Guerre*, though it has a lot more in common with the powerful first novel than with the somewhat disappointing *Floralie.*

For one thing, in *Il est par là* Carrier exhibits again the extraordinary capacity for fantastical realism (as opposed to pure fantasy) which characterized *La Guerre.* Here again he uses depiction of the unusual and the grotesque not simply for the sake of shock value and absurdity, but with purpose, often charged with bitter irony. The procession of the Laliberté family through the village streets, for instance, is stunning and unforgettable. Behind the priest and the mother and father, the Laliberté children are being pushed in wheelbarrows, twenty-one outsized heads and helpless blobs of flesh! They must be wheeled with great care; otherwise "les corps de chair liquide s'écouleraient par terre comme une eau

sale." Meanwhile, Jonas Laliberté and his wife murmur prayers as they march along: they are thanking God because "ils ont été élus pour être les protecteurs des vingt-et-un petits anges que Dieu a choisis dans son ciel pour les envoyer représenter sur terre sa justice et sa bonté." One is reminded of Gabrielle Roy's Rosanna and the perverse "résignation chrétienne". But Carrier with his skill at exploiting the grotesque strikes the imagination far more effectively than Roy has ever done in all her books.

Il est par là, it must be said, is inferior to *La Guerre* in organic unity and artistic structure, but there is compensation in terms of variety and depth of social insight. It is a picaresque novel, held together by Philibert's journey from his small Quebec village to the metropolis of Montreal. The adventures of Philibert include running on to the ice of the Montreal Forum to throw a punch at a Toronto Maple Leafs defenceman who had just tripped Maurice Rocket Richard. The picaresque technique allows Carrier to explore a cross-section of society and to create a number of ironic situations. Philibert, whose English is limited to "yes sir", eventually finds himself in an English-speaking city district (Westmount?) after hitchhiking from home. Hungry, he finds a shovel and clears the snow from several walks in the hope of earning some money. Finally a woman opens her door: "Poor boy," she says. "You don't speak English. . . . Are you an Italian?" The woman goes on to speculate: "What a pity! These immigrants ought to learn the language of the country before they set out for Canada."

The climactic irony of the book is Philibert being named the heir of "La Neuvième Merveille du Monde", a giant who had made his living by performances where people paid to pummel him with their fists. For a time Philibert was the impresario for this man, "Donato Ambrosio, alias Louis Durand, alias Agadad Aglagayan, alias Jean-Baptiste Turcotte, alias Boris Rataploffsky". The giant, of course, is ironically symbolic of the little man in modern society, and in particular of "les petits Canadiens français". And when this embodiment of immense human power decides that he has been punched enough, the results are dramatic and the implications sinister.

Il est par là, le soleil is filled with typical Carrier humour, a highly amusing novel with a sensitivity for language and life. Compared to much of the soul-searching, *engagé*, tormented writing produced in Quebec over the past ten years or so, it is a gust of fresh air.

RONALD SUTHERLAND

BASHING ON

MARGARET LAURENCE, *Jason's Quest*. Toronto, McClelland Stewart, $5.95.

JASON, A YOUNG MOLE, emerged from the Great North Tunnel into the darkness of Thither, the vast and frightening upper world. He skittered across the grass to his secret observation centre in the midst of the Pink Jungle, and there he met Oliver, a friendly tawny owl. Together, they planned a quest — Jason, to find a cure for the strange sickness infecting Molanium, the once-great underground city of the moles; and Oliver to find the wisdom that everybody expects of him, but that he feels he sadly lacks. Calico, the sensible cat, who wants to do a noble deed for the honour of all Catdom, and Topaz, the frivolous cat, go

along with them as their friends and trusty steeds.

> Bash on, bash on in majesty,
> And thwart the fouling churls —

is their motto. It, the friends they meet, the magic "Cap of Deeper Thinking", the Flying Umbrella, and their own bravery, good intentions and good hearts, carry them through many dangers to splendid success and the rejuvenation of the mole-folk.

There is a real lawn in England with a real pink rose jungle and two cats called Calico and Topaz. Margaret Laurence calls *Jason's Quest* a gift, for she imagined it all happening after an all-too-real infestation of moles on her property. Some gift! The book is a *tour de force*, built on the quest theme, its every detail embroidered with joyful imagining. The World of Smaller Animals with its heroes and villains, its pubs, boutiques and discotèques has a most valid existence in any imagination, young or old. Its addition gives our world of everyday a splendid extra dimension.

When Margaret Laurence's inventive powers and pervasive humour are turned towards such fantasy, the result is a proliferation of details of ridiculous delight. What child — or adult — is not enriched by knowing that underneath a London subway platform lives Glitter La Fay (Now Mrs. Weepworthy), former star of the Mole Music Hall and now, in her retirement, dreaming of past glories; or that Digger O'Bucket, proprietor of the Mole Hole, (theatrical costumes and stage scenery), is Glitter's long-lost love who will be restored to her through the efforts of the questing four; or that Police Constable Wattles, Strine, an Australian Cat, and Spice, a Jamaican one, are providentially on hand when their help is needed against the evil mouse-and-rat-pack, the Blades? Or who would be without this transcendent vision of the four surveying Trafalgar Square from between one of the bronze lions' paws at the base of Nelson's column. At last Oliver feels like "an owl of the world". "Look at those millions of pigeons," he says. "Fancy spending your life like that, living in the throbbing heart of this mighty city."

Underneath all this sun-shower of invention, the mythic quest, of course, goes on — good battling evil, a near thing sometimes, but a final victory in the end, marked by the ritual escape across the river that the Blades cannot cross. This is the kind of book that adults enjoy reading to children. Its double level of meaning is firmly, skillfully, but unpretentiously woven into its fabric and it was a wise decision to note "for all ages" on its dust jacket. Every detail of its production is elegant — paper, type and especially the drawings of Staffan Torell. These are so good that there is really no excuse for ranking them, except for the pleasure of mentioning especially his splendid panelled Council Hall of Molanium. There on the walls, decorated with the coats of arms of illustrious ancestors, are the two chief mottoes of the old-fashioned Mole people — *Festina Lente* (Make haste slowly), in gold and crimson, and the other one in gold and blue:

> They who think ye worlde not flat
> Deserve to be consumed by cat.

In finding the cure for his city, Jason also found his own confidence, for he realized that, many times, he had been able to act more bravely than he felt. The courage to "bash on" is the special

Margaret Laurence signature—to *Jason's Quest*, as to all the rest of her fiction.

CLARA THOMAS

WORDSWORTHIAN SENSITIVITY

GEOFFREY DURRANT, *William Wordsworth.* Macmillan. $3.95

THIS SLENDER VOLUME, the second in the Cambridge series, "British Authors: Introductory Critical Studies," is designed for general readers and students just beginning serious study of Wordsworth. Too often such studies are simple and so not very useful, or else they are idiosyncratic and so harmful; but this one is different. Professor Durrant gives us an introductory study which is in fact that. It should prove helpful to readers seeking a solid foothold in Wordsworth's poetry.

Professor Durrant concentrates on particular poems "in an attempt to show something of the range and quality" of Wordsworth's achievement. He devotes a chapter apiece to "Tintern Abbey", "Resolution and Independence", and the "Immortality" Ode. *The Prelude* is given two chapters, and there are chapters on "Michael", the "Matthew" poems, the "Lucy" poems, and the sonnets. Perhaps most interesting is the chapter "Wordsworth and the Daffodils", a discussion of some minor poems that often do not receive sufficient attention: "I wandered lonely", "The Reverie of Poor Susan", "To the Cuckoo" (1802), and "There was a Boy".

Professor Durrant reads poetry very well. He is at his best with the shorter, less standard poems where his sensitivity to the complex vibrations among individual words and phrases best displays itself. His close analysis of "I wandered lonely" is a fine example of sensitive but hard-minded criticism. Initiates to Wordsworth should profit from this. Too often beginning students think of Wordsworth as a heavy, thick sort of poet, the Rock of Romanticism writing blank-verse philosophy; their experience of his poetry is associated with copying in notebooks his doctrines about love of Nature and with memorizing the "mystical" passages about feeling a Presence. Professor Durrant's discussions demonstrate by example that Wordsworth was first of all a poet writing poetry, and that understanding Wordsworth is a poetic experience. Further, I suspect these discussions will attract readers to Wordsworth's lyrics and to the anecdotal poems, such as "Michael," which is where serious study of Wordsworth should probably begin.

It is unfortunate that Professor Durrant accepts the old notion that Wordsworth's powers were greatest in the period 1798-1805 and that they declined thereafter. This myth has not enhanced our understanding of Wordsworth, and one dislikes seeing it passed on without question to new generations of readers. But on the whole, Professor Durrant's reading of Wordsworth is traditional in the best sense, as is desirable in an introduction. Behind the poems of 1798-1805, he traces "a struggle of the mind to come to terms with the situation of man in a world transformed by the progress of natural science." For Professor Durrant, as for Morse Peckham and other recent critics, Wordsworth is the celebrator of man's ability to give order and value to the world, thus to redeem the world from apparent deadness. He properly stresses Wordsworth's recurrent theme of man

suffering through time, man's attempt to come to terms with a world in which growing is at the same time dying. And he gives attention to how the classics, Christian myth, Milton and science (especially Newton) influence Wordsworth's thought. This study will help beginning students avoid many of the common misconceptions: the Private, "Mystical" Wordsworth; the "Natural" Anti-Intellectual Wordsworth; the Happy-Optimistic Wordsworth.

Two basic weaknesses of the study should be mentioned. First, I was surprised that, for all the special attention given to influences on Wordsworth's thinking, the powerful influence of the empirical tradition in English philosophy is not emphasized. This causes some distortion. When in *The Prelude,* for example, Wordsworth speaks of the "auxiliar light" from his mind bestowing "new splendour" on the setting sun, this calls to mind not so much "the light of ancient poetry", as Professor Durrant suggests, but rather the exciting yet troubling epistemological problem of the subject-object relation which John Locke and the eighteenth-century philosophers bequeathed to the Romantics. This subject surely deserves attention in an introduction to Wordsworth. Second, I think Professor Durrant has not quite decided what part memory plays in Wordsworth. Significantly, his chapters on *The Prelude* do not examine Wordsworth's famous and enigmatic "spots of time". This weakness affects Professor Durrant's readings of those poems in which memory plays an important role. For example, we are told that "The Two April Mornings" suggests "that man is defeated by his very nature." But that poem is better read as a celebration of man's ability to remember, and hence to maintain a painful but triumphant human resurrection paralleling and challenging the April-resurrections in the natural world. A similar difficulty occurs in Professor Durrant's otherwise excellent discussion of "Michael": not enough attention is given to the fact that this is a poem of memory, and that the poet-narrator speaks of the tale not as tragedy but as something that will "delight" its listener.

However, strengths outweigh weaknesses in this study. Professor Durrant has given us a useful introduction to Wordsworth.

L. J. SWINGLE

DARK MOUTH

MARGARET ATWOOD, *Procedures For Underground.* Oxford University Press. $1.95.

MUCH OF WHAT Margaret Atwood says in this volume she has said in her previous books. She presents a world of peripheries, under-surfaces, divisions and isolation similar to the one in *The Circle Game,* but it would be a mistake to think that *Procedures For Underground* is simply a repetition of her earlier work. Certainly the surface of these poems remains the same; many of the images of drowning, buried life, still life, dreams, journeys and returns recur and the book is locked into a very repressive and inhibited atmosphere, even though the time-scope of the book is large, covering the chronological stretch from pre-history to the present. As in *The Circle Game,* personal relationships offer only minimal hope, yet most of the second half of this book expresses a promise of breaking-out that did not occur in the earlier work.

Even the title suggests that people need not be trapped or buried in stasis but that they can take action: there are motions that will push life and the individual forward. This volume moves in its second half more and more to the notion that words can break the authorities and inhibitions that fetter us and even a cry of agony is worth shouting, for it expresses that deep underside with its "mouth filled with darkness". This howl may be an automatic response to fear or pain, simply "uttering itself", but it is a statement, and, as such, is preferable to the blankness of "a white comic-strip balloon/with a question mark; or a blank button."

People still live on the edge in these poems, surrounded by flux, impermanence and repression, haunted by bad dreams, menaced by objects but

> in fear everything
> lives, impermanence
> makes the edges of things burn
>
> brighter.

In our present pre-historic state of human relationships we are at least evolving; "we are learning to make fire." Flux and disintegration continue but the poet has the means of preserving experience — "Over all I place/a glass bell." This attempt at preservation does not necessarily have the effect of a dead hand. In one poem a swimmer dives, is lonely in the lake but the marks on paper that the poem makes about the swimmer are words which "move outwards". Art may be "the link between/the buried will and the upper/world of sun". Things may frighten man but he is a creator; he may in fact create his own fears, his own divisions, his own dreams and nightmares but the act of creation, in particular the act of poetry, becomes an important procedure.

The volume progresses from the opening poem presenting a picture of entrapment with parents inside a fantasy zoo created by the I figure within the poem to the closing poem about those parents dancing. There is still entrapment within the circle of the dance but that circle is constantly "forming, breaking". The dance continues "transformed/ for this moment/always"; it "goes/on in a different/time (because/ I say it)."

"Because I say it" — that's the important triumph in the end. The progression in the book is towards a fundamental belief in the prerogatives of poetry in a threatening, tense world. Even the lining of the poems, still the usual broken, tentative expression she has used before, somehow sounds firmer, playing some kind of strength against the details of violence, repression, doubt and fear, finally emphasizing the courage of coming to terms with that lower layer where "you can learn/wisdom and great power,/ if you can descend and return safely."

Margaret Atwood has returned safely, broken the circle, shaken off the persona of Susanna Moodie which to my mind was a restriction on her own personality as a poet. Her own clear voice rings out from this book to give us her best collection to date.

PETER STEVENS

UNASSUMING GUIDE

BALACHANDRA RAJAN, *The Lofty Rhyme: A Study of Milton's Major Poetry*. Routledge and Kegan Paul.

IT IS A COMMONPLACE that academic critics find Milton perennially attractive and his works an exhaustless mine of

richly ambiguous concepts. He is one of the few figures in English literature who successfully and on a large scale combine poetic sensibility and religious fervour. His achievement is many-sided, with major and minor works, a balance of prose and poetry, a public as well as a private life, an ability to represent and speak for his age. His capacity for summation — whether of the Classics or of Christian doctrine — gives his work a solidity no single sensibility could ever impart. His ambivalences do not baffle or distress, but enrich our perception of reality. He is modern, not only in that he reveals the Protestant ethic in full flower but also in his premonitions: protest, pollution, therapy, birth-control, television, — they are all in *Paradise Lost*.

It follows that the best critics of Milton are those who feel he is in every way greater than themselves, who do not deal with *Paradise Lost* but let it deal with them, and who induce the same response in their readers. Professor Rajan plays this rôle to perfection. We hear only the modest voice of an unassuming guide. We have a sense of being, not informed, but reminded, of being edged up to viewpoints from which the whole panorama of Milton's poetry will do its work upon us. The panorama becomes a single composition. We are persuaded of Milton's continuity, the continuity of a continuously creative personality. We seem always to have known about this but never to have got it in focus for our own recognition until now.

Milton's critics have to bear a heavy burden of erudition. So much to read: so many views to acknowledge, to augment, to confute. This load Professor Rajan assumes with the ease of a gold-miner wearing a money-belt. Profusion without encumbrance. A characteristic touch is seen in his habit of qualified appreciation. The borrowed point is trimmed, pushed a little farther, deflected, or additionally barbed. But what we are being offered in these pages is a good deal more than a revised, expanded or more penetrating view of Milton. We experience less an argument than an immersion; we become acutely concerned with the actions and passions of the human mind, — whether creative, in the poet; or judicial, in the critic; or responsive, in the reader. This concern is sustained by small inset sentences, hovering between image and aphorism: "To see the whole with lucidity, one is obliged to bring to it a certain sense of shape." "The hope of freedom discloses itself only when we know who the enemy is." "Educated innocence is not easy to achieve." "*Paradise Lost* is tactful about its theology. It is a poem designed to be read without anguish by those who do not share Milton's views."

Rajan has the double faculty of directing us toward the perception of certain bed-rock strata sustaining the weight of Milton's intentions and, simultaneously, of awakening our faculties to the landscape so that we look "on herb, tree, fruit, and flow'r Glist'ring with dew." Things seem simpler, more luminous, more significant than we had remembered. *Lycidas* appears as a consistent "struggle of contraries" out of which pattern is forged. In *Paradise Lost*, Christ "may be an actor in the scheme of things but he is also the force that encloses the action." *Samson Agonistes* is indeed, as Milton claimed, a tragedy: "the providence of God requires the death of the hero."

Here is fresh evidence that Milton

scholars in Canada are maintaining and extending their field of action. The antenna-like sensitiveness, the gentle tone of confident assertion, the steady perception of centrality, the sense of enormous bliss in the total experience of Milton: these owe much to an Indian sensibility and a Cambridge provenance but partake also of the Canadian critical tradition going back through A.S.P. Woodhouse.

One closes *The Lofty Rhyme* with a sense one had not possessed before, — of Milton's total vision, of the unending contention between light and darkness, of the purposes of God transcending man's understanding but never failing to meet his need. And we find we have not only been reading a superb piece of literary criticism but also hearing a pastoral admonition and a tract for the times.

ROY DANIELLS

SEMANTIC CHAOS

SIR:

In *Canadian Literature* 46 (Autumn 1970) Mike Doyle alludes to a poem called "Semantic chaos equals moral anarchy" in his review article on concrete poetry. He states that this poem is by bp nichol. I am flattered that he should single this poem out for praise and more than flattered that he should think it is up to the standard of a bp nichol piece. Perhaps you could re-order this particular piece of semantic chaos by informing your readers that that poem was in fact written by

Yours sincerely,
PETER STEVENS

INDIAN SEESAW

ALAN FRY, *How A People Die*. Doubleday Canada Limited.

ACCORDING TO THE strikingly illustrated book jacket this is "a documentary novel about the tragedy of the "North American Indian". The only accurate word in that description is "tragedy"; "North American Indian" really means the inhabitants of a tiny village on the B.C. coast, and "documentary novel" seems an over generous assessment of Mr. Fry's achievement. All but plotless, with too many indistinct and eminently forgettable characters, *How a People Die* is scarcely a novel. Nor is it truly "documentary", if we take the word to mean supported by facts from real life. There are no maps, no excerpts from genuine newspaper pages, no verified statistics or photographs. What the book does contain, though, is something few mere literary novels could provide: an examination of a major social problem based on 15 years' personal experience.

Mr. Fry is an Indian agent; so is his chief character and apparent spokesman, Arne Saunders. Arne, like the Indians, is a product of his past:

> He'd been born into the backwoods of B.C. during the depression and raised into hard, unremitting labor and a profound distrust of the welfare state.

Conflict between Arne's "Protestant work ethic" and the life style of the Indian people he administers is inevitable.

In the days when the people had to work to live, there was dignity. In the days of the dole, not even hope remains. Most of the Indians Arne sees ride a relentless seesaw which spans the gap between work (decency) and poverty

(squalor), with a dreadful nemesis (alcohol) forever weighting the balance on the poverty side. There are cases of three weeks' drunken squandering by men who have earned more in a season's fishing than Arne's field officers do in a year. To Arne, as in Aesop's fable of the ant and the grasshopper, the moral is clear — but for the sake of the children, he must issue relief. The book ends as it began, on a note of frustration and despair.

What gives the "novel" its greatest interest is the variety of viewpoints Fry assembles. We hear from doctor, policeman, and Indian chief, reporters, social workers, welfare officers and the CYC. Other spokesmen include Indian children and adults of both sexes and all ages, and various white neighbours. All would have to agree that the "Indian problem" stands little chance of improvement under the paternal system. As Arne puts it,

> How do you talk to a man who doesn't share your notions about work or money or wife or kids or house or sanitation or what the hell he's going to live on tomorrow or next year and reach him where he's really alive inside and he can reach you back?

Although Arne's (and presumably Fry's) attitude towards Indians may not command our respect, it has been born of experience and as such deserves a hearing. In misrepresenting the nature of the book and thereby ensuring it a wider audience, his publishers may not have done him a disservice after all.

PAT BARCLAY

GARLANDS THAT FADE

FOR SOME TIME now the symposium of essays — and occasionally of poems as well — on contemporary problems has been a fashion in Canadian publishing. Some of these efforts, well-timed, have produced interesting and even stimulating documents of the collective preoccupations of the nation's intellectuals; A. W. Purdy's collection, *The New Romans*, was probably the best, though its lesson was lost where it should have been best learned, among Americans who most need educating in the feelings of their neighbours.

None of the collections that have recently appeared displays quite the same uniting passion as *The New Romans* or, for that matter, quite the same timeliness, though William Kilbourn's anthology — *Canada: A Guide to the Peaceable Kingdom* (Macmillan, $8.95) — *is* timely in an unintended way, since it came out at a time when Canada seemed to be one of the least peaceable of the world's countries. Yet it was perhaps a good thing to be reminded in the close aftermath of the FLQ crisis that we had in fact held such a view of ourselves, and to be brought back, in perusing the writings Kilbourn had collected, to the feeling that perhaps we were provoked into an excessive pessimism by the savageries of obscure fanatics.

Canada: A Guide to the Peaceable Kingdom is in fact the best of the collections here reviewed because it does not strive to be exclusively novel or to be devoted to a limited political or social view. Kilbourn has gathered his mosaic of Canadian attitudes from already published writings that express our generation; if there are dull pieces, and fragments of platitude so characteristic as to seem almost essential, there is also a great deal that is stimulating, curious, evocative, or positively wise, and all of it had

been selected by time before the editor got to work.

One characteristic that unites these collections, with the possible exception of *Living in the Seventies* (Peter Martin Associates, paper, $3.95, cloth, $7.50), which is really a collection of mainly boring papers from the Harrison Liberal Conference of 1969, is the panorama they give — if not of an establishment of letters, learning and political theory — at least of a definite mandarinate, an unacknowledged section of John Porter's vertical mosaic. At a rough guess, about half the contributors to *Canada: A Guide to the Peaceable Kingdom* are also among the "Fifty Canadians in Search of a Future" who appear in *Visions 2020* (Hurtig, paper $2.95, cloth $6.95), a symposium on the world to come (ambiguous phrase!) compiled by the editors of *Canadian Forum* as part of that journal's fiftieth anniversary exercises. It is a garland of prophesies that by turn intrigues and exasperates because it shares with all Utopian writing the excitement of assembling facts about a possible future with a deficiency in the precise delineation, so that we never do more than look forward through a glass, darkly.

Wilderness Canada (Clarke Irwin, $29.95) also leads us to contemplate the future, but in the terms of the present — that of the great Canadian wilderness — which we may lose, at least in its pristine form, if we are not prompt to halt the destruction of its delicate ecological balances. Dedicated to the memory of Blair Fraser, *Wilderness Canada*, in its essays celebrating various aspects of our land beyond the settlements and its magnificent photographs recording the splendour that still survives, may well become — if the next decade is as visionless as the last has been — the elegy on a land instead of, as it may now be taken, a celebration of it.

This great wave of symposia shares one characteristic. Every one of the books I am noticing dies with a whimper. Partly this is because the reader begins to tire of adjusting his mind to so many different viewpoints, but partly also it is because of the temptation that makes every editor crowd his brightest items in the beginning and centre of his collection and leave the end to take care of itself as he arranges his weakest pieces into a dying fall.

Do the collections tell us anything more in a general way? That Canadians are more inclined towards consensus than towards the individual stance, for example? I doubt it. The symposium is a publishing form temporarily popular in all countries, and this is a by-product of the infiltration of the worlds of literature and art by the ideas of participatory democracy. As a fashion it will depart, and perhaps should do so quickly. For after two or three years, most 300-page volumes of passing thoughts appear as ephemeral as a bundle of last year's newspapers, documents no doubt, but to be consulted rather than read.

ANTHONY APPENZELL

LENSMEN AND MADMEN

STANLEY COOPERMAN, *Cappelbaum's Dance.* University of Nebraska Press. $1.95 paper.
HENRY BEISSEL, *Face in the Dark.* new press. $3.50 paper.

IT WAS E. E. ("Skylark") Smith who created the lensmen, those watcher-guardians of Galactic Civilizations that delighted my fantasy-reading boyhood.

In *Cappelbaum's Dance*, Stanley Cooperman's persona is a lensman of a different sort. With his imagination he turns the lens of his perceptions, recombining observed and read glories and horrors into new ones with the impersonality and ease of a kaleidoscope:

> Kangaroos and ice-cream cones;
> everything
> is magic, like
> sawdust
> swimming in the green sea,
> or dolphins
> leaping down Granville Street
> tickled with smog.

The poetry-lover, encountering for the first time the flexibility and freshness with which Cappelbaum recreates his world, must feel like Keats' "watcher of the skies" when "a new planet swims into his ken". Innumerable passages like the following have clarity, economy, and an ease of utterance that takes away the breath (almost):

> When I walk through the street
> there are old women
> crucified
> on telephone wires,
> a sound of humming in the air
> like mumbles of thick
> laughter: and priests
> with hooks
> curved to the end of their arms . . .
> they hang
> from their own blackness.
>
> Even the snapdragons
> bite one another,
> fighting for room, fighting
> for a deeper swallow
> of light and air;
> their colors
> hammer the summer sun
> with a fire of painted
> teeth.

Alas! unmodulated excellence carried out at great length ultimately palls, and before the reader has explored many pages of the pyrotechnics of Cappelbaum's mind he has discovered — to use a mixed metaphor — its Achilles' heel, the equivalence or near equivalence of everything in the universe. Few readers possess a similar sense of the one-ness of things; consequently, a reader prepared to accept murder in a general way as one of the fine arts ("Chamber Music for Guitar and Hand Grenade") is apt to be somewhat more than irritated when the same cool detachment is used on a theme where his personal feelings are involved ("For Martin Luther King"). Ultimately, he is bound to reject Cappelbaum's aesthetic use of experience as a brilliant disguise for moral nihilism and a fear of commitment. Perhaps this is what Stanley Cooperman wants us to do. If so, I would suggest a more consistent positive approach to us, for his "committed" "End of Term in Oregon" hit me harder than any other poem in the book.

Despite the above, Cooperman's persona, who seems always relatively fulfilled by the mere act of reshaping memory and desire in the creative flux of a changing now, is the powerful antidote to the philosophy expressed in Henry Beissel's *Face on the Dark*. Here, life is not an imaginative game for a poet but a drama extending through time and space in which men and women are the personae for one or both of two conflicting forces, the beautiful ideal and the sordid reality. In the early domestic poems, Henry Beissel shows how through love, on a personal level at least, the gap can be bridged and co-existence achieved ("en la casa de la inquisicion", "To My Daughter at Age Oneandahalf", "Nuptials"). However, in the remaining poems, Beissel evidently feels it is impossible to bridge the gap between the actual and the ideal in the social and political world, and he deliberately takes sides, hoping to

further the abolition of the existing order in the interest of some Utopian unity. Beissel does not seem to be aware that his political position is as intolerant on the side of the angels as is that of the devils he attacks; however, in "Ballad of the Madman of Marbridge" he reveals that he understands that what really mars the bridge between us is our awareness of death, the "madman of Marbridge" who goes "looking only for bones".

Technically, Beissel's poetry is strong, clear, and (considering the pressure of feeling behind it) controlled. Its chief fault is an over-reliance upon the mere cataloguing of horror:

> Stillness wears rubber gloves and breathes
> through gauze soaks ichorous blood oozes
> where steel slits lobes of lung and colon
> a brain quivers under the mask memories
> groan
> mutter my mother yells in cancerous spasm
> the hand that stroked and slapped me
> clutches
> her anus praeter slobbering pus. . . .

This is really, done up in a different fashion, what A.J.M. Smith was attacking when he wrote:

> Cries from the stitched heart. . . .
>
> The old eternal frog
> In the throat that comes
> With the words *mother, sweetheart, dog*
> Excites, and then numbs.

It is also what Irving Babbitt meant when he said that Realism was Romanticism walking on all fours.

FRED COGSWELL

FROM THE INSIDE

AUDREY THOMAS, *Mrs. Blood.* Thomas Allen. $7.95.

PROUST had it easy with his tea and bun. So reflects a woman in the throes of miscarriage, having a far less dainty impetus to her remembrance of things past. Her situation does not immediately suggest lively material for a novel and *Mrs. Blood* is scarcely a compelling title. But from this seemingly unrewarding starting-point, Audrey Thomas creates an absorbing study of a woman's coming to terms with herself through pain, loneliness, fear and guilt. Though the time-span of the novel is a few weeks only, flashback reconstructs most of the woman's past so that we have as complete a character as Margaret Laurence's Hagar Shipley, built up by somewhat similar shifts from present to past and driftings in the stream of semiconsciousness.

With the heightened introversion of the sick, the narrator sees herself in two alternating roles, as Mrs. Thing when pain or social unease or housewifery reduces her to an object, and as Mrs. Blood when she is oppressed by the tyranny of the mind. The novel is sectioned into Mrs. Thing thoughts and Mrs. Blood thoughts, the former more in evidence early in the book, the latter dominating the final part.

Mrs. Thing, Smith College graduate with literary inclinations, married an English artist, lived in England and Canada and is now in Ghana where her husband is teaching. She has two storybook children, a native boy who runs her house and a social circle of young Europeans. It's a familiar pattern these days and Mrs. Thing's problems are ordinary enough: she feels out of place among the bright, efficient faculty wives, the most efficient infuriatingly as pregnant as herself; love-making with Jason, her husband, lacks passion and joy and now in hospital, isolated among native nurses and Indian doctors, she is terrified of pain and death.

It is as Mrs. Blood that she relives suppressed anxieties and guilt, the memories, painful and ecstatic, that have shaped her individual identity. Most of these are to do with sex, from the first childhood impressions to casual affairs and experiments and then to the one great passion of her life. Death figures, too, in a series of gruesome accidents imprinted on the memory, and madness in the reliving of horrific experiences as a student helper in an asylum. The Proustian journey merges into Alice's descent of the rabbit-hole: "How do you know I'm mad?" said Alice. "You must be," said the Cat, "or you wouldn't have come here." Africa becomes the rabbit-hole and the rabbit-hole becomes hell; the blood of miscarriage turns into the blood of sacrament, of atonement; the foetus is a dove, a fish, a symbolic sacrifice "on the broken altar of the past".

The apparently random movement of memory through Mrs. Thing thoughts and Mrs. Blood thoughts is carefully controlled and only at the end does the last fact complete the design. Although guilt and nemesis are introduced very early, their full implications are concealed until Mrs. Blood/Thing has burned through every stage of her obsessive fear that she, Jason's wife, might be indeed Mrs. Medea.

That there is a distinctively feminine sensitivity and outlook is amply demonstrated by women novelists of the nineteenth century but only recently has the novel began to explore the biological conditions affecting that sensitivity. Women alone can fully judge Audrey Thomas's accuracy in conveying physical processes, the nuances of mood created by body chemistry, the peculiar fluctuations of shame and pride. When Brian Moore attempted sympathetic identification with menstrual blues, he showed that, with the best will in the world, he was emphatically not and never could be Mary Dunne. *Mrs. Blood*, by contrast, gives us woman from the inside.

If the prospect unnerves, take comfort in the fact that Audrey Thomas is also a perceptive observer of the world around her and that her novel builds a convincing Ghanaian setting, especially rich in sounds and smells. There is a sizeable cast of minor characters, present and past, and they are sharply individualized. But the glory of the book is its prose. Though the stream of consciousness method is susceptible to pretentiousness, Audrey Thomas handles it masterfully, so that the near-Joycean passages, the quotations and the language rituals do not jar with a clear narrative style and authentic dialogue.

I have not mentioned that this is Audrey Thomas's first novel because there is nothing in it to excuse on the grounds of inexperience, no need to patronize or exaggerate. I found faults in it, certainly, in the overloading of literary reference at times and in a few memories that were never unjumbled. But *Mrs. Blood* is accomplished writing; it does not bear the marks of a first novel and it must surely not be Audrey Thomas's last.

JOAN COLDWELL

INCLUSIVE CANADIANISM

Made in Canada: New Poems of the Seventies, edited by Douglas Lochhead and Raymond Souster. Oberon Press. Cloth $6.95; paper $3.50.

FEW ANTHOLOGIES are decisive literary acts, and this is not one of them. Rather,

it performs two other functions of the anthology — to offer pleasure and to advertise. Pleasure is here in some profusion, from Acorn to Fetherling and beyond; but perhaps, for one who is still a "landed immigrant" (and an explorer in the territory of Canadian writing), the intriguing question is: What is being advertised here? A number of things: Canada herself, poems made in Canada (all in the past twelve months, the book's sub-title may mislead us into thinking) and the poets who are making them.

From the viewpoint of the first commodity it is perhaps unfortunate that nearly one-third of those poets invited to offer work did not respond. Hence we have a version of Canada without Bowering, Layton, Purdy, and without the younger people who helped to make *New Wave Canada* such a lively book — Daphne Marlatt, for example, Victor Coleman, bp Nichol, David Cull, Gerry Gilbert, etc. On the other hand, twenty per cent of those included were born elsewhere and came to Canada as adults. From one angle this matters little, since most of these poets have done their best work here and Canada has at least modified their consciousness. As an outsider, I can appreciate the editors' openness in being thus inclusive, especially when their main concern appears to have been in gathering a body of work which is at once accomplished and assertive of a national identity. Certainly they have not made the task of defining Canadian poetry any easier for themselves. One last note in this vein: I wish they had either drawn attention to John Glassco's new collection of *French Canadian Poetry in Translation* or, better still, included some work from it.

Introducing their floral tribute, the editors display a perhaps pardonable touch of chauvinism, claiming that the Canadian scene "is equalled in variety, excitement and technical excellence only in the United States" (a very large claim, indeed, but why not? "I am what is around me", said Wallace Stevens.) Later, however, Lochhead and Souster admit the strong influence of the United States, declaring that, "we can't turn to England any longer — the poets there are seeking new influences even more desperately than we are." With pleasure we can reassure them, many good poets here do not seem to be desperate in the way suggested. Similarly, one feels the oddness of the editors' claim that the book "has the word 'now' stamped all over it". What we are given is an engaging mixture of new and old and, in this instance, one is grateful for the compound.

For me *Made in Canada* has multiple value; a chance to see the latest advances of established poets such as P. K. Page, Dorothy Livesay, Earle Birney; an opportunity to meet poets for the first time, such as Bryan McCarthy and Chuck Carlson. Best of all, it is good to encounter work by poets already familiar, to find that they are off in a new and fruitful direction. Such a case is J. Michael Yates in his selection from *The Great Bear Lake Meditations*. (Now I must read the book).

Helped by the alphabet, the anthology opens strongly with Milton Acorn. His three poems here are of a piece with his collection, *I've Tasted My Blood* (Ryerson, 1969), with a characteristic gusto, a good ear for the colloquial (is it Canadian?), a command of the loose-limber line. He has range, too. A socialist poet, respecting the joy and dignity of working with the hands, he can (in "She") deploy

a long line and rather loose syntax to bring off a poem which is tender, mysterious, lyrical. Acorn seems to be a genuine "Earth lover", to whom experience has added a complementary touch of the cynic, but his mainstay is an engaging immediacy and warmth.

Because of the very variety of talent, for one thing, it is impossible to derive a coherent sense of Canadian poetry from these pages. Since this means responding impressionistically I admit to a preference for sparse statement, functional line structure and syntax, a minimum of rhetoric, large gesture, laboured metaphor, knowing synecdoche.

Notations, then: I don't mind that Margaret Atwood's landscape (of imagination) is a cold moon, but here her shadows are too shadowy. These four poems do not match the best of *The Animals in that Country*. Ondaatje's poems zing off at interesting, sometimes bizarre, tangents, revealing a personal world, very much alive. Nelson Ball's taut poems aim for total accuracy, in language, in identifying the true occasion of a poem. One awaits eagerly his forthcoming *The Pre-Linguistic Heights*. Two poets new to me: David Donnell's poet-self is appealing, perceptive, perhaps a shade over-explicit, but true; Bill Howell's adroit use of the line is applied equally well to the small private occasion ("Mechanics of Living") and to a larger, historical, sweep. Poignant as it is, Gustafson's "Nocturne: Prague 1968" also suffers from over-explicitness. Everything is laid out as in an undertaker's parlour, perhaps appropriately, considering the occasion. Contrast the unstated elements in Dorothy Livesay's sequence "The Operation", a fine, nervy piece of work, capturing as it does the tentativeness and pain of slow recovery. Another dimension offers itself in the group of Newlove poems, four which hint great range, from the compression (of thought, syntax, rhythm) in "Man Drift" to a variety of subtleties (mental, verbal, linear) in the "Dream" poems. I admire the descriptive and rhythmic integrity of Peter Stevens's poems, especially "Coming Back". From the editors, the ear and wit in Lochhead's "Canadian Jollies" are pleasurably lively; Souster has chosen to give himself one page, but he offers us two beautiful little poems. "Yeah Tigers" is particularly moving.

Much good work here I haven't mentioned. While I don't want to be the over-polite guest, declaring everything good to eat, even the egg which, well, err-um, whiffs a little and is greeny purple inside the shell, I can say there is very very little work here which I don't respect. To my as yet unpractised eye and ear, nothing in *Made in Canada* seems distinctively and exclusively Canadian, but this is a book of Canadian poems and it manifests sufficient zest, verbal muscle, sensitivity and imaginative life to be worth reading, worth being represented in and worth having edited and published.

MIKE DOYLE

ON THE VERGE

***** DAVID STAFFORD. *From Anarchism to Reformism: A Study of the Political Activities of Paul Brousse 1870-90*. University of Toronto Press, $15.00. This is political history of a high standard. The 1870's were the Homeric age of modern politics, when history caught the petty struggles of the First International in its magnifying light and enlarged them into the battles of a latter-day *Iliad*, with Marx and Bakunin as its Achilles and Hector.

All the important later divisions in left-wing politics, between democratic socialists and dictatorial communists, between both of these and the anarchists, date from those years. Among the lesser heroes of that time of prophetic struggle was Paul Brousse, a fervent Bakuninist who graduated from anarchism into a kind of socialism called possibilism, pragmatic and fervently anti-Marxist. The point which David Stafford makes very convincingly in his study of Brousse (the first written in English) is that the temporary alliance between the Latin anarchists and the English trade unionists against Marx in the First International was not accidental. There were libertarian elements in non-Marxist socialism and pragmatic elements in anarchism which joined to form a common ground for at least temporary action and allowed Brousse to slip from one to the other without feeling he had committed political treason. One might extend the idea by showing how far the political background of the English trade unionists in turn had come, via Robert Owen, from William Godwin, father of all anarchists. The practical point to all this is that a Mithridatic dose of anarchism is necessary for all political parties that do not wish to surrender to totalitarian temptations.

**** RAMSAY COOK. *The Maple Leaf for Ever: Essays on Nationalism and Politics in Canada.* Macmillan, $7.95. Perhaps the saddest feature of the upsurge of nationalism in contemporary Canada is the extent to which it has not only made Canadians forget (a) that internationalism does not imply continentalism, and (b) that Canada possesses a political outlook (rather than a political philosophy) whose development into a full-grown federalism might well be as important, in a world where nationalism has become increasingly suicidal, as British parliamentary institutions and French revolutionary impulses were in their time. The nation is an anachronism; the federation has a future. In playing the variants on this point of view Ramsay Cook performs a timely service.

**** E. L. M. BURNS. *General Mud.* Clarke Irwin, $6.50. The profession of arms and the profession of letters have an uneasy but recurrent relationship; from Caesar to de Gaulle, generals have often proved eloquent writers, their styles disciplined by the exercise of strategical thinking. General Burns has a place among this military minority. His literary accomplishments, beginning with articles in the *American Mercury* under Mencken, have been considerable, and now he follows his memoirs of peacekeeping in the Near East, and his writings on modern warfare, with his recollections of the two world wars in which he fought. As his title, *General Mud*, suggests, there are no false heroics when General Burns writes on war. He regards it, at best, as a grim inevitability, and his accounts of campaigns are written with a wry spareness, which deflates the pretensions of leaders and, in rather Tolstoyan vein, demonstrates how far their plans are modified by such incalculable influences as "General Mud". As military history, this is a small gem which deserves its place in any library of Canadian records; its fault is that while General Burns appears as a very human and tangible personality when he is a subaltern in World War, in the second conflict he fades into aloofness as the role of the field commander establishes its impersonal mask.

** EDWARD MEADE. *Indian Rock Carvings of the Pacific Northwest.* Gray's Publishing Ltd., $8.00. Except for a few boulders that have been taken into museums, the Indian stone carvings that record the presence of prehistoric peoples along the coast of British Columbia are gradually wearing away from the work of weather and human vandals. This makes a record of them urgently needed, and the novelist Edward Meade has spent many years on the task of photographing almost all the accessible petroglyphs. Now, with a rather laconic commentary, his prints are published; they form an indispensable addition to the library of anyone interested in the great artistic tradition of the Indian peoples of the Pacific Coast.

G.W.

ERRATUM

WE REGRET that in the "Canadian Literature Checklist" for 1970 which appeared in issue 48, a non-existent book was recorded. The entry ran as follows:

PURDY, AL. *Earle Birney.* Toronto, Copp Clarke, 1970. (Studies in Canadian Literature.)

The book was indeed planned and its forthcoming publication announced, but in fact it has not been written, and the entry was made in error.

ED.

opinions and notes

THE PROFESSIONAL CANADIAN

IF THERE'S A LIVING WRITER I admire more than Mordecai Richler I don't know who it is. But I wish people would stop calling him a *Canadian*.

When *Life* wants a story on Canada, whom do they phone? Why, good old Mordecai, naturally. And where do they reach him? Why, in London, England, that's where. That's where he *lives*, after all. He writes *Letters from Canada* to the *London Magazine*, and *Letters from London* to Canadian magazines. In *Encounter*, you can read his impressions of Montreal. He writes in *The New Statesman* on the opposition press in Canada. He covers Expo 67 for *The New York Review of Books*, and he edits the book that triggered all this, the Penguin anthology *Canadian Writing Today*.

Then he turns around and writes another kind of piece for domestic consumption, like an inferior wine: How I Came Back To Canada and Was Astonished to Find So Much Changed. This stuff goes in *Maclean's*, *Star Weekly*, even *Canadian Literature*. "After being rooted in London, England, for more than 15 years," he confides to the readers of *Weekend*, "I woke up one morning and decided it was time for a change." So he took up a year's appointment as writer-in-residence at Sir George Williams, soaking up impressions and whipping them into print at two-bits a word. Having complained in the past of our indifference to the arts, he can now damn us for spending lavish sums when there aren't many — he would say "aren't any" — significant artists. There aren't? How about Mordecai Richler, for one? But no: National Arts Centre is "a sort of Yankee Stadium without Babe Ruth."

Sometimes the exotic and the home brew can be mixed. In 1967, he tells us in his Expo piece, he "planned to return to Canada for the first time in three years." Aha, thinks the experienced Richler reader, a clever variation. This time he's going to be Astonished for *American* consumption.

I met Richler only once, in 1966, when I was a student in London and went out to interview him in his comfortable home in Kingston-on-Thames, a few miles out of London. Meeting a writer whose work I had loved, one of the few Canadians who's made an international name — yes, yes, I concede it: he's a terrific writer and his books have left their mark on me in all kinds of ways — I was scared stiff. Richler, however, was thoughtful, generous, kind and a little shy. I liked him immensely, though I suspect I bored him. Who wants to spend an afternoon with a tongue-tied fledgling academic, a kind of Peeping Tom on the world of writers? But he did, and I was abjectly grateful.

But damn it, why can't he content himself with writing marvellous novels, and never mind being the Just-Add-Hot-Water-and-Serve expert on Canada? When I met him, he had been working the expatriate routine both ways for years. So I was staggered to find out he had never been as far west as the Lakehead. So far as I can make out he still hasn't been to the Maritimes. When he

talks about "Canada," he's talking about just two provinces. In the Penguin book he talks about "Saint John's," New Brunswick. Saint John's is in Newfoundland, fella; this one's called Saint John, and if you'd ever seen either one you'd know the difference.

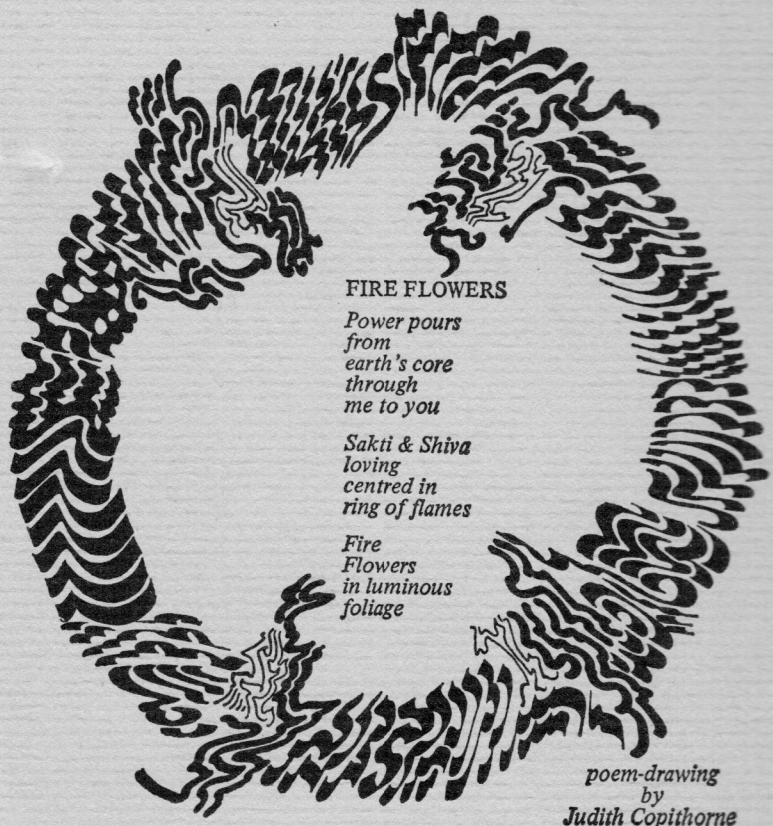
That's nit-picking, sure. As it would be to point out that he thought separatism dead and violence impossible in 1967 — after all, a lot of people did. But do you remember Richler's return home in 1967 to be Astonished for one of the weekend supplements? A month before the Liberal leadership convention, Richler appeared with his observations on the leading horses. As I recall, he put his money on John Turner, finding in him a kind of youth-and-responsibility combination which might put a little gas into the doughy lump of Canadian life. But it was his commentary on Pierre Elliott Trudeau, whom he clearly would have preferred, which I took the trouble to write down. Richler found Trudeau "the most intellectually impressive, perspicacious and charming man I met in Ottawa", but he doubted that Trudeau could make it to the leadership. Too stylish, too obviously intelligent, too much of an individual for dull old Canada. I was, I blush to admit, among Trudeau's fans at the time, even joining the Liberal Party, in a burst of folly, to help get him elected. I knew it was *possible*, and if Richler weren't so far out of touch with the emotional bases of Canadian politics he would have known too.

The ignorance has even shown in his novels. He hasn't published a really good one since *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* in 1959. *Cocksure* and *The Incomparable Atuk* are bores, unusually good college jokes drawn out to three times the length they deserve. And *Saint Urbain's Horseman*, though a splendid novel, is based not on Canada, but on the international world of film and big-money writing. The novelist in Richler admits the truth: he only knows about Canada in retrospect and as a tourist. He conceded the point himself years ago. Considering Montreal, he admitted he "no longer understood the idiom. Doomed to always be a foreigner in England, I was now in danger of finding Canada foreign too."

He knows about books and writing — the Penguin anthology, for instance, is assembled with taste and discernment. He knows the international set. He knows London about as well as a non-native can. But when it comes to Canada, he knows about a small part of the past, geographically located in Montreal and, to a lesser extent, Toronto. I grew up in Vancouver and live in the Maritimes, and I've never really recognized my Canada in Richler's, except in bits and starts.

If you don't know about something you shouldn't write about it. "Mordecai", I would like to say, plucking him gently by the sleeve and speaking quietly, for he is a man and writer I admire, "You know about novels. Go write them. You don't know about Canada any more."

DONALD CAMERON



poem-drawing
by
Judith Copithorne