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# CANADIAN LITERATURE N<sup>o</sup>. 52

*Spring, 1972*

## NATIONAL ORIGINS

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BY MARY JANE EDWARDS, WILLIAM H. NEW, ANN YEOMAN,  
H. H. MOWSHOWITZ, RUDY WIEBE, LESLIE MONKMAN

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LAWRENCE RUSSELL, P. G. STANWOOD, ROSALIE L. COLIE, ELIZABETH  
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A QUARTERLY OF  
CRITICISM AND REVIEW

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PUBLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF  
BRITISH COLUMBIA, VANCOUVER 8

## CANADIAN LITERATURE

LITTÉRATURE CANADIENNE

NUMBER 52, SPRING 1972

*A Quarterly of Criticism  
and Review*

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PRINTED IN CANADA BY MORRIS  
PRINTING COMPANY LTD., VICTORIA

Indexed in the  
*Canadian Periodical Index*.

Second class mail registration  
number 1375

*Unsolicited manuscripts will not be  
returned unless accompanied by  
stamped, addressed envelopes.*

Address subscriptions to  
Circulation Manager, *Canadian  
Literature*, University of British  
Columbia, Vancouver 8, B.C., Canada

SUBSCRIPTION \$5.50 A YEAR

## U.B.C. MEDAL FOR POPULAR BIOGRAPHY, 1971

1971 could scarcely be regarded as an important year in the field of popular biography. Because of this, two questions arise. Was 1971 simply not a good year? Or, has biography — at least as a form or recording the lives of some Canadians — lost some of its former stimulus? A larger question emerges: was this year but a break in what has appeared to be a continuing tradition, or was it a start of a downward turn. One hopes it was the former.

Last year the Selections Committee commended the Macmillan Company of Canada for turning out good biographies. This year the Committee would like to praise the University of Toronto Press for its continued decision to pursue interpretive “lives and times” of a wide range of secondary Canadian historical figures (J. M. Bumstead’s *Henry Alline* and Bruce W. Hodgins’ *John Sandfield Macdonald*, for example) figures who often sponsored lost causes and were themselves thus lost to sight. The Committee would also like to commend three particular books: *Robert Gourlay* by Lois Darroch Milani published by Ampersand, *Luxton’s Pacific Crossing* published by Grays Publishing, and *Pitseolak: Pictures Out of My Life*, published by Oxford, a splendidly produced work which brings intelligent use of pictorial representation to the biography of an artist, and supplies an English/Eskimo text. But these are in the category of “honourable mentions”: the Selections Committee regrets that it is unable to make an award this year and looks forward, with interest, to the biographies to be published in 1972.

D.S.

## GIVE THE CORPORATION A COMPASS!

I SHALL NEVER FORGET A CURIOUS, rather sad incident at one of those almost pointless conferences of artists and impresarios that preceded the Centennial of 1967. It was Seminar '65. From all corners of Canada we had gathered in a pine-smelling ski hotel at Ste. Adèle, to drink indifferent wine and food at government expense, and to talk about the kind of money we might extract from the Centennial budget. The members of the literary panel — bitterly divided because it included publishers whose interests were quite different from those of the writers with whom they sat — realized from the beginning that it stood little chance in comparison with the noisy extroverts of the performing arts. We therefore spent little time formulating our modest demands for the small proportion of the funds that would be available for those who *create* works in comparison with those who merely *interpret* them, and devoted most of our energy to a series of thunderous resolutions intended to call to order all those Canadian institutions which claimed to be dedicated to cultural ends.

Our most eloquent resolution — a veritable Jeremiad — was a denunciation of the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation for the decline in quality of its programmes since the beginning of the 1960's. (Had we known how much farther they would have declined by the early 1970's we might have held some of our fire for a later skirmish!) At the final plenum of the Seminar my fellow chairman of the panel — Jean-Ethier Blais — read it with savage relish from the platform; it was (in terms of popular acclaim though not — alas — in results) by far the



most successful resolution of the day, received with a thunder of desk-pounding and floor-stamping that for the only time at Ste. Adèle united actors and artists, conductors and editors, writers and composers, architects and museum directors, French-speaking and English-speaking. There was only one man who appeared not to appreciate it, and he sat in a gallery reserved for visitors. I saw his face go pained and blanched; after a decent interval he withdrew. I later learnt that he was the incumbent President of the CBC; he had heard the men and women whom he regarded as his ultimate, hardcore constituency, turning against the Corporation in condemnation. I felt, at that moment, rather guilty at having had such an enthusiastic hand in the resolution, since, however just our complaints may have been, by framing it we might appear to be aligning ourselves with the philistines who habitually attack the CBC because it offends their ideas of free enterprise and their hatred of anything truly cultural.

I have since realized that such guilt was pointless and unjustified, since the ambivalences of the situation have been created by the failure of the Corporation itself and of successive governments to define clearly the role of a national broadcasting service. Among the artistic and intellectual community there is no doubt that it should fulfil a cultural, educational and informative role, leaving marketable popular entertainment — *including hockey* — to those stations and networks which are in the business of selling broadcasting as a commodity. (Such a decision would largely defuse the philistine attack on the CBC in any case, since it would eliminate the element of business rivalry.) With this view *Canadian Literature* has always agreed, since it has seemed to us so limpidly reasonable. Not so, however, to politicians, whose own motives are rarely limpid and whose actions, even when expedient, are rarely reasonable, and not so, unfortunately, to many of those high Ottawa bonzes who make the final decisions in the CBC, and who regard themselves not as trustees of a cultural heritage, but as mere mundane business executives, as frenetically concerned with *ratings* as any private station boss who depends on advertisements for his Chivas Regal. The power within the Corporation of these business-minded bureaucrats has unfortunately grown so much of late that even the improvement in content and quality which we were recently promised when it was decided to reform programming by establishing Radio 1 and Radio 2 and has not yet been properly implemented, and one wonders whether the delay in restoring intelligent programmes will not be continued indefinitely. While a few national network programmes — Tuesday Night, Anthology, etc. — have sustained a reasonably high standard, there has been a steady and regrettable decline since the early 1960's — when Vancouver

for example had a first-rate staff including Robert Harlow, Peter Garvie, Gerald Newman and Robert Chesterman who produced first-rate local CBC programmes — in the quality and scope of broadcasting originating in the regions; in an intensely regionalized country like Canada such a condition is disastrous.

There are many men and women in the lower ranks of the CBC hierarchy who have worked and still work hard to provide first-rate cultural and educational programmes, but indecisiveness about the true role of the CBC has long afflicted the professional administrators who populate the higher echelons of the Corporation. It has resulted in the erosion of any sense of responsibility that may once have existed towards the role the CBC has played and might still play in the national cultural life. In the past the CBC has encouraged writers, as well as many other kinds of artist, and was responsible not only for saving them from despair in the lean years of the past, but also for encouraging the production of many works of considerable merit, especially in the fields of drama and historical documentary. However, once a work was created, the CBC has always been inclined to put it out in the cold to find its own way in life, and this usually means that a very good play may be written and superbly produced — once! (Though radio plays *are* occasionally revived, it is rarely indeed that they are performed more than twice.)

We are grateful that radio kept drama alive as a literary form in Canada during the long years before the recent revival of live theatre; even today far more new Canadian plays are performed on radio than on the stage. But radio drama is a genre with which even scholars are not really familiar, because radio plays are very rarely published. At the least one would have thought that the CBC could have sponsored the publication each year of a volume of the best radio plays; such anthologies *are* published in Germany, and they are very successful. But the CBC has always been hesitant in its publishing; it has never established a regular periodical like *The Listener* in England to publish the best broadcast material, and its few pamphlets of collected lectures — while often excellent in themselves — are much too scanty to be considered an adequate publication programme for a Corporation so much concerned with the commissioning of literary works.

However, one at least lived under the illusion that at the CBC material of cultural importance was protected even if it was not published, and that it would be available if some day its publication were to become possible. One heard rumours of a CBC archive — though scholars seeking access to material showed great signs of frustration — but one did not realize that no adequate rules had

been drawn up to protect important material before it reached the archive. A recent incident in one of the regional headquarters of the CBC has dramatically demonstrated the extent to which invaluable documents are still at the mercy of irresponsible petty bureaucrats.

In the Vancouver studios, early in 1971, a collection of more than two hundred tapes of important lectures, first performances of Canadian plays, first performances of Canadian translations of foreign plays, first Canadian performances of musical works, and first performances of valuable historical documentaries, had been put aside for transmission to the archives. Under circumstances which are obscure but which the President of the Corporation assured me *several months ago* were under investigation, more than one hundred and fifty of these tapes were destroyed by a minor official and the remainder would have been lost if one of the producers had not learnt what was happening and vigorously intervened. We have not yet heard the result of the investigation, but so far, though dubbings of some of the items destroyed in the studios are said to exist in private hands, no effort appears to have been made by the Corporation to reconstitute this important national cultural material, which includes the first acting versions of nearly thirty original Canadian plays.

Such an incident is scandalous in itself, but even more disturbing in general terms is the way in which this episode reveals that the CBC is not living up to its responsibilities as custodian of the literary (and also musical) works which — let us give credit where it is deserved — were written only because dedicated producers and programme directors in the CBC commissioned them. We hope that the high officials of the CBC will pause for a while in their obsessive pursuit of ratings and in their undignified competition with commercial networks to make provisions ensuring that such official vandalism cannot again be perpetrated and that the lost material will be reconstituted and placed in an archive adequately staffed and open to scholars who have up to now had very little opportunity to study intensively such interesting forms as the radio drama. Perhaps we should do more than call on the officials of the CBC; perhaps we should demand that M. Pelletier, the Minister of State, pay more than his usual lip service to the cultural needs of the country, and ensure that special funds are allocated to establish a Public Library of Broadcasting designed to safeguard documentary material of historical and cultural value which exists in the various centres of the CBC under perpetual threat of capricious destruction; perhaps we should go farther and suggest to the government in general that, for once and all, it be established that the CBC dedicate itself not to entertainment considered as a

commodity, but to fulfilling the cultural, educational and informational needs of the country. Give the Corporation a compass!

\*   \*   \*

After twelve years we have decided to discontinue the annual checklist of books and critical articles. When *Canadian Literature* began in 1959 no such list appeared in either English or French. Now there is an excellent annual bibliography of English-Canadian books in *Commonwealth Literature* and one of French-Canadian books in *Livres et Auteurs Québécois*. There is no need for competition, and since our original function is that of a "Journal of Criticism and Review", we have decided to devote the space formerly allocated to the list to more reviews so as to keep up with the increasing flow of Canadian books. In doing so we thank those bibliographers who over the years when it was needed worked so patiently and disinterestedly at providing the checklist.

G.W.

# ESSENTIALLY CANADIAN

Mary Jane Edwards

IN "The Fourth Separatism" (*Canadian Literature* 45),<sup>1</sup> Ronald Sutherland discusses five recent works of Canadian fiction: Hubert Aquin's *Prochain épisode* (1965); Jacques Godbout's *Le Couteau sur la table* (1965); Claude Jasmin's *Ethel et le terroriste* (1964); Hugh MacLennan's *Return of the Sphinx* (1967); and Ellis Portal's *Killing Ground* (1968). Sutherland uses these works, all about some aspect of English-French relations in Canada, to analyze "four kinds of Quebec Separatism" and to argue that, "in the light of the psychological problems discussed in all the novels", a "special status" for Quebec "within a confederate system makes sense". "The Fourth Separatism" is, on the whole, an eloquent plea for the need to create "a genuine feeling of cultural security . . . once and for all in Quebec". Two issues Sutherland raises, however, need further comment.

One is his definition of a "distinctive Canadian literature". Sutherland thinks that its "main distinguishing feature would have to be dependent upon the main distinguishing feature of the Canadian Nation — the co-existence of two major ethnic groups. To be in the . . . mainstream of Canadian literature, therefore, a writer must have some awareness of fundamental aspects and attitudes of both language groups in Canada". He argues that Aquin, Godbout, and Jasmin, "by virtue of a broadening awareness which includes English Canada to varying degrees, are moving definitely towards the Canadian mainstream" and that MacLennan "is already there". Most other writers in Canada, he explains, "are in the tributaries rather than the mainstream". English-Canadian writers like Sinclair Ross, Morley Callaghan, and Stephen Leacock are, in fact, "in the tributaries of American literature". "The great majority" of French-Canadian writers have "until recently been caught up in the various Quebec tributaries of Canadian literature". Some more recent ones "have embraced spheres of conscious-

ness which, like those of many of their anglophone colleagues, are more or less extensions of spheres already defined in the United States".

The main purpose of this article is not to argue with Sutherland's definition of a "distinctive Canadian" fiction.<sup>2</sup> Since an acceptance or rejection of it, however, does affect one's views of the importance of the theme of English-French relations in Canadian fiction, some observations about it are necessary. Canadian fiction in both English and French has always been strongly influenced by both the form and content of non-Canadian fiction. Frédéric Houde's "Le Manoir mystérieux" (1880), plagiarized from Scott's *Kenilworth* (1821), and Charlotte Führer's *The Mysteries of Montreal* (1881), based on Eugène Sue's *Les Mystères de Paris* (1843-1844), are two obvious examples of this fact. Yet both are adapted to some extent to their Canadian settings. "Le Manoir mystérieux" is partly concerned with moral corruption in New France shortly before the English conquest. In "Among the Fenians", one of the stories in *The Mysteries of Montreal*, Mrs. Schroeder, the narrator, describes her experiences with a "sick woman at Point St. Charles" whose husband she suspects is a Fenian. Convinced that the "long, coffin-shaped boxes" in the lady's room "contain arms and ammunition . . . sent here from the Fenian headquarters in New York . . . for the destruction of the peaceful inhabitants of Montreal", Mrs. Schroeder calls in the police, and, the Fenians arrested, prides herself on helping to "break up this den of ruffians". Corruption in New France in the eighteenth century and Fenianism in Montreal in the nineteenth century are themes which, like that of English-French relations in Canada, are based on Canadian history and therefore contribute, like it, to the development of a "distinctive Canadian" fiction.

Even if a writer swims in Sutherland's "mainstream" of Canadian fiction and shows "some awareness of fundamental aspects and attitudes of both language groups in Canada", usually he does not stop swimming in Sutherland's "tributaries". Motifs of Gothic fiction help shape both the form and content of William Kirby's *The Golden Dog* (1877), the most popular nineteenth-century work of Canadian fiction in English, which Kirby wrote after a careful study of the works of such French-Canadian authors as François-Xavier Garneau, Philippe Aubert de Gaspé (père), and Joseph Marmette. Balzac is cited and some of his techniques are used in probably the best novel about English-French relations in Canada published in the nineteenth century, Mrs. Rosanna Leprohon's *Antoinette de Mirecourt* (1864). In fact, most authors of Canadian fiction in both English and French have not tried to cut themselves off from non-Canadian fiction but have tried to adapt the form and content of this fiction to Canadian

themes. Thus, while the influence of foreign fiction may have sometimes weakened both the artistic and cultural significance of their works, it has not prevented them from dealing with Canadian themes or from developing a "distinctive Canadian" fiction. Sutherland's image of a main stream and several tributaries in Canadian fiction should be changed to an image of one river of Canadian fiction with several currents, one of them foreign influences, another the theme of English-French relations in Canada.

While, however, the theme of English-French relations in Canada is only one current in the river of Canadian fiction and only one characteristic that distinguishes it from other national fictions, the theme itself is in some ways more significant than Sutherland implies. In "The Fourth Separatism" he not only confines his main comments on this theme to recent novels, but he also states that it is only now "emerging" in Canadian literature. Hugh MacLennan is an early champion:

Provided that Canada continues to exist as a single nation, he may well be creating for himself a special status. I suspect that the day will come when Hugh MacLennan is considered to occupy a position much like that of Mark Twain in the United States, as the prime mover in the emergence of a distinctive Canadian literature.

Hubert Aquin, Jacques Godbout, and Claude Jasmin are moving Canadian fiction in French towards this theme.

These statements are not true. MacLennan has made important contributions to Canadian literature. But he is not the first author of Canadian fiction in English to show "some awareness of fundamental aspects and attitudes of both language groups in Canada". Aquin, Godbout, and Jasmin have presented in their novels important contemporary views on the province of Quebec and its future in Canada. But they have not invented this theme in Canadian fiction in French. The theme of English-French relations in Canada is not an emerging theme in Canadian fiction in either English or French. It has been present in Canadian fiction from its beginning. The main purpose of this article is to discuss some contributions made to this theme by some early writers and to compare some characteristics of their handling of the theme with its treatment by more recent Canadian writers.

THE FIRST NORTH AMERICAN NOVEL, Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* (1769), introduces the theme of English-French

relations in Canada. In this epistolary novel, the chief characters living in Canada are British men and women associated in some way with the military personnel occupying New France as a result of the English conquest. They are all interested to some extent in the French-Canadians and in their role in English Canada. Arabella Fermor, the coquette of the story, writes to a friend in London that she has been "rambling about amongst the peasants, and asking them a thousand questions"; she reports:

The Canadians live a good deal like the ancient patriarchs; the lands were originally settled by the troops, every officer became a seigneur, or lord of the manor, every soldier took lands under his commander; but, as avarice is natural to mankind, the soldiers took a great deal more than they could cultivate, by way of providing for a family: which is the reason so much land is now waste in the finest part of the province: those who had children, and in general they have a great number, portioned out their lands amongst them as they married, and lived in the midst of a little world of their descendants.

Her father, William Fermor, writes a series of letters about "the Canadians" and advocates ways of reforming them into loyal "British subjects". One method strikes a particularly familiar note: "It were indeed, my Lord, to be wished that we had here schools, at the expence of the public, to teach English to the rising generation: nothing is a stronger tie of brotherhood and affection, a greater cement of union, than speaking one common language". The chief male character, Edward Rivers, meets some Canadians in Montreal and briefs his sister on them:

tho' I have not seen many beauties, yet in general the women are handsome; their manner is easy and obliging, they make the most of their charms by their vivacity, and I certainly cannot be displeas'd with their extreme partiality for the English officers; their own men, who indeed are not very attractive, have not the least chance for any share in their good graces.

We may not like some of these ideas, but we must admit that Mrs. Brooke is aware of some "aspects and attitudes of both language groups in Canada".

It might be argued that neither Mrs. Brooke, an English lady who only lived in Canada from 1763 to 1768, when her husband was chaplain of the garrison in Quebec City, nor *The History of Emily Montague*, which was first published in England, belongs to Canadian fiction. Many stories, however, written about Canada in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries were written by English, American, and French writers who at most lived only for a short time in Canada.



One of the recurrent themes in this fiction was English-French relations in Canada. In Ann Eliza Schuyler Bleecker's *The History of Maria Kittle* (1781), Mrs. Bratt, who has been captured by Indians in New York and delivered to the French in Montreal, announces at a tea party that her reception in Montreal has made her "reject . . . all prejudices of education. From my infancy have I been taught that the French were a cruel perfidious enemy, but I have found them quite the reverse". Although much of Mrs. Bleecker's information about Canada and Montreal is inaccurate, this American writer does present the latter as a place where "prejudices of education", particularly those about national differences, can be overcome. On the other hand, in Henri-Émile Chevalier's *Poignet d'acier* (1863), M. Villefranche, lying on his death bed, makes his grandchildren swear to continue the revenge he already has wreaked for 53 years on the English: "Et pourtant, moi, je n'ai jamais pardonné . . . je ne puis pardonner . . . aux Anglais . . . Ah! le froid me gagne . . . ta main sur mon cœur, Alfred . . . la vôtre, Victorine . . . Adieu, mes enfants . . . Adieu . . . Vivez pour arracher le Canada à l'odieuse tyrannie anglaise!" Chevalier, a Frenchman who lived in Montreal from 1853 to 1860, wrote a series of *Drames de l'Amérique du Nord* featuring the revenge of M. Villefranche, a Montreal lawyer whose wife or daughter<sup>3</sup> had been seduced by an English officer.

Most stories published about Canada in the nineteenth century were written by Canadians; that is, people who were born and/or brought up in Canada or who made Canada their permanent home. Some of these writers, however, either left Canada as adults and pursued their literary careers elsewhere or, living in Canada, published their works abroad. Thus, there is a group of stories written primarily for a non-Canadian reading public. Even in these stories English-French relations in Canada are discussed. *A Comedy of Terrors* (1873), written by James De Mille, a Nova Scotian who taught at Acadia and Dalhousie and produced a large number of stories for American publishers, comments on this theme. Set in Canada and abroad in 1870, *A Comedy of Terrors* describes the courtship of two English ladies by two Americans. These love affairs begin in Montreal where Mrs. Georgie Lovell is pursued by Seth Grimes and where Miss Maud Heathcote is duelled over by Paul Carrol and the Count du Potiron, a Frenchman. Although the setting of Montreal is not particularized — De Mille implies at one point that it is an American city — the grouping of the characters in Montreal for their initial meeting suggests the author's awareness of the bilingual and multinational character of the city. The love triangle developed among Maud, Paul, and the Count; the victory over the Count both in the duel and in

love designed for Paul; and the name Potiron, a bilingual pun (pumpkin and pot/iron) given to the Count: all imply De Mille's awareness of cultural tensions in Montreal and his conviction of the superiority of the English and the Americans to the French.

One of the first short stories published in Canada was John Howard Willis' "The Fairy Harp" (1824).<sup>4</sup> A very simple tale strongly influenced by Gothic motifs, its subject is music heard by a platoon of soldiers encamped on "the Lower-Canada frontier" during the War of 1812-1814. Almost every night they hear strange music coming from a nearby valley. When they cannot discover its source, the French-Canadians in the party call it "la harpe de la fée"; the Indians think it is the spirit of the Manitou. The mystery is partly resolved in 1815 when the narrator, an English soldier stationed in Montreal, goes on a hunting trip with an Indian chief from Caughnawaga to the same area where he has previously been encamped. Remembering the music, he enters the valley and discovers in a clearing a deserted log cottage. Inside it are the "mouldering remains" of books and elegant women's clothes. Beside it is a grave. Although the narrator never solves the mystery of the lady, the source of the music is explained.

There are several Canadian motifs in "The Fairy Harp", but the most relevant for the theme of English-French relations in Canada is Willis' indication of the different reactions of the French-Canadian and English soldiers to the music. The former dub it "la harpe de la fée", and accept it as magic. The narrator, representing the latter, seeks to find a natural cause for it and, through an enterprising act, finally solves the mystery of the music. Willis does not imply that these different attitudes are sources of conflict: all the soldiers are fighting together against the Americans; the English soldier gives the music the same name, although anglicized, as the French-Canadians. But he does suggest his awareness of a fundamental difference in emotional response to the unseen between the French-Canadians and the English.

Another early short story published in Canada is Pierre Georges Boucher de Boucherville's "La Tour de Trafalgar" (1835). Like "The Fairy Harp" it is strongly influenced by motifs of popular non-Canadian literature, but it too comments on English-French relations in Canada. "La Tour de Trafalgar" describes the adventures of a hunter who becomes lost and spends a day and a night on Mount Royal. During the night he takes shelter in a tower. While there, he sees blood on the wall and a hand in the air. Frightened by these apparitions, he leaves the tower and continues his search for a way down the mountain. Early in the morning, he finds a cabin and asks its inhabitant for food. The man re-

fuses to give the hunter food, but he does read him a story from a worn manuscript. The story concerns the double murder of Léocadie and Joseph, two Montrealers, at the tower many years before. Léocadie, in love with Joseph, is courted by a handsome stranger. When Léocadie spurns him for Joseph, the stranger murders them both one day when they are in the tower. Having achieved his revenge, he disappears, presumably to the cabin on the mountain.

Several motifs in "La Tour de Trafalgar" are relevant to the theme of English-French relations in Canada. The two murders in the tower, the past cruelty of the stranger, and his present rudeness are connected through the title both to Nelson's victory over the French at Trafalgar and to the monuments erected in Montreal to commemorate that victory. Thus, de Boucherville, like Willis, shows his awareness "of both language groups in Canada". Unlike Willis, however, he seems to insist on the destructiveness of the English both in Europe and in Canada and in the past and present. It is interesting to note that the story was published only two years before the outbreak of the Rebellion of 1837 and that de Boucherville, a Montreal lawyer, went into voluntary exile in Louisiana from 1837 to 1850 because of the part he had played as a *Patriote*. In the light of his political activity, "La Tour de Trafalgar" might be read as a thinly-disguised warning by de Boucherville to his compatriots that English-French relations in Canada were disintegrating once again into violence.

IN THE YEARS FOLLOWING THE 1830's, the Rebellion became a popular subject for writers of fiction. Frequently they used it to explore English-French relations in Canada. Some of the earliest stories with this subject and theme were published in the *Literary Garland* (1838-1851), itself partly an attempt by John Lovell, its publisher, to increase Canadian "prosperity"<sup>5</sup> by encouraging tolerance among English-Canadians for the French-Canadian *Patriotes*. The most significant stories about the Rebellion, however, appeared later in the century. These include Jean-Talon Lesperance's "Rosalba; or, Faithful to Two Loves" (1870)<sup>6</sup> and François-Benjamin Singer's *Souvenirs d'un exilé canadien* (1871).

When "Rosalba; or, Faithful to Two Loves" opens, two friends, an American and a Canadian, are discussing Canadian life, particularly the French-Canadians and the Rebellion. The Canadian eventually gives the American a manuscript to read about this event. The manuscript, "Rosalba", takes place over several years.

It opens on April 5, 1837, when the ice is breaking up on the St. Lawrence. Rosalba Varny, a wealthy farmer's daughter, who lives near Montreal, goes down to the river, hears a cry for help, launches a boat, and rescues a man from drowning. The man is Walter Phipps, a wealthy English-Canadian merchant from Montreal. By the time he leaves the Varny's farm for the city, Phipps has fallen in love with Rosalba, but she is already unofficially engaged to Edgar Martin, a French-Canadian lawyer educated in Montreal who is practising in a nearby village. In August, 1837, they are about to announce their official engagement when M. Varny demands that it be delayed because of Edgar's activities with the *Patriotes*. In a dramatic scene, M. Varny reveals that he is a "bureaucrat" and supports the government.

The story then switches to events during and after the Rebellion. In November, 1837, Edgar joins the rebel forces at St. Denis and St. Charles. When they are defeated, he tries to flee to Montreal, but he is warned by friends to go to the United States. On the way he is captured near Lacolle by Phipps, who is serving with the government troops. Phipps, however, remembering that Edgar is Rosalba's fiancé, helps him escape. Eventually, Edgar goes to France. Rosalba, obeying her father, refuses to join him. When her father dies, she and her mother move to a small cottage near Montreal. In 1849 Walter Phipps is on business at the docks in Montreal when he hears that one of the people on a newly-arrived immigrant ship is a *Patriote* coming home to die. He goes to see the *Patriote* and recognizes Edgar. Phipps immediately takes him to the Hôtel-Dieu, sends for a doctor, and goes for Rosalba. She and Edgar are married just before he dies. In 1852, when Rosalba's cottage burns down, Phipps finally proposes to her. They marry, move to a splendid home "at the foot of the mountain", and have one son. In 1867 they are still living in Montreal. At the end of the story, the Canadian promises to introduce the American to them.

Thus, in "Rosalba", Lesperance not only shows his awareness of "fundamental aspects and attitudes" of both English-Canadians and French-Canadians, but he also makes several points about their relationship. He shows that strife in Canada is not just between different cultural groups. Varny rejects Edgar; Phipps helps him. He demonstrates, however, that when violence between cultural groups does occur, it leads to loneliness, exile, and death. Rosalba, Walter, and Edgar all remain unmarried for several years; Edgar's exile helps bring on his sickness and, ultimately, his early death. He suggests that French Canada can achieve both wealth and happiness in a union with English Canada. Rosalba finds both in her

marriage to Walter. Finally, he implies that this union is the most suitable way to preserve the traditions of French Canada. The Phipps' son is named Edgar Martin.

Jean-Talon Lesperance, born in the United States of French-Canadian parents, educated there and in France, and at the time of the publication of "Rosalba", living permanently in Canada, appears hopeful, then, that the "romance" of French Canada can be preserved in a union between French- and English-Canadians. François-Benjamin Singer, a French-Canadian notary, seems less optimistic. In *Souvenirs d'un exilé canadien*, the *Canadien*, Hamelin, dies sorrowing over his exile from his native land. But this land is presented as a place where English-Canadians, chiefly in Montreal, rob, betray, and torture French-Canadians. They deprive them of their language, religion, and customs; they encourage them to rebel; and they destroy them when they do. Hamelin's father is ruined by an architect, "un anglais du nom d'Henderson", who comes from Montreal to help M. Hamelin construct a building on his farm. Hamelin himself has been imprisoned in Montreal for his activity as a *Patriote* in the Rebellion of 1837, found guilty of murdering an English officer, although he is innocent of the act, and condemned to death. Hamelin, however, has escaped from prison and run away to Chile. His final advice to Canadians is that they should continue to fight for a nation which is French-speaking, Catholic, and French in tradition, but eschew open, armed rebellion. This message is written on his tombstone: "O, mes bien-aimés compatriotes, fuyez les séditions; soutenez vos droits, cela est juste, mais soutenez-les par des moyens qui ne vous mettent pas dans la triste alternative de choisir entre la mort et l'exil. . . . Fuyez donc la révolte, car la rébellion conduit à l'exil ou à l'échafaud".

*Souvenirs d'un exilé canadien* concentrates mostly on the more melodramatic events of Hamelin's life and death in Chile. Nevertheless, the cause of his exile and the message on his tombstone are worth noting. In the Rebellion Hamelin has been both a criminal and a scapegoat. He has been guilty of sedition. He has been wrongly accused and convicted of murder. And he has been punished by exile. Thus, Singer presents him as a man whose advice is based on experiences of violence, injustice, and loneliness. His message is that while French-Canadians must preserve their culture, they must choose peaceful methods. The circumstances which led to a choice between the "scaffold" and "exile" — Hamelin's in 1837 — must never again be created. *Souvenirs d'un exilé canadien* seems to warn French-Canadians against both the English and themselves.

SOME WRITERS chose to discuss English-French relations in Canada in stories about the Rebellion of 1837. Others used earlier events in Canadian history to explore this theme. Of these writers of fiction set in Canada before 1800, Mrs. Rosanna Eleanor Mullins Leprohon, the Montreal-born daughter of an Irish immigrant and the wife of a French-Canadian doctor, is one of the more significant. Her historical novel *Antoinette de Mirecourt* opens in "November . . . in the year 176-" and ends about two years later. Antoinette, the beautiful 17 year-old daughter of the *seigneur* of Mirecourt, has just arrived in Montreal to spend some time with her cousin, Lucille D'Aulnay, and her husband, another aristocratic, wealthy French-Canadian. The purpose of the visit is to introduce Antoinette to Montreal society, which, while aristocratic and military, is now, on the male side at least, mostly British and Protestant. Antoinette's introduction to society is a resounding success. She is admired by all, courted by several, and loved by two English officers, Colonel Evelyn and Major Audley Sternfield. When her father hears of her success, however, he fears that she will be lured into a hasty, unsuitable marriage. Thus, he informs her that she must marry Louis Beauchesne, a childhood friend. Antoinette, encouraged by Lucille, refuses to obey her father and secretly marries Audley in a Protestant ceremony.

The result of this marriage is many sorrows. Audley is a passionate, moody man who has married Antoinette partly because she is a rich heiress. Antoinette regrets her disobedience of her father, her apostasy in marrying outside the true faith, and her choice of husband. She discovers that she is really in love with the reserved Colonel Evelyn. These sorrows are brought to a climax when Audley and Louis meet in a duel. Audley is mortally wounded. Antoinette, told this by Louis, who is about to escape to France, rushes to the Major's quarters and announces that she is his wife. Antoinette is thus involved in a great scandal. But Audley dies; Antoinette is too ill to know of the gossip about her; the revelation of her marriage and widowhood allows Colonel Evelyn to forgive her for her previous mysterious attitude to him and to marry her a year after these events.

In *Antoinette de Mirecourt* Mrs. Leprohon uses several melodramatic motifs of popular nineteenth-century fiction. Like many of her contemporaries who used historical settings, she includes quotations from historical works to provide background material. But she is skilful at character analysis and dialogue. And she presents much of the history through character and action. The result is that *Antoinette de Mirecourt* is both a good novel and an important contribution to a study of English-French relations in Canada.

In the opening chapter, Mrs. Leprohon sets the stage, introduces the characters, begins the action, and announces the main theme of her novel in a manner reminiscent of the comedy of manners. In the first paragraph the time, the setting, and the theme of the story are introduced. Their reality is enhanced by precise descriptive details and two metonymies: "The feeble sun of November, that most unpleasant month in our Canadian year, was streaming down on the narrow streets and irregular buildings of Montreal, such as it existed in the year 176-, some short time after the royal standard of England had replaced the fleur-de-lys of France". The concreteness of the setting is further developed in the second paragraph where Mrs. Leprohon focusses on the D'Aulnay's house and chooses details about it that create the vivid image of "unmistakable wealth and refinement" for which she is striving. In the next three paragraphs more *objets d'art* are mentioned to introduce M. D'Aulnay, to explain his motives for staying in New France after his "country has passed under a foreign rule", and to describe one method of dealing with English-French relations: living among, but in isolation from, the "proud conquerors":

In vain some fiery spirits indignantly asked him how he could brook the arrogance of the proud conquerors who had landed on their shores? how he could endure to meet, wherever eye or footstep turned, the scarlet uniforms of the epauletted heroes who now governed his native land in King George's name. To their indignant remonstrances he sadly but calmly rejoined he should not see much of them, for he intended establishing himself henceforth permanently in his beloved library, and going abroad as little as possible.

The conversation which comprises the rest of Chapter One repeats the theme of English-French relations and enunciates another attitude to them. Lucille has decided to entertain the British. She announces to her husband that she proposes to end the "cloister-like seclusion" in which they have been "vegetating" because of the defeat of "Lévis and his gallant epaulettes" and re-enter society.

In the rest of the story, the theme is further developed, various attitudes to it are explored, and their wisdom is examined. The most extreme anti-English attitude is held by Antoinette's father, Arthur de Mirecourt. Having spent some time in "that gay sunny land of France, that polished brilliant Paris", he returned to his native country, "fonder and more devoted to it than when he had left its shores". Living a quiet, retired life in rural New France, he had a great determination to retain that life both for himself and his daughter. He tells Antoinette that he will never allow "any secret love-engagement with those who are aliens alike to our race, creed, and tongue". When Arthur comes to Montreal, a hint

that Antoinette might be involved with an Englishman throws him into a violent rage:

"Listen to me, daughter Antoinette, and you, my too officious niece, bear witness," he resumed, after a short pause, which had been merely a lull in the tempest. "I must be plain, explicit, with you both. I forbid you, child, to have any intercourse, beyond that of distant courtesy, with the men I have mentioned; and if you have entangled yourself in any disgraceful flirtation or attachment, break it off at once, under penalty of being disowned and disinherited."

The price of this attitude is made clear in the story. Antoinette's knowledge that her father will not allow her to marry Audley is one reason for her hasty and secret marriage to him. Her father's threat to disinherit her prolongs the secrecy of the marriage. Her suffering over her disobedience to her father is one cause of her serious illness. While by the end of the novel, de Mirecourt has learned that not all Englishmen are villains, and has allowed his daughter to marry one, the cost of this lesson has been high. Mrs. Leprohon thus rejects the idea that French-Canadians can preserve easily or successfully a Roman Catholic, French-Canadian life in complete isolation from English-Canadians.

De Mirecourt, unlike the other French-Canadians, almost succeeds in his isolation by remaining on his estate and by making only quick visits to Montreal and Quebec. The other minor characters, Louis Beauchesne, Lucille, and M. D'Aulnay, have to come in contact with the English in Montreal. Louis, sharing de Mirecourt's views, is prompted to duel with Audley. The price he pays for this act is permanent exile from Canada. Lucille, determined to have warm relations with the English, entertains them, encourages Antoinette to marry Audley, and announces that her father's attitude is a "mere prejudice". The remorse she feels when the marriage is so unhappy teaches her that her flippant acceptance of the new order is dangerous and impious. Even M. D'Aulnay has to learn that his way of handling the new government is potentially disastrous, for his disinterest in the affairs of Antoinette and Audley is partly responsible for their "secret sorrows". Thus, Mrs. Leprohon implies that all these attitudes are imperfect, limited responses.

In *Antoinette de Mirecourt*, only two English characters, Audley and Colonel Evelyn, are fully developed. Of the two, the less sympathetic is Audley. Although he is partly sincere in his love of Antoinette, he is presented chiefly as a penniless, proud gambler and flirt who is interested mostly in marrying and exploiting a rich heiress. His desire for money and his treatment of Antoinette suggest that he is materialistic and sensuous and that he has no spiritual values. Although he



dies "peacefully", Mrs. Leprohon carefully avoids an explicit statement about his acceptance of God and the afterlife. The manner in which his death is described suggests, in fact, that she felt it a fitting end for a man so lacking in respect for people from a different cultural background.

While there are similarities between Audley and Evelyn, the latter has money, family connections, and a latent Roman Catholic faith which allow him finally to accept and to be accepted by the French-Canadians. Although Evelyn's Catholicism permits Mrs. Leprohon to duck religious differences between the two groups, his marriage to Antoinette is clearly meant to symbolize the union of the old and the new orders in Canada and the emergence of a new society. When Antoinette marries the Colonel, she has openly confessed her sinful marriage, been purged of her evil through her illness, and been forgiven by her father and her church. In her marriage to Evelyn, she unites this heritage to his. The new society, bilingual and binational — if not interdenominational — is one of happiness and "unclouded domestic felicity". Mrs. Leprohon, then, after exploring English-French relations in Canada from several points of view and after canvassing various solutions to their problems, opts at least emotionally for a bicultural Canada. She claims, moreover, that this choice is "essentially Canadian".

IT IS EVIDENT, then, that the theme of English-French relations in Canada does not emerge with the works of Hugh MacLennan in English or those of Aquin, Godbout, and Jasmin in French, but that it is a seminal theme in Canadian fiction in both languages. It begins in the first novel about Canada. It continues in the fiction about this country published in the nineteenth century and written by both non-Canadian and Canadian authors. It recurs today in Canadian fiction. Thus, while it is not the only theme which makes this fiction "essentially Canadian", it does help to distinguish Canadian fiction from that of other countries. There are, moreover, similarities in the way the theme is handled by the writers.

In the stories the theme of English-French relations in Canada is often connected with other dominant themes in Canadian fiction. One of these is Canadian-American relations. In "Rosalba; or, Faithful to Two Loves", the Canadian makes his longest explanations about English-French relations in Canada to an American who has come to "Montreal purposely to study the history and condition of the country"; Edgar flees to the United States to avoid arrest. In *Ethel et le terroriste*, Paul escapes for the same reason to New York City. In *Return of*

*the Sphinx*, Alan Ainslie goes into politics and to the Ministry of Cultural Affairs partly because of his anger at Americans exploiting Canada. In *Killing Ground*, it is American intervention in the Canadian Civil War that forces the English-Canadian federalists and the French-Canadian separatists to work together again to prevent "a complete American takeover".

While the settings of the stories vary, the locale of Montreal is used in some way in them all. *Antoinette de Mirecourt* is set chiefly in Montreal. In *Souvenirs d'un exilé canadien*, Hamelin ponders events which occurred in Montreal. Often these events are crucial for the characters and their country. In *Ethel et le terroriste*, the lives of Paul and Ethel become extremely complicated because of Paul's terrorist activities in Montreal; the bomb-throwing and killing force him to continue to work for the revolutionaries. Montreal, finally, is often the place where the English-Canadians and the French-Canadians have the most sustained relations with each other. In Lesperance's story, Walter and Rosalba marry and live "happily ever after" in Montreal.

Two stylistic devices help to create the reality of bilingualism in this fiction and to suggest the complexity and confusion of English-French relations in Canada. One is the habit of mixing English and French. Mrs. Leprohon uses French expressions like *mon cher* in *Antoinette de Mirecourt*. Godbout includes such sentences as "Je ne suis pas une raciste moi, mais les seuls nègres que j'ai connus étaient porteurs à bord des trains, *I can't get upset like you*". The other is the terminology used to describe the national origins of the characters. The narrator of "Rosalba" calls the French-Canadians both "French Canadians" and "Canadians". The English-Canadians are usually called *les Anglais* in the stories in French, even though the term is often inaccurate. The narrator of *Le Couteau sur la table* considers Patricia *une Anglaise*, although her father was a Czechoslovakian Jew, her mother Irish. It is difficult to say whether the plethora of terms used to differentiate Canadians and the tendency of one group of Canadians to categorize another in simplified national terms is a result of, or a cause for, the ambivalent relations between English-Canadians and French-Canadians that the fables of the fiction reveal.

Actual political events frequently help to shape their fables. The fall of New France to the English is the starting point of Mrs. Leprohon's *Antoinette de Mirecourt*. The writing of *Ethel et le terroriste* was, according to Jasmin, "one manifestation of the acute examination of conscience which seized French Canada in the spring of 1963 . . . when a terrorist bomb exploded in a Canadian military recruiting centre in Montreal, killing the night watchman". The last chapter of

Godbout's *Le Couteau sur la table* is mostly taken up with two reports, one in English, one in French, of this same action.

One of these events, the Rebellion of 1837, links closely some of the nineteenth- and twentieth-century stories. Chevalier's character, Villefranche, pursuing his revenge against the English, becomes a leader in the *Fils de la liberté*. Lesperance weaves "Rosalba" around events related to the 1837 crisis. In one of the most moving passages in Aquin's *Prochain épisode*, the narrator dreams of a house on the Nation river and links his crisis and that of present-day Quebec with the battle of Saint-Eustache and Papineau. In *Killing Ground*, the headquarters of the "P.D.Q." at the beginning of the Civil War is the Seignior Club, "a site . . . of great historical significance" for the separatists since "it was the home of Louis Joseph Papineau".

Violence, death, guilt, and loss are often the result of both group and individual confrontations between English-Canadians and French-Canadians. In *Antoinette de Mirecourt* Louis duels with Audley, kills him, rushes to Antoinette to confess, and leaves for exile in France. In *Ethel et le terroriste* Paul throws the bomb, escapes to New York, and suffers guilt pangs about the death and homesickness for Canada. These feelings are often associated with a reluctance to kill and a recognition of brotherhood. In "Rosalba", Walter, fighting with the government against the rebels, spares Edgar's life and later helps him marry Rosalba. In *Prochain épisode* the narrator hesitates to murder Heutz when Heutz repeats the narrator's alibi to him. Although he does not believe Heutz, the narrator finds himself identifying with him.

The same ambivalent feelings that exist between English-Canadians and French-Canadians are shown in another frequently used motif: a love affair. Mrs. Brooke, Chevalier, De Mille, de Boucherville, Lesperance, Mrs. Leprohon, MacLennan, Aquin, Godbout, Jasmin, and Portal: all use a version of this motif. Sometimes deception and misunderstanding are involved. Mme Des Roches, misinterpreting Rivers' sensitivity for sentiment, is partly tricked into loving him in *The History of Emily Montague*. In *Prochain épisode* Aquin suggests that K, the narrator's blonde mistress, is also Heutz's and that she has betrayed the narrator to him. Even in *Antoinette de Mirecourt*, which is most optimistic about a union between the two cultures. Antoinette is tricked by Sternfield into a secret marriage and betrayed by him, when he courts other women. Yet the characters continue to be fascinated by members of the other group. Antoinette, despite her unhappy marriage to one Englishman, marries another. In *Le Couteau sur la table*, the narrator, despite Patricia's affair with the rich *Anglais* from West-

mount and his own affair with Madeleine, continues to love Patricia and later returns to her, although he admits, "je ne suis pas chez moi ici" and he says, "le couteau restera sur la table de la cuisine".

"The knife on the table": this image summarizes the theme of English-French relations in Canada as it is presented in Canadian fiction from its beginning to the present day. These stories reveal that there is a knife, composed of real acts of violence, between English-Canadians and French-Canadians. They reveal that the knife has been used periodically to cut more wounds on the bodies, minds, and souls of members of both groups. But they also reveal that the wounds are the kind that one member of a family inflicts on another. For the image of a knife on a table implies a house shared by people in a domestic relationship with each other. Wounds which result from the cut-and-thrust of "domestic felicity" are often more damaging, it is true, than injuries from mechanical objects or foreign intrusions. On the other hand, a family breakdown after 200 years would probably be even more destructive. Perhaps, then, instead of wondering if we should "let Quebec go" or "free Quebec from the English", we should examine more closely the rules of this family game which we have played as a nation for such a long time, expose them, as some Canadian writers have traditionally done, and change them, if we choose, not with a knife but with a pen.

#### FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> "The Fourth Separation" has since been reprinted with only a few changes as a chapter in Ronald Sutherland's *Second Image*, 1971.
- <sup>2</sup> Although he speaks of "literature", Sutherland's examples are drawn from fiction.
- <sup>3</sup> The reason for M. Villefranche's hatred of the English differs in the novels where he is the chief character. In *Poignet d'acier*, his hatred is attributed to the fact that his daughter has been seduced by an English officer. In *Les Derniers Iroquois* the woman seduced is Villefranche's wife.
- <sup>4</sup> John Howard Willis, "The Fair Harp" *Canadian Review and Literary and Historical Journal*, 1, 2 (December (1824), 3 11-348.
- <sup>5</sup> Mary Markham Brown, *An Index to the Literary Garland* (Toronto: Bibliographical Society of Canada, 1962), iii.
- <sup>6</sup> Jean-Talon Lesperance, "Rosalba; or, Faithful to Two Loves", *Canadian Illustrated News*, 1, 20 (March 19, 1870) — 1, 24 (April 16, 1870).

# FRANCES BROOKE'S CHEQUERED GARDENS

*William H. New*

TWO-THIRDS OF THE WAY through Voltaire's *Candide*, the naïve Candide and his cynical but ostensibly realistic companion Martin learn about the Parisian stage from

a little abbé from Périgord, one of those eager people, always alert, always obliging, brazen, fawning, complaisant, who lie in wait for strangers passing through, tell them the history of the town's scandals, and offer them pleasures at any price. . . .

"Sir, how many plays do you have in France?" said Candide to the abbé, who replied: "Five or six thousand."

"That's a lot," said Candide. "How many of them are good?"

"Fifteen or sixteen," replied the other.

"That's a lot," said Martin.

The sardonic view of literary values ought frequently to restrain our enthusiasms more than it does, and force us to temper mercy with a little justice when we set out to assess a work. Deciding what criteria to use in the process, however, is even more of a problem than agreeing that assessment is necessary in the first place. It is a problem that is particularly difficult with a provincial literature, where the temptation to extol regional fidelity and verbal felicity as automatic indications of profound talent is matched only by the insistence on a work's "historical importance" — a convenient escape from the harsh judgments one might otherwise have to make. In Canada, the latter approach has the fortuitous by-product of providing us with the history we seem to be constantly in search of and thus offering glimpses of the national attitudes we have since — perhaps unconsciously — come to accept. To re-examine Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily*

*Montague* (the "first" Canadian novel, dated 1769) is not only to catch at some of those attitudes but also to look at the way they are presented, to grapple with the potentially disparate scenes, events, and characters, and with the words themselves, in order to comprehend the effect that, taken together, they can exert.

As Voltaire's character Martin should remind us, being the "first" of a kind is not a literary virtue, and Mrs. Brooke's epistolary novel suffers from a certain repetitiveness of style and event that no amount of exegesis can excuse. We are told so often how "lively" and "tender" things are that the adjectives lose their meaning, for example, and the characters of Emily Montague herself, and of her patient wooer Ed Rivers, are so pallid and priggish as to be almost indistinguishable. Yet they, like the other characters — Emily's long-lost father Col. Wilmott, her friend Bell Fermor, Bell's father and *her* erratic suitor Fitzgerald; Ed's sister Lucy and his rakish friend Jack Temple; Sir George Clayton (Emily's unacceptable fiancé) and Ed's enigmatic Canadian confidante, Mme. des Roches — fit into a definite pattern in which some repetition is good. The three sets of lovers, with two threats to happiness and two parents, are arranged with a neat sense of balance that follows faithfully the eighteenth century taste for symmetry. As Carl Klinck points out in his introduction to the New Canadian Library edition of the novel, it also displays the aphoristic wit and the analysis of sentiment that make it characteristic of its time, and it is, in other words, an English book.

To what extent it is Canadian, too, then, is a moot point. But if we look further we see that though the pattern is English, much of the energy in the book derives from the author's contact with Quebec during the period 1763-1768, and that, as a result, there is a tension established between nature and society that is never wholly resolved. On the surface Quebec is simply an exotic setting for an English comedy of manners, which Lionel Stevenson dismisses in a left-handed compliment as being quaint, and which B. G. McCarthy values because scenic description, up to this point, had been rare in English fiction. Both estimates seem to me to miss the point: that the setting, with all its resonances, is built into the book's use of imagery, therefore attached to the structure, and therefore used deliberately to establish the tension through which the author conveys her ideas. For as one ought to expect from a character as forceful as Mrs. Brooke appears in the Murray Papers to have been, she does have ideas, and her novel is no mere sentimental exercise. Drawing some of her characters' expectations from the fashionable ideas of Pope and Rousseau, she (and her mouthpiece Bell Fermor) are more at home in the brittle ironies of Voltaire's *Candide*, which they cannot resolve and so must instead contend with as knowledgeably as they can. That

Mrs. Brooke's knowledge also allows her to take *Candide* subtly to task would probably be an added irony for the coterie in which she moved.

Voltaire's satire, published in 1759, would be readily available to Frances Brooke, who read French fluently, and she would no doubt respond to the view of the Seven Years' War that he expresses in it. At the beginning of Chapter 23, *Candide* and his friend are aboard a ship in the English channel:

"You know England; are they as mad there as in France?"

"It's another kind of madness," said Martin. "You know that these two nations are at war over a few acres of snow out around Canada, and that they are spending on that war much more than all of Canada is worth."

The image stuck in the European imagination, and *quelques arpents de neige* (glossed up with the occasional trapper, Mountie, or *coureur-de-bois*) is what Canada has been ever since. For Mrs. Brooke's characters, actually experiencing the Canadian winter, however, the snow is only a partial truth. Their descriptions of climate and scenery form part of the author's distinction between illusion and reality and thus (while giving the novel all the flavour of the *Commonplace Book*) contribute to its dramatic conflict between the natural wilderness and civilization.

When Ed Rivers comes to Canada, he does so on half-pay with the anticipation of running an estate larger than any he might acquire in England. Sir George comes as a "civil but cold" social butterfly, directed by his mother as to the time he shall marry Emily. Emily is with chaperones at Montreal, Arabella with her father on a farm at Sillery (attached to the garrison), Fitzgerald is in the army, and Mme. des Roches, being Canadian and having land to sell to Ed, lives alone "in the wildest country on earth". The differences between England and Canada start to multiply; observed initially in the surface landscape, they are extended rapidly into social customs and, aphorism by aphorism, into the intellectual distinctions between romantic North America and ordered Augustan England. Ed's initial reaction to the country displays something of this:

My subjects indeed at present will be only bears and elks, but in time I hope to see the *human face divine* multiplying around me; and, in thus cultivating what is in the rudest state of nature, I shall taste one of the greatest of all pleasures, that of creation, and see order and beauty gradually rise from chaos.

When he adds shortly, "one grows tired of meer scenery", the author advises us almost directly that his attachment to the country — and by extension to the

aptly-named Mme. des Roches — will be short-lived. His own name, Rivers, suggests the paradox of his stance; he seems part of the scenery, after all. But when Arabella's father later writes a descriptive commentary of the breakup of ice on the St. Lawrence, he indirectly clarifies Ed's relationship with Canada. Frances Brooke uses the imagery to tie landscape with character once more. William Fermor had anticipated, he says, that the break-up would be unexceptional, a melting by degree that would go largely unnoticed: "But I found *the great river*, as the savages with much propriety call it, maintain its dignity . . . and assert its superiority over those petty streams which we honour with the names of rivers in England." The neat distinction is one which only Bell really appreciates.

She, too, arrives with certain built-in expectations and prejudices, and as the coquette with the literary name she epitomizes many of the socially acceptable attitudes of her day. Behind her prejudices lies an independence of judgment, however, and behind her flirtatiousness a cool and reasoned assessment of the people she meets. When, after being in Canada, she changes her mind about it, it is that apprehension we should therefore try to gauge. As Bell is by far the liveliest character in the book anyway, the style inevitably focusses attention on her rather than on Ed or Emily, but this seems to be part of the author's intent. Convention will solve all discord for Emily, while Bell is more shrewd; the Nature that she recognizes in Canada forces her to re-examine the conventions she starts with. When we first hear from Bell, that is, she is describing Chaudière Rapids and Montmorenci Falls in conventional terms, which she employs with fluent energy and apparent easiness of mind:

The former [speaking of Chaudière] is a prodigious sheet of water, rushing over the wildest rocks, and forming a scene grotesque, irregular, astonishing: the latter, less wild, less irregular, but more pleasing and more majestic, falls from an immense height, down the side of a romantic mountain, into the river St. Lawrence, opposite the most smiling part of the island of Orleans, to the cultivated charms of which it forms the most striking and agreeable contrast.

The important distinction here is that between irregularity and contrast. Contrast, by implying balance, fits into the conventional scheme of things and into Bell's scale of values, whereas an irregular landscape, being unpredictable, is at this stage unacceptable. As Bell herself admits, the conventional plan of the natural environment is "a little world of enchantment". It is one which in Canada the forcible realities of winter will soon alter.

To demonstrate her developing change of attitude, Frances Brooke then makes



Bell write several letters over the winter to Lucy Rivers, which seem at first simply to describe the weather and the land. The notations about the very cold temperatures and the freezing of the river are those of the acute observer, but gradually, by a sardonic competition between herself and the beavers as to who is the better judge of the climate, Bell comes to participate in the Nature that to this point she has only described. As long as she separates herself from Canada, it is merely "one undistinguishable waste of snow"; she is one then with Voltaire in the English Channel, judging from afar with trenchant fancy. But such division from the local landscape, as she finds out, does not mean she can retain the old conventions with comfort. The freezing of the river forces her to recognize the intellectual as well as the physical distance she has come. In November she writes:

I have been seeing the last ship go out of the port, Lucy; you have no notion what a melancholy sight it is: we are now left to ourselves, and shut up from all the world for the winter. . . .

Another note is introduced only when she reveals that being cut off from England does not mean being cut off from the landscape; she enjoys the carriage trips, which "fly along at the rate of twenty miles an hour", and late in February she confirms her change of mind. Returning to Montmorenci to view the Sugar Loaf and the partly frozen falls, she writes:

Those who have heard no more of a Canadian winter than what regards the intenseness of its cold, must suppose it a very joyless season; 'tis, I assure you, quite otherwise. . . .

The river ice that she thought severed her from beauty turns out to create its own kind, and she adds, "all together give a grandeur and variety to the scene, which almost rise to enchantment." But not quite. This time the scene stops short in the reality of the cold, which must be acknowledged and met. The new world can then be appreciated.

The difference in attitude that close acquaintance brings demands an appropriate change in action as well. In February Emily breaks off her engagement to Sir George Clayton (of which Bell has never approved), distinguishing civil coldness from the natural kind. And when in April Bell has heard from England that Lucy and Jack Temple have married, she writes with characteristic posturing:

Our beaux are terribly at a loss for similes: you have lillies of the valley for comparisons; we nothing but what with the idea of whiteness gives that of coldness too.

Underlying her whimsy is her new knowledge. She is as unsatisfied with conventional relationships among people as with conventional attitudes to the wilderness. The whole complex of ideas related to the landscape image is thus tied to love, or, looked at from another angle, the love story which provides the simple plot for the book can be seen as a vehicle to allow the author to explore her ideas about nature and society.

**P**ARALLELING THE REASSESSMENT of climate and landscape, the novel's examination of the "Noble Savage" concept also relates to the theme of love. Once again the conventional attitudes are put into the mouth of Ed Rivers:

If the Epicurean definition of happiness is just that it consists in indolence of body and tranquility of mind, the Indians of both sexes are the happiest people on earth; free from all care, they enjoy the present moment, forget the past, and are without solicitude for the future: in summer, stretch'd on the verdant turf, they sing, they laugh, they play, they relate stories of their ancient heroes to warm the youth to war; in winter, wrap'd in the furs which bounteous nature provides them, they dance, they feast, and despise the rigours of the season, at which the more effeminate Europeans tremble. . . .

Later, observing that the almost exterminated Hurons preserve their independence inside the European colony, he affirms of what he calls "his" savages: "other nations talk of liberty, they possess it". He quotes an Indian as saying "we are subjects to no prince; a savage is free all over the world", and he adds:

He spoke only truth; they are not only free as a people, but every individual is perfectly so. Lord of himself, at once subject and master, a savage knows no superior . . . ; 'tis the species, 'tis man, 'tis his equal he respects, without regarding the gaudy trappings, the accidental advantages, to which polished nations pay homage.

The distinction between the European system and the local one rests on the question of social status, the latent irony of the observation appearing when we place Ed's apparent respect of the classless society beside his motives and actions in the sphere of love. We have learned already not to expect either logic or depth from Ed — he grows tired of "meer scenery" — and true to form, when he is faced with the prospect of marrying Emily, he momentarily backs away, finding it impossible to marry her either in Canada, where he will have an estate but be

exiled, or in England, where he will have too small an estate to be permanently at leisure. His consciousness of class is built firmly into his sense of acceptable position, and his taste for classlessness seems in that context the casual whim of the uninvolved aristocrat rather than the zealous intent of the revolutionary.

His view is one which finds its analogue in Pope's *Essay on Man*, published over thirty years earlier. In the first epistle of that poem, Pope chides the proud, who presume to judge God and censure Nature, and in a passage of remarkable condescension contemplates the lot of the noble savage:

Lo, the poor Indian! whose untutored mind  
Sees God in clouds, or hears him in the wind;  
His soul, proud Science never taught to stray  
Far as the solar walk, or milky way;  
Yet simple Nature to his hope has given,  
Behind the cloud-topped hill, an humbler heaven;  
Some safer world in depth of woods embraced,  
Some happier island in the watery waste,  
Where slaves once more their native land behold,  
No fiends torment, no Christians thirst for gold.  
To Be, contents his natural desire,  
He asks no Angel's wing, no Seraph's fire;  
But thinks, admitted to that equal sky,  
His faithful dog shall bear him company.

The conclusion of the epistle affirms with absolute certainty:

All Nature is but Art, unknown to thee;  
All Chance, Direction, which thou canst not see;  
All Discord, Harmony not understood;  
All partial Evil, universal Good:  
And, spite of Pride, in erring Reason's spite,  
One truth is clear, **WHATEVER IS, IS RIGHT.**

And indeed, in the pleasure they take in order, balance, symmetry and decorum, Ed and Emily — and even Arabella, at first — accept that solution implicitly.

Bell's response is, admittedly, tinged with an intentional irony Ed is incapable of, as when she writes to Emily:

I believe I shall set about writing a system of ethics myself . . . rural, refined, and sentimental; rural by all means; for who does not know that virtue is a country gentlewoman? all the good mammas will tell you, there is no such being to be heard of in town.

But she is wholly genuine in her first estimation of the noble life of Indian women. Ed had written somewhat ponderously that

The sex we have so unjustly excluded from power in Europe have a great share in the Huron government . . . In the true sense of the word, *we* are the savages, who so impolitely deprive you of the common rights of citizenship, and leave you no power but . . . the resistless power of your charms.

Bell's reaction is lighter but equally admiring:

Absolutely, Lucy, I will marry a savage, and turn squaw . . . : never was any thing delightful as their lives; they talk of French husbands, but commend me to an Indian one, who lets his wife ramble five hundred miles, without asking where she is going.

In short order the illusion is overturned and an even more vigorous letter is sent off to Lucy Rivers:

I declare off at once; I will not be a squaw; I admire their talking of the liberty of savages; in the most essential point they are slaves: the mothers marry their children without ever consulting their inclinations, and they are obliged to submit to this foolish tyranny. Dear England! where liberty appears, not as here among these odious savages, wild and ferocious like themselves, led by the hand of the Graces. There is no true freedom anywhere else. They may talk of the privilege of chusing a chief; but what is that to the dear English privilege of chusing a husband?

That last utterance becomes structurally ironic when Frances Brooke develops the relationship between Emily and Sir George, for the privilege of English freedom is inherently denied by the loveless arrangement of marriage and by the set of social rules that makes it so uncomfortable for the arrangement to be changed. The question of freedom rapidly also acquires political overtones, especially in a novel concerning the English garrison in Quebec in the 1760's, and when Bell says "I think no politics worth attending to but those of the little commonwealth of woman", her words, rather than deny the issue, simply extend its force into a still larger sphere.

The independence of the Huron in the colony, in other words, is matched by the independence of the "Canadian" (a word reserved in this book entirely for the French community), and thus begin a number of parallels between the savages and the colonials, both of whom are closer to nature and so supposedly closer to virtue than the civilized British — which does not prevent the civilized

British, of course, from judging themselves still superior. Ed Rivers, writing from Montreal early on in the story, announces with a nice sense of contrast:

The peasants are ignorant, lazy, dirty, and stupid beyond all belief; but hospitable, courteous, civil; and, what is particularly agreeable, they leave their wives and daughters to do the honours of the house: in which obliging office they acquit themselves with an attention, which . . . must please every guest who has a soul inclin'd to be pleas'd. . . . Their conversation is lively and amusing; all the little knowledge of Canada is confined to the sex. . . .

The power of women in politics and love is thus reaffirmed in yet another quarter; furthermore, the ascription of knowledge only to the women underlines the importance of Arabella's viewpoint to the book and the importance that Frances Brooke attaches to intellectual as well as domestic freedom. The implicit and explicit attacks on Catholicism — and on the unnaturalness of the nunnery — combine the issues of women's freedom and moral virtue, and through the tacit suggestion that locking "knowledge" away in the convent may both weaken the colony and put power in a dangerous place, they reach into politics as well. William Fermor's interpretive commentary takes up the point again with Protestant astringency:

there is a striking resemblance between the manners of the Canadians and the savages. . . .

From all that I have observed, and heard of these people, it appears to me an undoubted fact, that the most civilized Indian nations are the most virtuous; a fact which makes directly against Rousseau's ideal system.

Indeed all systems make against, instead of leading to, the discovery of truth. . . .

That the savages have virtues, candour must own; but only a love of paradox can make any man assert they have more than polished nations. . . .

the Canadians . . . are simple and hospitable, yet extremely attentive to interest, where it does not interfere with that laziness which is their governing passion.

They are rather devout than virtuous; have religion without morality, and a sense of honour without very strict honesty.

Indeed I believe wherever superstition reigns, the moral sense is greatly weakened; the strongest inducement to the practice of morality is removed, when people are brought to believe that a few outward ceremonies will compensate for the want of virtue.

His point is strictly the religious one. Mrs. Brooke's goes further, for in jousting with ceremony she is taking on the whole social acceptance of symmetry and

decorous balance to see if it proves acceptable. It does not. Pope and Rousseau do not. The noble savage is not noblest when most savage, and as Rousseau's *Émile* (1762) suggests, it is difficult to know whether education should serve to make the learner more natural or more civilized.

Bell, committed to neither of these positions in exclusion of the other, rejects not the nature of the savage Canadians but their want of sensibility.

If my ideas of things are right, the human mind is naturally virtuous; the business of education is therefore less to give us good impressions, which we have from nature, than to guard us against bad ones, which are generally acquired.

No society exists in a state of nature, in other words; all are civilized in their way. The difference lies in the degree of freedom accorded to individuals and the sympathetic understanding they in turn have of their environment. Fitzgerald, whom Bell finally marries, echoes his wife's observation:

Nothing can be more false than that we are naturally inclined to evil: we are indeed naturally inclined to gratify the selfish passions of every kind; but those passions are not evil in themselves, they only become so from excess.

The malevolent passions are not inherent in our nature. They are only to be acquired by degrees, and generally are born from chagrin and disappointment. . . .

Having thus confirmed Bell's respectable independence, Frances Brooke goes on to probe the solutions that Ed and Emily arrive at, to examine the implications of their marriage, the fortuitous and dramatically artificial appearance of Emily's wealthy father, and their subsequent comfortable settlement in the English countryside. In so doing she approaches the intellectual climax of her book.

EMILY AND ED, installed in their country estate, have different responses to it, but in neither case are they the responses that would have been possible in Canada. The landscape image is revived, and the English garden serves as a balanced contrast to the savage wilderness. In that garden, Emily even contrives to recapitulate the contrast by constructing wild areas. The balance she seeks and the self-congratulatory eminence Ed acquires display all the attributes of Pope's Augustan Man:

Emily is planning a thousand embellishments for the garden, and will next year make it a wilderness of sweets, a paradise worthy its lovely inhabitant: she is already forming walks and flowery arbours in the wood, and giving the whole scene every charm which taste, at little expence, can bestow.

I, on my side, am selecting spots for plantations of trees; and mean, like a good citizen, to serve at once myself and the public, by raising oaks, which may hereafter bear the British thunder to distant lands.

I believe we country gentlemen, whilst we have spirit to keep ourselves independent, are the best citizens, as well as subjects, in the world. . . .

In short, and I am sure you will here be of my opinion, the man who has competence, virtue, true liberty, and the woman he loves, will cheerfully obey the laws which secure him these blessings, and the prince under whose mild sway he enjoys them.

All is for the best, in other words, in the best of all possible worlds. But Ed Rivers notwithstanding, neither Voltaire nor Mrs. Brooke nor the chastened *Candide* are so sure. Says Voltaire's philosopher Pangloss to his former pupil:

"All events are linked together in the best of all possible worlds; for after all, if you had not been expelled from a fine castle with great kicks in the backside . . . , if you had not been subjected to the Inquisition, if you had not traveled about America on foot, if you had not given the Baron a great blow with your sword, if you had not lost all your sheep from the good country of Eldorado, you would not be here eating candied citrons and pistachios."

"That is well said," replied *Candide*, "but we must cultivate our garden."

And at the end of *The History of Emily Montague*, Ed, pontificating as usual to Bell, suddenly interrupts his letter to anticipate the reply she would undoubtedly give him: "'Cela est bien dit, mon cher Rivers; mais il faut cultiver notre jardin.' You are right, my dear Bell, and I am a prating coxcomb." Which is true, despite his own (and even Arabella's) earlier statement to the contrary. The sudden intrusion of reality into the flow of his words works reflexively to illuminate the rest of the book; the direct quotation from *Candide* throws perspective from the resolvable upsets of the mannered romance to the continuing tensions of irony. Though Ed's final words suggest equanimity — "I hope . . . to have nothing to wish, but a continuance of our present happiness" they cannot, in the light of the author's obvious warnings to the contrary, be accepted as a sign of permanent peace.

Through Ed's glimpse of himself we are advised back to the end of Pope's *Essay on Man*:

For Wit's false mirror held up Nature's light;  
Showed erring Pride, WHATEVER IS, IS RIGHT;  
That REASON, PASSION, answer one great aim;  
That true SELF-LOVE and SOCIAL are the same;

That VIRTUE only makes our Bliss below;  
And all our KNOWLEDGE is, OURSELVES TO KNOW.

It is not a doctrine that Frances Brooke accepts without a thousand qualifiers; wit's mirror in her book reveals the pretentiousness of much English "cultivation" and the need to recognize reality. Ed's English garden of trees is certainly co-existent self-and social-love in his mind, but if his love of self is confounded by his not accurately recognizing his identity, is the society not ill-served? Are his trees and Emily's artificial wilderness a true cultivation of Candide's human garden? Their estate at the end is called Bellfield, which suggests at once the possibility of acuteness and energy (possessing Bell's name as it does) and the enervating factitiousness of not actually being Bell. For it is she who throughout the book cultivates her landscape and she who recognizes Canada for what it was — a wilderness garden with its own pleasures, its own advantages, its own prospect of danger and development, not a simple balance to cultivated civilization, nor a few acres of snow to be summarily dismissed. In Canada, Ed says, "contrary to what we see every where else, the country is rich, the capital poor; the hills fruitful, the vallies barren." Bell, garnering information around her too, adds:

You will judge how naturally rich the soil must be, to produce good crops without manure, and without ever lying fallow, and almost without ploughing; yet our political writers in England never speak of Canada without the epithet *barren*. They tell me this extreme fertility is owing to the snow. . . .

Don't you think I am become an excellent farmeress? 'Tis intuition; some people are born learned: are you not all astonishment at my knowledge? I never was so vain of a letter in my life.

The tone is characteristically flippant, but given its eighteenth century pronunciation ("farmer") her name indeed is *Arabella Fermor*, which contains enough punning to be suitably witty and enough literary association to be seriously ironic. There may, for the independent feminist author, be another irony implicit in the fact that Bell gives up that name on her return to England and her marriage to Fitzgerald. In any event, Ed points out that

Tame, cold, dispassionate minds resemble barren lands; warm, animated ones, rich ground, which, if properly cultivated, yields the noblest fruit; but, if neglected, from its luxuriance is most productive of weeds.

It seems at first simply to distinguish himself from Sir George Clayton. But the energetic realities that demand cultivation are to be found in Canada. In Eng-



land Bell is afraid above all else of "sinking into vegetation", and it is only Ed, relying on his father-in-law's money to allow them to follow inclination rather than rule, who contradicts her. He is a gentleman farmer there as he had hoped to be in Canada, but by being the gentleman foremost he always stops short of the real thing. As usual, it is Bell whom we should trust.

FRANCES BROOKE makes her point clear by drawing attention in a number of the closing letters to a symbolic gathering of the main characters. Emily and Ed hold a masquerade, at which Lucy goes as a sultana and Emily, following Ed's choice of costume, dresses up as a French *paisanne*. Bell, significantly, does not attend. In other words, the others in happily accepting the life they are living as the best of all possible worlds are living with masks across their eyes, while Bell, living in the same community, remains conscious of the rigours they choose to ignore. As Ed is the imitation farmer, Emily is the imitation peasant girl; they have the appearance without the reality and the rural state with none of its inconveniences. Bell's knowledge leads in another direction. Quoting Montesquieu, she approves his admiration of the amiability of surprise: "*Magnificent habits have seldom grace, which the dresses of shepherdesses often have.*" It is what appeals to Ed on his first arriving in Montreal, in fact:

I am arriv'd, and have brought my heart safe thro' a continued fire as never poor knight errant was exposed to; waited on at every stage by blooming country girls, full of spirit and coquetry, without any of the village bashfulness of England, and dressed like the shepherdesses of romance.

But the Canadian is real. By later turning Emily into the same mould, he contrives a wilderness that he will never be forced to fight. Knowing the wilderness to remain uncontrolled outside such a balance, Mrs. Brooke recognizes that the "best of all possible worlds" that rests on a masquerade must itself be a fiction. To recognize that, however, is to enter a kind of disorder, where resolutions seem arbitrary and ironic, and where only irony itself seems a legitimate response to man's estate.

From a vantage point two centuries later, it is possible to see the latter years of the Age of Johnson as an ideal breeding-ground for such a disposition. The revolution of the Common Man was in the offing, and the Great Democracies were shortly to spread their culture around the world. Still, it is not possible to assert that *The History of Emily Montague* exerted any direct influence whatsoever on

the revolutionary movement or on the course of literature in either England or Canada. (Even Fanny Burney's *Evelina* [1778] looked back to Richardson for its model, and the epistolary form was soon absorbed into other structures.) But it is indicative of the tension of the times. In his impressive book on the relationship between art and ideas between 1768 and 1850, *European Vision and the South Pacific*, Bernard Smith shows how the conflict resulted largely because of the opposing pulls of neo-classic order and scientific empiricism:

In the year 1768 the Royal Academy was established and the Royal Society promoted Cook's first voyage to the South Seas. The two events fittingly represent two influential attitudes to nature current in English eighteenth-century thought. The formation of the Academy constituted the official recognition in England of those neo-classical theories of Italian origin which had been transmitted to Britain through French theorists like de Chambray and de Piles. Nature, it was said, was to be rendered by the artist not with her imperfections clinging to her but in her perfect forms; what those perfect forms were the artist could only learn by a close study of the masterpieces of the ancients and their Renaissance disciples. The Royal Society, on the other hand, approached nature in a different way, appealing to travellers, virtuosi, and scientists to observe carefully, record accurately, and to experiment.

He goes on to examine in detail the shift from the Arcadian view of the South Pacific to the empirical one, and to note how the triumph of descriptive realism meant the death of paradise.

The relationship between these observations and Mrs. Brooke's Quebec is quite clear. Ed and Emily are the Arcadian pair, and when Emily seems irrevocably doomed to Sir George Clayton, Ed wanders "about like the first man when driven out of paradise". Contrarily, when he has hopes of winning her, he writes:

I already fancy my own settlement advancing in beauty: I paint to myself my Emily adorning those lovely shades: I see her, like the mother of mankind, admiring a new creation which smiles around her: we appear, to my idea, like the first pair in paradise.

It is a world he finds only in England's pretty ordered gardens and miniature woods and streams, or what he calls "enamelled meadows" and "every elegant art". Here, as anywhere, it depends for its existence on universal acceptance of the same convention, and if the company changes, so does the world. Bell is the last to leave Canada, and even she is by then happy to return to the English garden, but she accepts Arcadia as basically ephemeral:

Not but this is a divine country, and our farm a terrestrial paradise; but we have lived in it almost a year, and one grows tired of every thing in time, you know. . . .

When, then, she feels a regret she had not anticipated at having to leave not only the scenes of remembered pleasure but the scenes themselves, it is only her jaunty tone which prevents her attribution of naiads to the falls of Montmorenci from seeming like a break in character. They are part of her guise as coquette, which she wears as the occasion demands and always recognizes for what it is. Behind it is the strong sense of change and empirical truth which forces her into her ironic role and gives the novel its increased dimension.

It is not that Canada for some geographic reason could not support indigenous nymphs, swains, satyrs, and the like, but that, by the time the English came to settle Canada, the European vision was largely unwilling to invest it with any. If it did, it did so with little conviction, and as a result the books we remember from nineteenth-century Canadian literature are the diaries, travel journals, emigrant guides, scientific commentaries, and exact descriptions of the life actually being encountered in the new land. Paradise does not last long in such an environment, and in fact the tension implicit in the two meanings of the word *cultivation* — mannered elegance vs. rigorous tillage — lies not only at the heart of *The History of Emily Montague* but also, because of historical accident rather than direct influence, at the heart of Canadian literature as a whole. As Douglas Jones has pointed out in *Butterfly on Rock*, the pervading myth of Canadian writing has not been one of finding Eden but of accommodating oneself to the expulsion. As Sandra Djwa has added in her computer analysis of Roberts and Pratt, the dominant source of their imagery is Darwinian theory. What this adds up to is an attempt to combat the equivocal tension that Frances Brooke exposed, to gather knowledge about the land in order to meet the land — and frequently for the sake of the knowledge itself. For the equivocation has never entirely disappeared. The preoccupation with Emile's dilemma — whether it is better to become more civilized or more natural — has become a perennial syndrome, leading to greater and greater literary complexity and sometimes to art. The problem is one which Frances Brooke's articulate glimpse of England and Canada can enlighten at little, but not resolve. The gardens of both remain chequered with shade.

# TOWARDS A NATIVE MYTHOLOGY:

*The Poetry of Isabella Valency Crawford*

*Ann Yeoman*

We must enter the new period for ourselves, because though truth, the radiance of reality, is universally one and the same, it is mirrored variously according to the mediums in which it is reflected. Truth appears differently in different lands and ages according to the living materials out of which its symbols are hewn.<sup>1</sup>

HEINRICH ZIMMER

**H** EINRICH ZIMMER is here speaking of the development of Occidental religious philosophy and the need for the Western world to evolve within its own structure, reaching its own, rather than borrowed, solutions. He emphasizes the need for every age, as well as every civilization, to bring forth its own symbols, rituals and images. This theory would seem to apply to the growth of any nation, or group of people, in their desire to assert themselves as a significant entity in the eyes of the world. It follows that the process is paralleled in the development of a nation's literature and must, to the extent that art expresses and defines a given culture, grow partly out of its conscious art forms. C. G. Jung alludes to a similar process when he speaks of the collective level of the consciousness, the contents of which belong to a nation, or whole group of people, rather than just to one individual. He points out that the contents of the collective consciousness "are not acquired during the individual's lifetime but are products of innate forms and instincts."<sup>2</sup>

If these ideas are applied to the growth of an emergent nation and that nation's literature, there appears the need for basic, characteristic symbols and a native mythology — a mythology which both grows out of the evolving culture and clarifies it, thus preparing for still further growth. Mythology, and consequently the symbols and images which derive from a mythology, is seen by Northrop Frye as the "matrix of literature" in that it defines "a society's religious beliefs, historical traditions, cosmological speculations."<sup>3</sup> In the early, pre-Confederation days of Canadian poetry, it is not difficult to understand the need to impose European standards and literary ideals on an unknown, uncultivated land: religious belief, historical tradition, etc., had to be brought to Canada from Europe. Heinrich Zimmer, in the passage quoted above, implies the difficulties that arise when foreign, or preconceived, ideas are imposed on a land whose basic "living materials" are so different.

These difficulties are evident in the earlier Canadian poets, such as O'Grady, Goldsmith and Sangster. O'Grady's reaction is one of helplessness in the face of a hostile "barren waste". In Goldsmith's poem, "The Rising Village", the Indian and the wild beast are equated, in that peace only comes to the settler when both "Have fled to wilds beneath the northern star". Charles Sangster also refers to the Indian as a race that has "passed away", and suffuses his verse with the inappropriate trappings of nineteenth century English pastoral poetry. It is not until the poetry of Isabella Valancy Crawford that there appears to have been any serious attempt at the creation of a purely native mythology, or language of symbols. And, both the formal structure of her poetry, and the knowledge of the classical education she received from her father, point to much of Crawford's work as being a *conscious* attempt.

In his article on Crawford, James Reaney refers to the poet's attempt to use "images grammatically rather than intuitively", and to re-use an image over and over again, with each use adding to the symbolic dimension and thus carrying an infinitely "larger" symbol on to the next poem.<sup>4</sup> This implies the essential "private mythology" of every poet, which Frye believes to arise out of that poet's own "spectroscopic band or peculiar formation of symbols."<sup>5</sup> If this "extension of symbol" is insufficient, it can either fail, being unnoticed by the reader, or can serve to render the poetry extremely personalized. Crawford, however, draws on the immediate "living" material of Pre-Confederation Canada for her initial image, and works it extensively and sympathetically within the structure of her own society, but she also draws from primitive and classical mythologies and their basic, underlying archetypes.

This process, of the careful development of a symbolic language, can be better understood by tracing certain symbols that appear throughout Crawford's poetry. The image of the water-lily occurs frequently, gathering in significance until it points to Crawford's own poetic conception of Eternity and freedom, both of which will be discussed later. In one of the earlier poems, the lily appears as an adornment of Laughter's gown — "Laughter wears a lilled gown".<sup>6</sup> At this point, and with the further image of Laughter's eyes being "water-brown,/Ever glancing up and down", the effect seems merely to glorify Laughter through the association of Laughter with the pied-beauty of a pond of lilies reflecting a summer sun.

In "The Camp of Souls", the image appears again:

As the calm, large stars in the  
                   deep sky rest,  
 The yellow lilies upon them  
                   [the lakes] float.

Here, the lily is associated with the stars, heavenly bodies, and with Manitou's happy hunting-ground beyond the River of Death: the association, then, is with Eternity and life-after-death. In "Said The Skylark", the lily reflects an ideal to which the skylark aspires, for it is associated with the "fair, small Cloud, grown small as lily flower", which the skylark cannot reach. However, the image of the lily is here also evolving as a symbol for freedom, the lily-flower cloud being something far beyond the attainment of a *caged* skylark. If the skylark is seen as the traditional image for man's soul, trapped by the cage of the body, then another dimension is added — one of human spiritual aspiration.

Finally, in "The Lily Bed", the previous symbolic levels of the lily image, reflecting freedom, aspiration, the Eternal, etc., are combined. The lily pond becomes a bourne, a sanctuary, and the canoer is "Locked in the arms of the placid bay". There is the sense of a particular and ideal moment in time being sustained. From the time in the poem when the cedar paddle enters the water to the time when it is withdrawn, there are many references to "the freed soul", — to love and the unity of opposites ("With voice of eagle and dove"), — to Manitou, and Eternity in the heaving of the far shore to join with the stars, — to the Evening Star, traditionally a star symbolizing rest, and hence, death.

The lily-bed, then, becomes a symbol for the moment of peace and transcendence, when the soul is free and such polarities as the eagle and the dove, love and death, are contained within that one perfect moment. The assimilation of

essential polarities and dichotomies within a single vision appears to be the basic theme of most of Crawford's work. This returns us to the discussion of mythology. For Frye, "the central myth of art must be the vision at the end of social effort, the innocent world of fulfilled desires, the free human society." This would appear to be a unified and essentially simple and ordered world, and is usually reflected in literature as a heaven or Eden. This vision, then, must be a "vision of innocence which sees the world in terms of total human intelligibility",<sup>7</sup> and is therefore a vision constructed of primitive image or basic archetypes ("communicable symbol . . . typical image").<sup>8</sup>

IN HER OWN ATTEMPT to create a vision of primal unity, Crawford often returns to the primitive concept of a world populated by gods, mostly nature gods, or a God or gods other than the omnipotent Christian deity (see "The Camp of Souls", "The Lily Bed", "Gisli the Chieftain" . . .). This, the primitive world, is a world in which there is no division between the gods and nature, or man and nature, for it is only the concept of an all-powerful, yet all-benevolent deity, leaving no natural place for evil in the universal system, which leads to the dualities that Crawford attempts to reconcile through her poetry. "The Christian concept of the Devil is unique, marking a total break with all polarized ideas of light and darkness, life and death, good and evil, as aspects of a single reality that transcends and yet expresses itself through them."<sup>9</sup>

In building a vision of a universe which contains both good and evil, black and white, love and death, etc., Crawford is not only going beyond the constructs of literature and mythology to the fundamental archetypes from which primitive ritual and then mythology arose; she is also clearly working with the environment she discovered in a then undeveloped Canada. Rather than rejecting the Indian and the wilderness as the earlier poets had done, Crawford embraces both and, in the attempt to create a working mythology, arrives at the necessary stage of 'humanizing' nature. This "absorption of the natural cycle into mythology" Frye sees as essential: "The total form of art . . . is a world whose content is nature but whose form is human; hence when it imitates nature it assimilates nature to human forms."<sup>10</sup> Reaney sees this process as the necessity to evolve a symbol in which mind and nature become the same thing so that the "unknown" world can be absorbed into the consciousness. Such an absorption would eradicate any possibility of a dualism arising between the concepts of man and nature.

The assimilation of nature and the Indian culture is clearly seen in "Said The Canoe". The first symbol which strikes the reader is, of course, that of the canoe itself, which is personified and also deified — "Now she shall lay her polished sides/As queens do rest, or dainty brides" (p. 67). Referring to the discussion on the evolution of a symbol, the symbol of the canoe has specific significance. In "The Camp of Souls" the canoe appears as the bark which transports the soul to and fro between the after-world and the earth; in "The Lily Bed" the canoe is the means whereby the centre of the lily bed and, symbolically, freedom and unity of soul, are attained, — the image of the canoe, then, is associated with transportation of the soul, both as a means of passage from life to death and as a vehicle of transcendence.

Similarly, after a reading of "The Camp of Souls" the line "My masters twain their camp-soul lit" has religious and spiritual echoes which emphasize the ritualistic atmosphere of the stanza, the process of burning incense and lighting the fire. The camp-fire assumes human qualities — "Thin gold nerves of sly light curled . . ." — and other parts of nature are seen in terms of fire — "and ruddied from new-dead wars,/Blazed in the light the scaly hordes". Opposing images of death and love, cold and heat, etc., are placed side by side, and are united in the songs of the two masters, who sing both "Loud of the chase and low of love". Read in the context of the other poems, "The Lily Bed" and "The Camp of Souls", it seems possible that the poet is expressing these dualities in the figures of the two masters, who simultaneously "rule", and exist within, the soul (the canoe). If this is the case, it is interesting to note in the final stanza that "Darkness built its wigwam walls/Close round the camp", — these images of total darkness and the circle occur throughout Crawford's poetry and appear to symbolize the primal state, the swirling black state of chaos out of which the primitive gods were born and in which good and evil are necessary energies working towards the reconstruction of Eternity; the circle, having neither beginning nor end, signifies the totality of such a vision, and Eternity itself.

THE FIRE IMAGERY, a unifying image in "Said The Canoe", also appears in many other poems. In "The Lily Bed", Crawford refers to a "burning soul"; in "Gisli the Chieftain", flames escape from both sun and crater; the Goddess Lada weaves a tapestry of flame ("Warp and weft of flame she wove"); but more important is the stanza:



To the Love Queen Gisli prayed.  
Groaned far icebergs, tall and blue,  
As to Lada's distaff slim  
All their ice-locked fires blew.

In a later stanza "all the subtle fires of earth" are referred to. Fire is certainly used as a symbol of duality, being both constructive, in that it warms the body, and destructive, in that it can consume man as well as nature. More than this, however, I feel that Crawford is using the image to express the essence of nature as a whole and the particular essence of everything within nature: the gods seem to inhabit Crawford's natural world. This is seen in "The Ghosts of the Trees", where the ghost, or spirit of the tree, the tree-god, appears to rule and be a part of the things of man as well as the things of nature:

I have pushed apart,  
The mountain's heart,  
I have trod the valley down; . . .

When I reared my head  
From its old-time bed,  
Shook the pale cities of man . . .

I built men's graves  
With strong-thewed waves.

This might be paralleled with much of the work of Gerard Manley Hopkins, who explored the innermost fire, or essence of every part of nature as it appeared to him to be a manifestation of God: the essence, or quality of God within a cold grey ember, for Hopkins, was that last flash of fire when the ember falls and is dashed open on the ground in a final burst of light (see Hopkins' "The Wind-hover"). So, too, for Crawford, the essence of the iceberg is that last flash of fire before it is destroyed — the union of two opposites, cold and heat, in death.

To return to the recurring image of the circle and darkness: in "Between the Wind and Rain", the archetypal garden is depicted as a retreat from impending evil, the storm. The eagle is naively seen by the narrator as possessing that freedom which allows him to ride above the storm, above evil, "to some great planet of eternal peace". However, as the gyre, the spiral which points to Eternity and order, turns back on itself at every turn, so the eagle only attains real freedom when he "beats the wild storm apart that rings the earth", afterwards returning to his haven in the wind-dashed cliff. Love is seen here as a transcendent force

(as in "Malcolm's Katie") enabling the lover to transcend the reality of "good versus evil" and reach a level of peace in his love.

In "Old Spookses' Pass", the force of evil is represented by the stampede of the cattle in the night. The cowboy, however, does not resist the evil (he believes in no devil but that evil is the working of God's "own great plan"). Instead, he descends into the stampede and rides with it until the herd "mills" into a large, black circle of calm, and the cowboy finds his own peace. Again, the descension into evil points the path to God, or a glimpse of Eternity, in that a spiritual unity is understood. The opposing forces of good and evil working together towards the reconstruction of Eternity, both essential forces, are nowhere more clearly stated than in "Gisli, the Chieftain":

Said the voice of Evil to the ear of Good,  
 "Clasp thou my strong right hand,  
 Nor shall our clasp be known or understood  
 By any in the land.

"I, the dark giant, rule strong on the earth;  
 Yet thou, bright one, and I  
 Sprang from the one great mystery — at one birth  
 We looked upon the sky.

In "Malcolm's Katie", this mythological concept of a primal god, — of the need to assimilate evil in order to attain the promise of Eternity, an understanding of Paradise and re-capture innocence, — of love as a transcendent force, — is worked out in the narrative structure of the poem. The two lovers, Max and Katie, are parted; a selfish father and an evil force in the person of Alfred comes between them; Max is forced to overcome the evil in nature and man through his love for Katie before this love can be realized and the two lovers attain a paradisaal innocence at the end.

I would not change these wild and rocking woods,  
 Dotted by little homes of unbarked trees,  
 Where dwell the fleers, from the waves of want  
 For the smooth sward of selfish Eden bowers,  
 Nor — Max for Adam, if I know my mind.

The emphasis here is on the return to a higher state of innocence from a fallen world, which necessitates the completion of the circle and the total assimilation, or knowledge, of evil; the mythological rebirth after the apocalypse into a yet higher state of innocence; the power, through knowledge of evil, to overcome that evil and pass beyond it, as in the poem "Who sees a Vision":

Who sees a vision foul and dim  
 Hath seen the naked shade of sin;  
 And say its grim masque closeth  
 When morn himself discloseth  
 Thy soul hath seen the colour  
 The anguish and the dolor,  
 Of her whom thou hast haply only seen  
 In fair attire and feasted as a queen;  
 But now thou dost her know,  
 She may not fool thee so  
 Sin may not ever be  
 Again a queen to thee.

This vision of triumphing over evil through knowledge and assimilation of evil, and through the ritualistic process of death/rebirth (as in "Malcolm's Katie" when Max is struck by the falling tree), points toward the "apocalyptic world, the heaven of religion"<sup>11</sup> — revelation. This is a vision which Reaney believes will help to "translate our still mysterious melancholy dominion into the releasing . . . dominion of poetry."<sup>12</sup>

That Isabella Valancy Crawford's poetry is not ultimately successful is, in this context, irrelevant. What is important is that she tried to develop a native mythology and, in her own understanding that Eternity may only be glimpsed through the transcendent power of love, through the perfect moment of assimilation in the lily-bed, — and in showing God as a life-force (fire) in a humanized nature, she has largely complied with what Frye considers to be the essentials of a mythology — "Every developed mythology tends to complete itself, to outline an entire universe in which the 'gods' represent the whole of nature in humanized form, and at the same time show in perspective man's origin, his destiny, the limits of his power, and the extension of his hopes and desires."<sup>13</sup> Jung states that the "union of opposites on a higher level of consciousness is not a rational thing, nor is it a matter of will; it is a process of psychic development that expresses itself in symbols."<sup>14</sup> Isabella Valancy Crawford has understood this need for a unifying and identifying language of symbols as necessary to the development of a native culture and literature, — and this alone makes her an important literary figure in Canadian art.

#### FOOTNOTES

<sup>1</sup> Heinrich Zimmer, quoted by Joseph Campbell in *The Masks of God: Creative Mythology* (New York: The Viking Press, 1968), p. 625.

- <sup>2</sup> From C. G. Jung, *The Structure and Dynamics of the Psyche*, pp. 310-311, quoted by Campbell, *Ibid.*, p. 652.
- <sup>3</sup> Northrop Frye, *Fables of Identity: Studies in Poetic Mythology* (New York: Harcourt, Brace and World, 1963), p. 33.
- <sup>4</sup> James Reaney, "Isabella Valancy Crawford", in *Our Living Tradition*, ed. R. L. McDougall (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1959), p. 278.
- <sup>5</sup> Frye, *op. cit.*, p. 11.
- <sup>6</sup> All quotations of Isabella Valancy Crawford's poetry are taken from *The Collected Poems*, Edited by J. W. Garvin (Toronto: William Briggs, 1905).
- <sup>7</sup> Frye, *op. cit.*, p. 19.
- <sup>8</sup> Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism* (New York: Atheneum, 1968), p. 99.
- <sup>9</sup> Alan W. Watts, *The Two Hands of God: The Myths of Polarity* (Toronto: Macmillan Co., 1969), p. 134.
- <sup>10</sup> Frye, *Fables of Identity*, p. 33.
- <sup>11</sup> Frye, *Anatomy of Criticism*, p. 141.
- <sup>12</sup> Reaney, *op. cit.*, p. 288.
- <sup>13</sup> Frye, *Fables of Identity*, p. 32.
- <sup>14</sup> C. G. Jung, *Alchemical Studies* (Princeton University Press, 1967), Volume 13 of *The Collected Works*, Bollingen Series XX, p. 21.

# L'ADOLESCENT VAINCU

H. H. Mowshowitz

O N NE SAURAIT NIER que le thème principal d'*Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel* est l'adolescence: ses brèves réflexions sur le passé, son optimisme pour l'avenir, ses hauts et ses bas, ses fantaisies déchirantes et sa réalité cruelle. Et pourtant le monde adolescent de Marie-Claire Blais ne signifie pas une période privilégiée où tout souci matériel s'éloigne et où l'adolescent baigne dans une chaude lumière. Au contraire, l'adolescent dans le livre de Blais se trouve emprisonné par son milieu et par les exigences d'une vie difficile. Il doit lutter contre une grande pauvreté sans les armes de l'adulte pour son combat. A cet égard, les jeux et les mauvais tours d'enfants nous laissent ici avec un sentiment d'amertume. Tout est vu à travers l'oeil stoïque de l'individu qui accepte la misère du monde sans jamais réussir à la dominer. Il ne s'agit pas d'adultes mais de jeunes qui ne deviennent jamais adultes et qui savent au fond de leur coeur ce que la vie peut leur offrir. Parmi ces jeunes se distingue le personnage de Jean-Le Maigre, protagoniste du roman.

Une question se pose immédiatement si l'on considère l'attitude pessimiste des personnages de Blais: comment peut-on être vaincu par la vie à l'âge de quatorze ans sans l'être d'une façon artificielle? Les adolescents dans ce roman ne viennent pas de cette haute bourgeoisie proustienne qui envoie ses enfants au bord de la mer pour passer l'été. Héloïse, le Septième et Jean-Le Maigre combattent incessamment la misère matérielle. Le peu de contact qu'ils ont avec leurs parents prête au milieu paysan son ton: un père qui raille inlassablement les livres malgré les sincères protestations de la Grand-Mère Antoinette. Comme Gérard Boivin l'a si bien remarqué: "Le père est mort ou absent moralement . . . La voix d'homme n'est qu'un murmure."<sup>1</sup> La mère nous montre ses épaules courbées, sa mine éternellement triste, son sein épuisé par les enfants qui ont "tout pris d'elle."<sup>2</sup> Les

parents fournissent aux enfants une image de la vie sans toutefois en parler. Ils ne sont conscients que du travail difficile et long, des enfants qui viennent régulièrement, d'une vague pratique de la religion, de la mort qui est leur ami intime. Les enfants qui imitent facilement leurs parents, et qui saisissent la signification des silences, ne pourraient guère échapper à une telle résignation devant la vie.

D'une part le milieu, sa pauvreté et sa misère, détermine la résignation qui caractérise toute la famille et Jean-Le Maigre en particulier. Ce sentiment reste constant pendant que d'autres émotions tournent autour de lui. A plusieurs reprises Jean est dominé par une fierté d'artiste qui manque toute proportion. Ou bien il est saisi par une grande incertitude et se croit aux bords de l'abîme. A un autre moment une grande tendresse envers son frère l'enveloppe. A la fin cependant, la résignation persiste: Jean-Le Maigre, poète maudit, est vaincu et c'est sa défaite qui donne au roman le droit de se dire international et éternel. Il nous reste de voir comment.

Les deux grands thèmes qui se dégagent d'une étude sur Jean-Le Maigre sont colorés tous les deux par l'obsession de la mort. Le premier, c'est-à-dire l'influence et l'acceptation du milieu paysan, ne traite que du cycle trop précipité de la vie et de la mort. Les enfants naissent et meurent avec une rapidité effrayante. Ceux qui arrivent à la vieillesse, Horace ou la Grand-Mère, n'y arrivent que grâce à une ténacité féroce. Le second thème, le rôle du poète-écrivain dévolu à Jean-Le Maigre, illumine et souligne la résignation fondamentale du protagoniste. Il accepte et poursuit sa vocation d'écrivain en restant conscient de sa propre mort. Il devient artiste malgré les obstacles du milieu, malgré sa santé chancelante, et malgré l'incertitude du succès de son oeuvre.

L'influence du milieu sur Jean est presque sans limites. Même avant l'introduction du personnage dans le roman, une confrontation entre lui et la mort est suggérée à travers son petit frère Emmanuel. Après avoir terminé le roman ou même avant (Voir la page 90), le lecteur reconnaît que le bébé qui vient de naître représente Jean-Le Maigre en petit; il suivra les mêmes chemins que ses aînés intellectuels, Jean et Léopold. Comme eux, Emmanuel obtient la faveur spéciale de la Grand-Mère Antoinette et il se révèlera tout aussi déterminé à vivre que Jean. Dès le début Blais lui impose l'acceptation de sa tâche: "Il a su que cette misère n'aurait pas de fin, mais il a consenti à vivre."

Entouré d'une telle famille, Jean subit un par un les échecs que connaissent ses semblables. Toutes les possibilités de leur vie tournent en expériences cauchemardesques. Les routes leur sont bloquées: le refuge qu'ils cherchent dans les institutions les détournent de leurs buts au lieu de les y guider. Héloïse commence

par vouloir devenir religieuse, mais tourmentée par ses désirs finit par devenir prostituée, sans aucun Abélard pour la réconforter. Le Septième se lance vite sur la voie du crime, passe par un "job" en ville et finit presque étranglé (ou voilé)<sup>3</sup> par le même frère qui avait séduit Jean-Le Maigre. Chaque effort des autres résulte dans un échec total. Seul Jean qui pousse le plus loin est conscient des échecs. Mais pour lui aussi, la vie est trop vie épuisée et il meurt fatigué de sa lutte.

**I**L ARRIVE QUELQUEFOIS aux personnages modernes nés dans des conditions semblables à celles de Jean-Le Maigre, de considérer les institutions comme lieux de refuge contre la vie et contre les maux infligés par leur famille. Jean Genet, à la fois auteur et personnage, est l'exemple qui vient immédiatement à l'esprit : pour lui la prison prend la place du foyer. Pour Jean-Le Maigre il y a plusieurs lieux de refuge : les jupes de sa Grand-Mère Antoinette, les livres, le noviciat, la maison de correction. Il n'y en a pas un seul qui le protège contre les blessures infligées par ses parents. Tous les éléments du milieu conspirent à sa fin et malgré ce fait il se montre, lui, optimiste devant chaque nouvelle expérience.<sup>4</sup> Il entretient par exemple de grands espoirs quand il entre au noviciat. Finalement on aura du respect pour son intelligence. Il pourra se dévouer entièrement à son travail et "renoncer à jamais à l'oi si ve té de [sa] vie." Ses espoirs sont vite déçus lorsque le Diable — sans doute le frère Théo Crapula — "entraîne par la fenêtre du dortoir . . . avec sa robe noire, son chapeau de fourrure sur le front, ses souliers boueux à la main." Le noviciat devient, dans une phrase que l'on cite souvent "ce jardin étrange où poussaient, là comme ailleurs, entre-mêlant leurs tiges, les plantes gracieuses du Vice et de la Vertu."

L'épisode du noviciat est suivi par celui de l'école. La deuxième institution n'offre non plus ni soulagement ni encouragement pour le garçon tuberculeux. Jean s'attend symboliquement à se réjouir de la chaleur autour d'un poêle en même temps qu'il se met à faire la cour à la maîtresse, Mlle Lorgnette. Ses tentatives n'aboutissent à rien ; ses émotions et son intelligence restent enfermés sans aucun contact humain pour les assouvir.

Le va-et-vient d'espoirs et de déceptions se reflète également dans les rêves de Jean-Le Maigre et les réalités qui les déchirent.<sup>5</sup> Les fantaisies d'une conquête sexuelle échouent dans une masturbation entre frères. La précocité des enfants n'a rien d'étonnant si, à nouveau, on revient à l'influence du milieu. Les enfants entendent chaque soir "l'ennemi géant" qui "viole" leur mère et ils sont quatre

ou cinq dans un même lit. Tout est étroitement lié aux besoins physiques et un autre rêve de Jean le prouve aussi. Dans son imagination il conçoit des banquets énormes, de véritables orgies de nourriture.

Il y a une image centrale du romain qui contient les deux aspects du personnage que nous avons esquissés. C'est l'image du poète au front couronné de poux qui commence l'autobiographie. Lorsqu'il entreprend son oeuvre principale, Jean constate :

Dès ma naissance, j'ai eu le front couronné de poux!  
Un poète, s'écria mon père . . . Grand-Mère, un poète!

Et peu de temps après, Héloïse ajoute: "IL EST VERT IL EST VERT: . . . vert comme un céleri." Toute l'ironie tragique du personnage se dégage de cette première phrase de l'autobiographie. Le milieu lui envoie des poux, une bien triste couronne pour un poète, mais le mélange d'images est clair. Un vrai poète aurait le front couronné plutôt de lauriers. La saleté du milieu aussi bien que la saleté des enfants est rapelée par les poux. Et puis, c'est le père qui prononce le mot poète. Rien de plus ironique si l'on considère le rôle du père qui consiste à toujours s'opposer aux ambitions intellectuelles et artistiques de ses fils. Finalement, Jean-Le Maigre ajoute sa propre couleur à la série des leitmotives. Ce ne sera pas le vert des lauriers qui couronnera son front, mais celui du céleri, de la paleur lunaire, de la maladie et de la mort. La fait qu'il s'agit de céleri, légume de la cuisine quotidienne, nous rattache encore une fois au milieu et offre un contraste net avec les éléments poétiques qui le suivent. La couleur s'identifie au poète tuberculeux à tel point que Grand-Mère Antoinette aperçoit "le vert reflet de la lune sur la neige" aux funérailles de Jean.<sup>6</sup>

Avant d'examiner de plus près le rôle de Jean-Le Maigre en tant qu'écrivain, il convient de dire un mot sur les procédés littéraires de l'autobiographie.<sup>7</sup> Comme nous venons de le voir, cette partie d'*Une saison* met en valeur l'oeuvre principale du protagoniste. Au cours du "roman dans le roman", Jean retrace fidèlement le déroulement de sa vie dès sa naissance jusqu'à quelques moments avant sa mort. Dans le microcosme on reconnaît une technique chère aux romanciers français modernes. Or la vraie fonction de l'autobiographie se trouve dans l'approfondissement et l'intensification du monde suggéré dans le reste du roman. Il y a récapitulation de tous les thèmes: le vice, les poux de la pauvreté, la maladie, l'évasion possible dans l'art. Cependant les visages présentés d'abord par l'auteur elle-même acquièrent une autre dimension lorsque nous les confrontons à travers le poète-adolescent. Le curé en fournit un bon exemple. Mlle Blais avait



déjà suggéré les tendances gourmandes du curé quand elle décrivait son arrivée au noviciat avec Jean: "Il avait tant bu pour se réchauffer, d'un village à l'autre, qu'il pouvait à peine se tenir ses longues jambes mobiles." Bien sûr, le curé assiste à la naissance du poète (en même temps les funérailles d'un autre enfant) mais on a l'impression à travers le rapportage de Jean que sa présence ajoute à l'ironie de la scène. La mère se lamente les enfants morts et ceux qui viendront tandis que le curé s'en réjouit: "Dieu bénit les nombreuses familles." Par un effet de contraste avec l'auteur, Jean jouit d'une plus grande liberté et d'une plus grande ironie dans ses interprétations des autres. Aussi l'intensification est-elle reprise au niveau stylistique. L'autobiographie représente la partie la plus expérimentale du roman pour ce qui est de la typographie, les lettres majuscules, les mots divisés en syllabes, l'absence de ponctuation.<sup>8</sup>

La vocation de Jean-Le Maigre avant l'autobiographie est imprégnée d'un humour noir profondément moqueur. Son premier poème, composé dans les latrines (autre lieu de refuge), démontre une conscience de sa propre mort:

Combien funèbre la neige  
Sous le vol des oiseaux noirs . . .

Ce que l'on voit dans cet effort initial c'est le côté pathétique du romantisme avec des symboles un peu trop évidents. On a tendance à oublier que Jean meurt en effet dans la neige<sup>9</sup> et que l'auteur revient aux corbeaux dans les arbres du cimetière aux funérailles. "Un hiver moral et physique" affirme Mlle Blais, constitue le message de l'oeuvre.<sup>10</sup> Cependant le lecteur n'a guère le temps ici d'aller jusqu'au fond du poème en question. L'auteur y juxtapose un autre composé par le Septième qui en détruit tout le sérieux: "Mon coeur plein d'ordures."

A part sa résignation envers la mort, Jean révèle d'autres aspects importants du roman à travers ses efforts littéraires débutants: la sexualité naissante du poème "A LA CHAUDE MAITRESSE" et l'effort conséquent du milieu pour le détruire, ou bien les observations sur sa soeur dans le *Portrait d'Héloïse* qui deviendra le "roman" d'Héloïse. En plus, le jeune poète se préoccupe de l'avenir de toute son oeuvre et la création est donc souvent liée à la destruction menaçante du milieu. Le tuberculeux se tourne vers son art pour échapper à la misère actuelle et pour affirmer sa révolte contre son père. Seule la grand-mère qui enlève les poux l'encourage à persévérer dans sa vocation. Par ailleurs, Jean craint la mort qui le guette aussi bien que les personnes qui guettent ses écrits.

Pour se protéger contre cette éventualité dans l'avenir, il confie au Septième dans la cave: "Si tu crois . . . que je m'en irai au paradis tout doucement comme ça, avec bénédiction . . . J'ai une idée . . . je vais faire mon oeuvre posthume!" On voit des débuts littéraires que la vocation arrive à Jean en riant et lui, il l'embrasse avec de l'humour, mais il y tiendra avec autant de force qu'il tient à la vie elle-même.

Jacques Lamarche en parlant de l'aliénation chez Marie-Claire Blais considère la solution de la mort comme un signe fondamental de cette aliénation.<sup>11</sup> Or ce que l'autobiographie nous découvre surtout ce sont les efforts de Jean pour trouver d'autres solutions à la vie. Il se résigne finalement à la mort tout en restant conscient qu'il va à sa rencontre. Les institutions qui doivent servir de refuge contre la famille et contre le froid sont développées de l'intérieur dans l'autobiographie. Le lecteur ressent directement la terreur d'un garçon devant la maison de correction ou bien les réservations de ce même garçon avant son départ au noviciat. L'auteur ne nous éloigne pas par l'emploi de la troisième personne; ce n'est plus "il" mais "je" et "nous".

L'autobiographie détruit systématiquement les structures sociales du milieu. Jean-Le Maigre critique ouvertement le matriarcat en vigueur à l'école à travers les personnages de Mlle Lorgnette et de la veuve Casimir. Avec les nombreuses caricatures du curé et des frères au noviciat, la religion cesse d'être une consolation pour les adolescents. La vie en famille forme le cadre de l'autobiographie et son échec se reproduit en rêve impossible après la fin du "roman dans le roman."<sup>12</sup>

En suivant un plan circulaire pour ainsi dire qui relie famille, institutions, religion, et famille, l'autobiographie montre la vocation de Jean-Le Maigre en train de s'épanouir. Bien que le rôle du poète ne se détache jamais complètement de la mort, c'est un rôle qui a plusieurs aspects. D'une part l'écrivain est dépeint comme prophète; Jean prévoit les tristes fins de sa soeur et de son frère. Pour le petit Emmanuel il envisage une mort comme la sienne. D'autre part il est toujours solitaire et même ses bien-faiteurs ne peuvent jamais lui apprendre suffisamment: "Monsieur le curé ne put jamais me renseigner sur les grandes vérités de la vie." On retrouve un autre aspect de ce rôle dans le sentiment assez romantique que Jean éprouve d'être incompris par le monde. Il ne s'agit pas d'un isolement total mais d'une aliénation du monde non-artiste. Tout en admirant le style de Jean, le directeur de la maison de correction déchire ses lettres. Selon le garçon, "il [le directeur] me reprochait de vouloir attendrir les grandes personnes sur mon malheur."

LE POÈTE EST IMMORTEL, affirme Jean. Si seulement il arrive à préserver ses oeuvres intactes des vautours avant la mort. A mesure que Jean se heurte contre les portes fermées de la vie, sa conscience de la mort s'approfondit. Il semble que le feu mis à l'école par le Septième (en collaboration avec Jean) marque une dernière étape dans la lutte du poète pour la vie contre la mort. Les adolescents chez Blais sont obsédés par le pouvoir destructeur du feu. C'est un effort désespéré et anarchique pour satisfaire leurs désirs et physiques (la chaleur) et spirituels (l'amour). L'acte antisocial provoque une réaction sévère de la part des autorités et crée une expérience des plus pénibles pour Jean et le Septième. Ils finissent à la maison de correction qualifiée de "jungle". Quand Jean y arrive pour la première fois il réagit à l'irréalité de sa situation et à l'injustice du monde adulte: "Les grandes personnes ne mettent jamais les enfants en prison." Il aura un sentiment pareil devant la mort.

La maison de correction n'est rien à côté de Notre Dame de la Miséricorde où règne "la délinquance en fleur." La violence sous la forme de massacres et de vengeance provoque la terreur chez Jean. Il est toujours sûr d'être immortel mais il reste incrédule devant l'idée de mourir, tout comme il le fut devant le fait d'être en prison. L'humour devient de plus en plus noir :

J'étais malade. Je craignais de mourir. Mais aussi, je savais que cela n'était pas possible puisque la mort n'est que pour les bébés et les vieillards.

Néanmoins, une fois arrivé au noviciat, il reconnaît sa fin: "Le Noviciat est mon tombeau... je pense à m'évader." Les poses romantiques disparaissent et le lecteur commence à se reconnaître dans la lutte de Jean-Le Maigre. Le garçon voit approcher la mort et il en a peur. En même temps il veut la refuser en se moquant d'elle.

De toutes les parties du roman, la mort de Jean reste l'une des plus saisissantes. Le jeu est terminé. Si l'on lui reproche sa précocité, ses idées romantiques sur l'art, son mélange d'adolescent et d'adulte, il exige qu'on le prenne au sérieux lorsqu'il meurt. Les images passent d'un manque d'appétit aux fruits pourris et à la mort des fleurs, à l'hiver et à la mort. L'autobiographie s'achève sur ce ton.

Si le rôle du poète cesse avec la fin de son roman, c'est en partie parce que Blais se réserve l'apothéose de Jean-Le Maigre. Pendant le reste du chapitre, elle peint une vision qui a toute la grâce et les rythmes d'un ballet où Jean revoit les visages familiers de sa courte vie. Ses frères et soeurs le hantent par des cris mystérieux: "Jean, viens jouer avec moi... Jean, viens me réchauffer." Som-

nambule il quitte le noviciat pour partir vers la neige. Il y aperçoit sa famille et le Septième l'invite à patiner jusqu'à la maison sur des patins aux lames d'or. Déchiré pour la dernière fois entre la réalité de sa toux ou des saignements de nez et la grande fantaisie de patiner "sans jamais l'avoir appris", Jean pense trouver la liberté. Le patinage signale le triomphe de l'enfant sur la glace, sur l'hiver, et sur la mort. Mais la solitude l'accable à nouveau et sur "la patinoire craquelée, tout un tribunal de Jésuites, avec leurs dossiers sous le bras." Le cercle ne serait pas complet sans les représentants des institutions qui lui refusent un refuge pour la dernière fois. Eux, ils viennent annoncer "la bonne nouvelle: cette nuit vous êtes condamné à mort . . . Tournez-vous maintenant et baissez la tête."

Jean-Le Maigre suit les ordres et son geste final de baisser la tête, de s'agenouiller dans la neige, résume en une phrase l'histoire de l'adolescent vaincu. La mort ne peut pas être une solution comme Lamarche l'a constaté parce que "la bonne nouvelle" est une expression profondément ironique. La mort ne fait que supprimer les problèmes sans les résoudre. Les visions du paradis (famille et amour) aussi bien que celles de l'enfer (institutions et jugements) cessent tout simplement d'exister.

Le Frère Théodule avait remarqué dans Jean-Le Maigre au moins deux attributs: "sa laideur charmante" et "son exquise folie". Or ces attributs caractérisent brièvement les pôles de l'adolescent vaincu que nous venons de dégager de ce personnage romanesque. La laideur reflète la pauvreté du milieu et la folie engendre d'hésitantes créations littéraires. Sans aucun doute une pareille description d'un milieu paysan appauvri suit les traditions du roman naturaliste à deux différences près: le salut temporaire dans l'art et le niveau de la bataille contre la mort. Après tout, dans le roman naturaliste il s'agit d'adultes chez lesquels la bataille de résignation et de lutte se livre entre égaux. L'homme fait face à son destin, à la nature cruelle et indifférente, à ses propres adversaires humains. *Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel* décrit une bataille où les combattants ne peuvent pas être égaux les uns pour les autres; l'adolescent n'est pas à la mesure de l'homme. Dans la dernière phrase du roman, Marie-Claire Blais nous rappelle le résultat du combat entre son protagoniste et la mort: "Oui, ce sera un beau printemps, disait Grand-Mère Antoinette, mais Jean-Le Maigre ne sera pas avec nous cette année . . .".

## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Gérard-Marie Boivin, "Le Monde étrange de Marie-Claire Blais ou la cage aux fauves," *Culture* XXIX, n° 1, mars 1968, p. 7.

- <sup>2</sup> Marie-Claire Blais, *Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel*, 6<sup>e</sup> édit., Editions du Jour, Montréal, 1965, pp. 11, 12, 21. Toute référence suivante à ce texte sera indiquée entre parenthèses.
- <sup>3</sup> Le passage à la page 127 reste un peu ambigu: "Le Septième se réveilla à l'aube . . . Il n'était pas mort comme il l'avait cru. Ses vêtements étaient à peine déchirés. Mais passant la main à son cou, il sentit une marque qui brûlait encore . . ."
- <sup>4</sup> Voir Vincent Nadeau, *Le Noir et le Tendre: Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel*, thèse de D.E.S. Département d'études françaises, Faculté des lettres, Université de Montréal, 1967. Le côté optimiste correspond à ce que Nadeau appelle "le tendre" chez Jean-Le Maigre.
- <sup>5</sup> A cet égard, nous ne sommes pas d'accord avec l'analyse de Nadeau (Note 3) qui constate que le rêve n'est pas en conflit avec la réalité parce que le rêve se définit en termes de cauchemar. Nadeau, p. 46 ff.
- <sup>6</sup> Selon Jean, le Septième lui ressemble en ce qui concerne la verdeur: car lui aussi souffrait d'une maladie presque fatale: "Non seulement je faillis mourir de ma verdeur, mais le Septième en hérita en naissant. Préparez sa tombe, dit ma grand-mère qui sentait déjà courir la méningite sous ce front disgracieux, tour à tour jaune, gris et vert, . . ." (51).
- <sup>7</sup> Une étude est en préparation à ce sujet par Yvon Morin, *Le Style de Marie-Claire Blais dans Une saison dans la vie d'Emmanuel*, Doct., Montréal, 1970. Il ne serait pas possible d'indiquer ici la signification de tous les procédés stylistiques du roman. Les lettres majuscules signalent parfois le ton de la voix (IL EST VERT) ou bien les clichés (IL FINIRA TRES MAL); elles marquent également l'importance de la sexualité (LORSQUE LES LITS CRAQUENT JE SAIS CE QUI SE PASSE). Bref, la liste est à peine commencée.
- <sup>8</sup> Ce sont en partie ces procédés stylistiques "faciles" que Robert Buckeye critique dans "Nouveau Roman Made Easy," *Canadian Literature*, n° 31, hiver 1967, pp. 67-69.
- <sup>9</sup> Voir la dernière phrase du chapitre dévolu à l'autobiographie: "Jean-Le Maigre ouvrit le col de sa chemise. Il baissa la tête. Il ne lui restait plus qu'à s'agenouiller dans la neige et attendre . . ." (76).
- <sup>10</sup> Gérard Boivin (Note 1, pp. 16-7) cite une entrevue avec Mlle Blais où elle parle de ses intentions dans *Une saison*: "Ce que j'ai voulu faire sentir, c'est l'hiver. Hiver moral, hiver physique, la misère matérielle et la misère morale, la prison du gel et des préjugés."
- <sup>11</sup> Jacques-A. Lamarche, "La Thématique de l'aliénation chez Marie-Claire Blais," *Cité libre*, 16<sup>e</sup> année, n° 88-89, juillet-août 1966, pp. 29-30.
- <sup>12</sup> Ce rêve avait été prévu sous une forme bien plus abrégée à la page 35.

# SONGS OF THE CANADIAN ESKIMO

*Rudy Wiebe*

UNTHINKING ADULTS sometimes ask: why bother with writing or reading poetry? After all, poetry has no real use, like developing a hog with more bacon meat has real use. Neither small children nor primitive peoples ask for reasons to enjoy music, or dance, or poetry. They recognize what western adults seem to have had drilled out of them: that human beings must and do live as much by rhythm and symbol as by the tangible things that surround them. Man does not, like every other animal, merely gorge and rest and procreate; he also has ideas, feelings for friendship and community, sometimes even beliefs. These, rather than merely eating and being comfortable, make him a human being.

Sixty years ago the Eskimos of northern Canada were still a primitive people. They had developed great skill in finding food and staying warm in an overpowering, ruthless land, but, much more, they had survived as human beings. This, not simply their animal survival in a dreadful climate, impressed anthropologists like Franz Boas (1880's) and explorers like J. B. Tyrrell (1890's). They found that the complete Eskimo man was not only a skilful hunter but also an accomplished singer and dancer; to be continually outsung and outdanced was as shaming as to be continually outhunted. This paper is intended to be a brief introduction to such classic Eskimo song and poetry — "classic" in the sense that it was unaffected by western rhythms and images, as Eskimo song since the record player and particularly the transistor radio is not.

Between 1912 and 1925 both Knud Rasmussen of Denmark<sup>1</sup> and Diamond Jenness of Canada<sup>2</sup> lived for years with the Eskimos of Greenland and the

Canadian Arctic and, among other activities, wrote down many of their songs. Jenness' work is particularly useful to someone who knows no Eskimo; not only does his printed report contain line by line phonetic transcription, English translation, and musical notation by H. H. Roberts of some one hundred songs collected from the Coppermine Eskimos in 1914-16, but in the National Museum at Ottawa are preserved the wax cylinders he made of the people singing these very songs.<sup>3</sup> These invaluable recordings (somewhat scratchy, but amazingly clear considering Jenness's stories of trying to record in snow houses while his wax kept hardening prematurely) are vivid examples of primitive song; they are strange, beautiful in words, rhythm, melody.

The recorded songs are not difficult to follow if the Jenness-Roberts report is studied; this is so even if one does not understand any Eskimo. Indeed, as Rasmussen explains (his mother was Eskimo and he spoke it as his native tongue), understanding the language is no necessary help in understanding a song because, as with all primitive peoples, the subjects are their day-to-day activities. Eskimo groups are very small; members know everything that happens to everyone included, so the Eskimo poet may with one key word recall a striking occurrence for his group, and an outside listener, though he knows Eskimo perfectly, will not understand the overtones that echo to give it depth. For Eskimo poetry, like our own, tries to convey the most vivid sensations with the fewest words possible.

For us, then, appreciation of Eskimo song must be based on its rhythmic line and its repetition of word and refrain; this appreciation is helped by the fact that, as with all primitive songs, the verse was composed in the mind alone and not in writing. Further, songs were carried about in the memory, not on paper, sometimes for generations. Like all unwritten poetry, they work for immediate rhythmic and sound effects: they need not be studied for complex inter-weaving of image, though strangely enough, that too is there more often than not.

Very simply, we could speak of two kinds of Eskimo song: prayers, which are private, and festival songs, which are very much public. To speak of prayer songs first: Eskimos believe that the first songs of mankind were spirit songs;<sup>4</sup> when an Eskimo sings, he is attuned to that great primeval song and his prayer draws power from it. If petitioned correctly through private prayer songs, certain familiar spirits will help humans in specific trouble. The prayers to call them are private property — sometimes passed on to an heir at the moment of death — and are used only by the person to whom they have come, often in a great moment of vision. Jenness records a three-part weather incantation<sup>5</sup> sung by

Hagunjag, a Coppermine woman; it begins with the singer speaking of herself in the third person (he) pleading with her familiar spirit (thou) to come to her aid:

Come, he says, thou outside there; come, he says, thou outside there,  
Come, he says, thou outside there; come, he says, thou outside there.  
Thy Sivoangnaq he bids thee come,  
Telling thee to enter him.  
Come, he says, thou outside there.

With a slight variation of tune, the prayer becomes more personal:

Only come, only come,  
Only come, only come.  
I stretch out my hands to them thus.  
Only come, only come. (*repeated*)

Finally, with another variation in tune, the spirit answers through the voice of the one praying:

I come again, I again,  
I come again, I, dost thou not know? (*repeated*)  
I come again, I again.

Rasmussen gathered some more complex prayer words, though his translations must be accepted with the knowledge that he tends (in contrast to Jenness) to "fill out" the prayers in terms of what he considers more intelligible poetry. Words to make heavy things light (that is, on the trail):

I will walk with the leg muscles  
which are strong  
as the sinews of the shins of the little caribou calf.  
I will walk with leg muscles  
which are strong  
as the sinews of the shins of the little hare.  
I will take care not to go towards the dark.  
I will go towards the day.

Words to a sick child:

Little child! Your mother's breasts are full of milk.  
Go and be nursed,  
Go and drink!  
Go up to the mountain!



From the summit of the mountain you shall seek health,  
You shall draw life.

Words to stop bleeding:

This is blood from the little sparrow's mother.  
Wipe it away!  
This is blood  
That flowed from a piece of wood.  
Wipe it away!<sup>6</sup>

The latter prayer demonstrates the poet's absolute faith in the power of the word (Eskimo is an agglutinative language and most of the lines consist of only one word, despite the necessary translation length): he must be capable of believing that a piece of dry wood, the driest thing he knows, can actually shed warm red blood. Only if he believes will the spirit come and the bleeding stop.

These are the prayer songs: simple, repetitious, beautiful; one cannot listen to the Jenness recordings without feeling the fervent depths to which the prayer, in chant melody and rhythm, carries the singer. But the glory of Eskimo humanity is their great festival songs. Rasmussen describes the most beautiful custom in a land of darkness and cold: when in their wanderings one group meets another, they build a festival house, and sing and dance. Everyone has a song; to be outsung is as bad as to be outhunted. Though there are several modes of performance, the most common is that the men form a circle, the women and children kneel on the snowbench at the back, the singer (either man or woman) holds the huge sealskin drum in one hand and, beating on its rim, dances slowly around the circle in time to his own beat, composing on the spot as he moves and sings. The audience sways as the emotion and rhythm mounts in the tight snow-house, joining in after every verse on the refrain of "ayayaya — ayaya". Under the long oppression of polar night, Eskimos say these festivals are what keep them sane. Rasmussen tells how they may continue for twelve or sixteen hours at a stretch; as soon as one singer is exhausted, another leaps into the ring, seizes the drum, and breaks into his or her song and vision. Here is one by Aijuk, "A Dead Man's Song", composed from a dream by his friend Paulinaoq:

I am filled with joy  
Whenever the dawn rises over the earth  
And the great sun  
Glides up in the heavens.  
Aja — aja — ja

But at other times  
I lie in horror and dread  
Of the creeping numberless worms  
That eat their way in through hollowed bone  
And bore eyes away.

In fear I lie, remembering:  
Say, was it so beautiful on earth?  
Think of the winters  
When we were anxious  
For soles to our footwear  
Or skins for our boots:  
Was it so beautiful?

In fear and in horror I lie,  
But was I not always troubled in mind,  
Even in the beautiful summer,  
When the hunting failed,  
And there was dearth of skins  
For clothing and sleeping?  
Was it so beautiful?

In fear and in horror I lie  
But was I not always troubled in mind  
When I stood on the sea ice  
Wretched beyond measure  
Because no fish would bite?  
Or was it so beautiful  
When I flushed with shame and dismay  
In the midst of the gathering,  
And the chorus laughed  
Because I forgot my song and its words?  
Was that so beautiful?

Say, was it so beautiful on earth?  
Here, I am filled with joy  
Whenever the dawn rises over the earth  
And the great sun  
Glides up in the heavens.

But at other times  
I lie in horror and dread  
Of the creeping numberless worms  
That eat their way in through hollowed bone  
And bore eyes away.<sup>7</sup>  
Aja — aja — ja.

Or this dance song by Nitanatciaq, reviewing all the things that give her joy:

He was in a state of rejoicing,  
The fishing-line jigging it properly.  
ai ye yai ya

*Refrain:*

i yaj ai ye yaji ya  
ai ye yaji yaj i yai ya

The fishing-line when it sank right down,  
His line too he pulled it right up.

*(Refrain)*

He was in a state of rejoicing,  
The caribou weapon [arrow] flying straight.

*(Refrain)*

The arrow when it flew,  
The arrow it struck home.

He was in a state of rejoicing,  
The weapon for getting broth [sealing harpoon] being hurled down.

*(Refrain)*

He was in a state of rejoicing,  
The weapon for getting broth being let down.

*(Refrain)*

The weapon for getting broth when it was hurled down,  
His stinking seal he drew right up.  
Ai ye yai ya i yai ya<sup>s</sup>

I N THE FESTIVAL HOUSE Eskimos find not only joy, but also social release. If someone has angered you, here you insult him to his face with a satiric song; then he leaps into the ring and insults you. Everyone laughs as the abuse piles higher, and in the laughter hard feelings vanish. This custom may help explain why the subject of war is unknown in Eskimo poetry: they work out their hatred in songs, not, like "civilized" peoples, by mass killings. The subject of love between man and woman is also entirely lacking, which underlines again how totally non-western Eskimo song is.

Their songs tell of their daily life: hard travel, hunting, building snow houses, the festivals themselves. Using a kind of kenning, they sing of hunting "the bearded one" — the seal, or "the careless dweller of the plains" — the caribou. The greater his feat of hunting, the more modest the singer can be about it (since everyone knows the actual facts) and only brief words are thrown out to allow the chanting chorus' imagination to work. So Aua sings his bear song of a struggle that lasted an entire day and in the last verse takes a poke at the braggarts who everyone knows have less to sing about:

It chanced that I caught sight of  
one wearing the skin of a bear  
out in the drifting pack ice.  
ajaja'ja aja aja'ja.

It came not threateningly.  
Turning about  
was the only thing that seemed to hamper it.  
ajaja'ja aja aja'ja.

It wore out its strength against me,  
And I thrust my lance  
into its body.  
ajaja'ja aja aja'ja.  
ajaja'ja aja aja'ja.

I call this to mind  
Merely because they are ever breathing self-praise,  
Those neighbours of ours to the south and to the north.<sup>9</sup>

Examining many Jenness songs shows that a basic song technique is to compare two differing activities that raise the same emotion. In the following song by Kunana the fear of not being able to build a snow house (a life-and-death matter on the barrens) is compared to the fear of having to dance (i.e. lead in a song) and not doing it skilfully; the two belong together in a further aspect: both seem to share the added physical difficulty of taking place in too crowded a circle:

It terrifies me here  
On hearing the loud sound, that one,  
Of Singittoq's drum.  
ai yai ya hai yai yai  
ya he yai yi ya qa  
ye yi ya qa

How I am I going to move about [in dancing]?  
A greater space than this one it being hard to find?  
It terrifies me here  
On hearing the loud sound, that one.  
Qingaloqana and Katuttaq.

*(Refrain)*

How I am I to move about?  
Just think. That thing,  
My lower circle of snow-blocks I hardly  
know how to build it.  
I continue nevertheless without stopping.  
Here, too, on the floor here.

*(Refrain)*

How am I to move about?  
It terrifies me here  
On hearing the loud sound, that one.  
Tamarsuin and Iviutaq.

*(Refrain)*

How I am I to move about?  
Just think. That one, that one,  
My lower circle of snow-blocks I hardly  
know how to build it.  
I continue nevertheless without stopping.  
Here, too, in the tent here.

*(Refrain)*

How I am I to move about?<sup>10</sup>

A slightly more elaborate use of such comparison is found in the following Copper Eskimo song; the difficulty of drawing the heavy horn hunting-bow and shooting the arrow straight is compared to the difficulty of pulling a song-theme into place:

He constantly bends it, he constantly sends it straight;  
So the big bow, he constantly sends it straight.  
Refrain: He constantly bends it,  
He constantly bends it.

Just as he seeks well for words in a song,  
The big bow, he constantly sends it straight.

He constantly bends it,  
He constantly bends it.

He constantly bends it as he walks along,  
In summer as he walks along.  
He constantly bends it,  
He constantly bends it.

It is clearly easy to shoot big birds,  
As he carries his pack walking along.  
He constantly bends it,  
He constantly bends it.<sup>11</sup>

Some of the songs are more philosophic, as suits the nature of the individual singer. Rasmussen tells how at Repulse Bay an old Iglulik man, Ivaluardjuk, "whose joyous days of life were long since over and past", sang his song of remembrance while his wife chanted in the background a few notes repeated again and again:

Cold and mosquitoes,  
These two pests  
Come never together.  
I lay me down on the ice,  
Lay me down on the snow and ice,  
Till my teeth fall chattering.  
It is I,  
Aja — aja ja.

Memories are they,  
From those days,  
From those days,  
Mosquitoes swarming  
From those days,  
The cold is bitter,  
The mind grows dizzy  
As I stretch my limbs  
Out on the ice.  
It is I,  
Aja — aja — ja.

Ai! but songs  
Call for strength  
And I seek after words.  
I, aja — aja — ja.

Ai! I seek and spy  
Something to sing of,  
The caribou with the spreading antlers!

And strongly I threw  
The spear with my throwing stick.  
And my weapon fixed the bull  
In the hollow of the groin  
And it quivered with the wound  
Till it dropped  
And was still.

Ai! but songs  
Call for strength.  
And I seek after words.  
It is I,  
Aja, aja — haja — haja.<sup>12</sup>

However, when Rasmussen tried to question the patriarch about his view of the world, he found reserve. Men, Ivaluardjuk felt, knew so little of things apart from their food and sleep and rest; it might easily seem presumptuous if they endeavoured to form any opinion about hidden things. Happy folk should not worry themselves by thinking.

Such complete surrender to joy is found in a dance song Jenness records, composed and sung by Higilaq, a Coppermine woman. If a record were possible with this essay, this is the song I would include; it is as beautiful, as enchanting as any song I have ever heard, and the hundreds of people for whom I have played it have invariably agreed. The song describes the points of travel the composer and her husband touched in making their yearly round of living. It begins in a strange surrealism, moves to a refrain whose burden syllables help you catch the basic song rhythm, and at several points crests an incredible ecstatic cry of sheer happiness which only a natural (or highly-trained opera singer) could physically produce.

Wishing to begin to walk  
Wishing to begin to walk  
e ye ye yane ye ye ya  
e yana

Wishing to begin to walk  
To Kuluksuk I proceeded to walk.  
e ye ye yane ye ye ya  
e yana

My stomach [?] when it was empty within me  
 To Kuluksuk I proceeded to walk.  
 e ye ye yane ye ye ya  
 e yana

[Lake] Uluksaq when I reached at last  
 The lake trout I pulled out one after another.  
 e ye ye yane (hu hu hu hu hu hu)  
 e yana

Wishing to begin to walk  
 Wishing to begin to walk.  
 e ye ye yane ye ye ya  
 e yana

Wishing to begin to walk  
 To the Kugaryuaq [river] I proceeded to walk.  
 e ye ye yane ye ye ya  
 e yana

[Mt.] Aptaloq on the road that seemed to lead to it  
 To the Kugaryuaq [river] I proceeded to walk.  
 e ye ye yane ye ye ya  
 e yana

To the Kugaryuaq [river] when I reached at last  
 To Utkusiktaq too I reached at last  
 e ye ye yane ye ye ya  
 e yana

To Utkusiktaq when I reached at last  
 Thoughtlessly I did not go and finish them [the stone pots].  
 e ye ye yana (hu hu hu hu hu hu)  
 e yana

Wishing to begin to walk  
 To Asiak I proceeded to walk.  
 e ye ye yane ye ye ya  
 e yana

Bull caribou, though thinking I should see many,  
 Because I had no bow I was unable to do anything.  
 e ye ye yane ye ye ya  
 e yana

Wishing to begin to walk  
 Wishing to begin to walk.



e ye ye yane ye ye ya  
e yana

Wishing to begin to walk  
To Aqoviyaq I proceeded to walk.  
e ye ye yane ye ye ya  
e yana

The scalers though they hauled up many seals,  
The one seal I obtained I could not procure a companion to it.  
e ye ye yane ye ya  
e yana

Wishing to begin to walk  
To the land behind [northward] I proceeded to walk.  
e ye ye yane ye ye ya  
e yana

The thought entered my mind, Apiana [man's name?]  
Expecting to meet him I proceeded to walk.  
e ye ye yane ye ye ya  
e yana

What is this, this here, the thought that enters my mind?  
His sled it caused him to be exceedingly angry [because it upset].  
e ye ye yane ye ye ya  
e yana

And I then having no possessions [on the sled]  
Since I did not become angry I laughed aloud at it!  
e ye ye yana e ye ye ya.<sup>13</sup>

The word "inspiration" does not, apparently, exist in Eskimo; Ivaluardjuk<sup>14</sup> was astonished when Rasmussen explained to him that only certain persons were considered poets in the white man's world. For the Eskimo to be "inspired" is simply to "feel emotion", and therefore all human beings are poets in the Eskimo sense of the word. But it is true that sometimes special people are visited by a truly great emotion (Rasmussen gives an example of a woman seeing a meteor); these people (for the rest of their lives) are then capable of composing especially memorable songs like Higilaq's quoted above. Perhaps the most profound statement on Eskimo song composition comes from the Nesilik man Orpingalik:

Songs are thoughts, sung out with the breath when people are moved by great forces and ordinary speech no longer suffices. Man is moved just like the ice-floe sailing here and there out in the current. His thoughts are driven by a flowing

force when he feels joy, when he feels fear, when he feels sorrow. Thoughts can wash over him like a flood, making his breath come in gasps and his heart throb. Something like an abatement in the weather will keep him thawed up. And then it will happen that we, who always think we are small, will feel still smaller. And we will fear to use words. But it will happen that the words we need will come of themselves. When the words we want to use shoot up of themselves — we get a new song.<sup>15</sup>

It is time, I feel, that we began exploring this Arctic heritage of “new songs”.

## FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Rasmussen's findings are published in many articles and books. Those most readily available are: *Across Arctic America*, New York, 1927; *The Netsilik Eskimos*, Copenhagen, 1931; *Report on the Fifth Thule Expedition 1921-24*, v. VII, #1: *Intellectual Culture of the Iglulik Eskimos*, Copenhagen, 1929; and a collection of poems drawn from these sources: *Beyond the High Hills*, Cleveland, 1961.
- <sup>2</sup> Diamond Jenness: *Canadian Arctic Expedition 1913-18*, v. XIV: *Eskimo Songs*, Ottawa, 1925; with H. H. Roberts.
- <sup>3</sup> The Folklore Division has now transcribed these to tapes and makes copies available to bona fide researchers.
- <sup>4</sup> Rasmussen (*Iglulik*, p. 234) conjectures that originally all Eskimo song was for magic purposes, quoting as evidence the special, ancient, vocabulary sometimes used in song that is never used in daily life, and also whole song fragments of no intelligible meaning passed on as legacy among the Iglulik Eskimos.
- <sup>5</sup> Jenness: *Songs* #96 (IV, C, 63a), #97 (IV, C, 63b), #93 (IV, C, 63b).
- <sup>6</sup> Rasmussen, *Iglulik* . . . , p. 166-67.
- <sup>7</sup> Rasmussen, *Across* . . . , p. 264-6.
- <sup>8</sup> Jenness, *Song* # 25 (IV, C, 90a).
- <sup>9</sup> Rasmussen, *Iglulik* . . . , p. 237-38.
- <sup>10</sup> Jenness, *Song* # 9 (IV, C, 96b).
- <sup>11</sup> *Ibid.*, *Song* #52 (IV, C, 33).
- <sup>12</sup> Rasmussen, *Iglulik* . . . , p. 18-19.
- <sup>13</sup> Jenness, *Song* # 1 (IV, C, 80).
- <sup>14</sup> Rasmussen, *Iglulik* . . . , p. 233-34.
- <sup>15</sup> Rasmussen, *Netsilik* . . . , p. 321.

# COYOTE AS TRICKSTER IN THE DOUBLE HOOK

Leslie Monkman

FOR A SMALL BOOK, Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* contains so many implications and allusions that some readers have come to regard it as a prose-poem.<sup>1</sup> Some elements in the book's structure have already been examined<sup>2</sup> but the figure of Coyote, one of the most intriguing sources of mystery and meaning, has been relatively ignored. Yet it would appear that Coyote is based upon an ancient and widespread mythic personality serving as the very focus for the establishment of a new moral and social order.

In *The Trickster: A Study In American Indian Mythology*, Paul Radin has noted the prevalence of a trickster-figure in the myths of both Eastern and Western cultures. In discussing the manifestations of this figure in Amerindian folklore, Radin says:

In what must be regarded as its earliest and most archaic form, as found among the North American Indians, Trickster is at one and the same time, creator and destroyer, giver and negator, he who dupes others and who is always duped himself . . . He possesses no values, moral or social, is at the mercy of his passions and appetites, yet through his actions all values come into being . . . Trickster himself is, not infrequently, identified with specific animals such as raven, coyote, hare, spider, but these animals are only secondarily to be equated with concrete animals. Basically, he possesses no well-defined form.<sup>3</sup>

Watson's Coyote embodies many of the qualities outlined here. In his role as amoral "giver and negator" he has driven the community into silence and submission. Yet Coyote, "plotting to catch the glory for himself is fooled", and in the face of the seduction and death which he has inspired, comes a new sense of meaning and integration.

In the opening lines of Watson's book, each character is introduced "under Coyote's eye". However, his presence does not rest at the level of an unseen divinity; indeed, the whole landscape is presented as embodying his immediacy.

A harbinger of sterile east winds, "Coyote made the land his pastime. He stretched out his paw. He breathed on the grass. His spittle eyed it with prickly pear." While such a stringent environment where "the men lay like sift in the cracks of the earth" has excluded the concept of a loving and compassionate deity for the inhabitants, they have easily adopted the Indian's belief in a force which is manifested daily in the blood-curdling howls of the prairie-wolf.

Initially, Mrs. Potter is the figure most closely associated with Coyote. The thoughts of fear and death which she inspires before and after her murder are linked with the community's adoption of a belief in the Indian deity. Thus, when Ara investigates the river bank where she saw the old lady's spectre, she finds the paw mark of a coyote. In a similar vein, the passive herd cows "turn their tails to her and stretch their hides tight."

Mrs. Potter has rebelled against the will of God:

If God had come into the valley, come holding out the long finger of salvation, moaning in the darkness, thundering down the gap at the lake head . . . asking where, asking why, defying an answer, she would have thrown her line against the rebuke.

In her defiance, she unwittingly allies herself with Coyote, who functions here in Satanic opposition to Old Testament Jehovah.

The parallel operating between the defiance of the old lady and Jonah is clearly developed. Ara reflects the dejection of the community as she recalls the history of Nineveh:

Even God's eye could not spy out the men lost here already, Ara thought. He had looked mercifully on the people of Nineveh though they did not know their right hand and their left. But there were not enough people here to attract his attention. The cattle were scrub cattle.

She later envisages "the old lady, lost like Jonah perhaps in the cleft belly of the rock, the water washing over her." After his penitence in the belly of the whale, Jonah accepted God's will and warned the people of Nineveh. A merciful Jehovah decrees:

I spare Nineveh, that great city, wherein are more than sixscore thousand persons that cannot discern between their right hand and their left hand; and also much cattle.<sup>4</sup>

Similarly, Mrs. Potter could have effected the salvation of the community if she had allied herself with God's will and functioned as a benevolent matriarch and

spiritual guide. However, she defies the light of God with her own lamp, and her fish bring neither sustenance nor salvation to the community.

ALTHOUGH COYOTE possesses the power to incite individuals against God, he is clearly lower on the scale of deity in *The Double Hook*. Kip comments that neither James nor his mother realizes that "Coyote, plotting to catch the glory for himself is fooled and everyday fools others." The old lady forgets that her defiance does not alter God's control over life and death, and thus Coyote carries her away "like a rabbit in his mouth." Coyote, of course, will be fooled when suicide, seduction and matricide lead not to despair but to an affirmation of faith and love. Even the old lady shares in the changes which come to the community. Felix describes her last appearance by the creek:

I saw James Potter's old mother standing by my brown pool, he said. I was thinking of catching some fish for the lot of us. But she wasn't fishing he said. Just standing like a tree with its roots reaching out to water.

As the rest of the community undergoes renewal, water assumes its proper symbolic value for Mrs. Potter as well.

Although Kip recognizes both the power and weakness of Coyote, he too is finally "fooled". Mrs. Watson's short stories offer a possible explanation of Kip's crucial vulnerability in spite of his unique awareness. At the end of "The Black Farm", Uncle Daedalus announces:

Ghede has already chosen me, he said, the eternal figure in black . . . death at the cross-roads. He stands at the intersection of time and eternity. He is corpse and phallus, king and clown. He introduces men to their own devil. He is the last day of the week and the cross in every cemetery. He sings the song of the grave-digger.<sup>5</sup>

The reference here is to the Guédé figures of Haitian voodoo. As this passage indicates, the members of the Guédé family are represented as spirits of death and guardians of cemeteries. Although they inspire fear because of their associations with death, they also serve as obscene jesters: thus, the reference to phallus and clown.

Just as Coyote and God both play a role in the spiritual landscape of *The Double Hook*, practitioners of Haitian voodoo have no difficulty in assimilating beliefs in their gods with the creed of the Roman Catholic church. The Christian God is regarded as the supreme deity while the voodoo gods provide simple ex-

planations for daily occurrences. The conception of these spirits is anthropomorphic as seen in the description of Guédé. "By conceiving his spirits as in manner and desires resembling himself, the Haitian can understand his little universe without subjecting himself to the bewilderment which faces a simple Christian, trying to reconcile an all-loving Father with the obvious evil he allows on earth."<sup>6</sup> The parallels with Coyote's role in *The Double Hook* are evident.

The power of these voodoo gods to possess their worshippers has special application to Kip's behaviour. "When a god seizes a man, he 'mounts' him; the possessed person forthwith becomes the god's 'horse' . . . The person mounted does nothing of his own accord while he is possessed."<sup>7</sup> This concept is alluded to in Watson's "Antigone": "My father ruled men who thought they were gods or the instruments of gods or at the very least, god-affected and god-pursued."<sup>8</sup>

Kip's role as an agent for Coyote's designs is made explicit when Ara and Felix hear Coyote crying through the thunder, "Kip, my servant, Kip." Although he is aware that Coyote practises his duplicity by "reaching out reflected glory. Like a fire to warm. Then shoving the brand between a man's teeth right into his belly's pit," Kip is drawn to attempt to seduce Lenchen and to deliberately taunt and antagonize James. Later, Kip justifies his behaviour by saying: "The old white moon had me by the hair." This comment is closely related to an earlier description of Kip just before the crucial events leading to his blinding:

He stood on the doorstep looking at the moon. Stood roped to the ground by his weight of flesh. Reaching out to the white tongue of moonlight so that he might swing up to the cool mouth. Raising his hand to the white glory for which he thirsted.

Kip seems to have no more control over his faculties in this scene than the possessed victim of the Haitian voodoo god. In his uncontrollable thirst for the illusory "reflected glory" of god-like perception and control, Kip is victimized by Coyote, just as Mrs. Potter was. When he is alone in the barn with James, Kip thinks: "He's only to loose the force in his own muscles", but his prudence has deserted him and by mis-judging James, he loses his sight. Kip's complete forgiveness of James can also be accounted for by his recognition that an extra-human power was operating: "I keep thinking about James . . . I kept at him like a dog till he beat around the way a porcupine beats with his tail."

While James is the cause of both his mother's death and Kip's loss of sight, he is also the principal victim of these agents of Coyote's will. Images of eyes and seeing are used to convey the intimidation which moves James and Greta to

desperation. "Eyes. Eyes and padded feet. Coyote moving in rank-smelling." The link between James' fear and this constant surveillance is reiterated in his cry when he blinds Kip: "If you were God Almighty, if you'd as many eyes as a spider, I'd get them all." Like his mother, James defies both God and nature. However, while the old lady's defiance and denial ended in death, James lives to share in the community's renewal. Coyote's song extolling the peace of passivity and death only reminds James of the confinement of death and like Europa in "The Black Farm", he realizes that "no one ever found abundance of life in a six-foot plot."<sup>9</sup>

Greta believes that she has been freed of her mother's bonds by James' revolt but she learns that such vicarious release is impossible. When she finally comes to defy her mother's spectre as she prepares for her suicide, she sacrifices herself to Coyote:

And Coyote cried in the hills  
I've taken her where she stood  
my left hand is on her head  
my right hand embraces

The sexual innuendo in these lines is linked not only with Greta's repression but also with a recurring image of Coyote's excessive sensuality in many Indian myths. He functions as the great seducer both to sex and death.

In the destruction of Greta's suicide, Ara sees new hope for an end to the purgatorial existence of the community. Earlier, she envisages God: "the glory of his face shaded by his hat. Not coaxing with a pan of oats, but coming after you with a whip until you stand and face him in the end." William is quick to point out that this conception "sounds only a step from the Indian's Coyote." While William, like Theophil, is sufficiently sophisticated to reject the god of Indian myth, his self-enclosed mind cannot admit any higher conception of deity. "I've never seen God, he said, but if I did, I don't think I'd be much surprised." After Greta's suicide, however, Ara has a vision of a renewed world conveyed in Christian symbols:

Everything shall live where the river comes, she said out loud. And she saw a great multitude of fish, each fish springing arched through the slanting light.

Coyote delivers a typical benediction on the attractiveness of death but now Ara sees him as a simple prairie-wolf "on a jut of rock calling down over the ledge." Thus, she conclusively reduces the power which the crippling superstition of death-dealing Coyote has had over her.

The Widow Wagner, with her many invocations to God, shares Ara's earlier conceptions of a deity of vengeance and justice:

Dear God, she cried. Then she stopped. Afraid that he might come.  
 Father of the fatherless. Judge of widows. Death and after death the judgement.

Finally, maternal instincts mingled with a strong fear of the judgement after death move her to participation in the redemptive process centred on the birth of her grand-child.

Angel interrupts one of the Widow's many profane invocations with "There's no use wailing on God." She views the latter's conceptions as inapplicable to the way of life imposed on the community by the stringent environment and replaces these ideas with a stronger belief in Coyote than we see in any other individual. Her meaningful role in the community is maintained by relegating Coyote to the status of "meddler" where the Indians originally placed him. Angel's world is not particularly complex, and when she has problems or doubts she assumes Coyote as the cause. Like the voodoo gods, Angel's Coyote offers simple explanations for daily occurrences. The daily frustrations imposed on her in the community are viewed as "spirits let out of a sack . . . by the meddler Coyote." The reference here is to Indian myths which relate that the world was originally created as an Eden until Coyote released from a sack the spirits of fatigue, hunger and disease. In spite of her pessimism regarding a benevolent deity or the possibility of communal action and responsibility, Angel will provide the pragmatic element essential to the achievement of those same concepts.

**I**F ANGEL stands as the epitome of positive practicality, her husband Felix clearly engenders the spiritual affirmation evident at the end of her book. Felix rejects the oblivion offered by Coyote's promise of forgetfulness in retreat and death by reiterating, "I mustn't forget." Instead, having accepted Lenchen and Kip into his house, he assumes his communal responsibilities and asks Angel to return. Thus, he picks up the troubles which William accused him of leaving on other people's doorsteps. As he comforts Lenchen in childbirth, Felix reflects that he may begin again with the help of remembered phrases from the Christian liturgy. Kip's pain and the birth of his namesake break through the "huge indifference" in which Felix previously cloaked himself. The other characters, conditioned by their sterile relationships with each other and with the land can only conceive of God in terms of either Coyote or the just but cruel patriarch



of the Old Testament. Felix functions as an illustration of the Christ-like love of the New Testament which can bring others into peace and harmony.

Although Theophil is implicitly damned for his refusal to participate in the renewal of the community, there is no instant nirvana for those who do share in this development. In the midst of the joy of birth and re-birth surrounding the arrival of young Felix, Coyote cries:

I have set his feet on the soft ground  
I have set his feet on the sloping shoulders of the world.

Ara foreshadows this final pessimistic note when she thinks of the baby Felix: "I never see baby-clothes . . . that I don't think how a child puts on suffering with them."

Even in their moment of triumph against the fear and passivity which has crippled their lives, these people must remember that their environment will continue to place the same stringent demands upon them. Only through a continued affirmation of the human spirit and of the essential worth of all human existence can they continue the renewal process into a reconstruction of their lives in a more meaningful way. The figure of Coyote will always be present whether manifested as the Satanic tempter of Felix and Ara, the fear of life in the Widow or the mystical force which can drive the passions of men like Kip and James to such desperate heights. Yet out of the recognition of the dual aspects or "double-hook" of glory and darkness in human existence rises the promise of a benevolent deity, implicitly affirmed in the character of Felix who will supersede both the malevolence of Coyote and the cruel justice of the Old Testament Jehovah.

FOOTNOTES

- <sup>1</sup> Philip Child, "A Canadian Prose-Poem", *Dalhousie Review* 39 (Summer, 1959), pp. 233-236.
- <sup>2</sup> Margaret Morriss, "The Elements Transcended", *Canadian Literature* 42 (Autumn, 1969), pp. 56-71.
- <sup>3</sup> Paul Radin, *The Trickster: A Study In American Indian Mythology* (London, 1956), pp. ix-x.
- <sup>4</sup> Jonah 1:11.
- <sup>5</sup> Sheila Watson, "The Black Farm", *Queen's Quarterly*, 65 (Summer, 1956), p. 213.
- <sup>6</sup> James Leyburn, *The Haitian People* (London, 1966), p. 145.
- <sup>7</sup> *Ibid.*, p. 150.
- <sup>8</sup> Sheila Watson, "Antigone", *Tamarack Review*, 11 (Spring, 1959), p. 22.
- <sup>9</sup> Sheila Watson, "The Black Farm", p. 209.

## review articles

# PLAY IN THE WESTERN WORLD

*Douglas Barbour*

KEN BELFORD, *The Post Electric Cave Man*. Talonbooks, \$3.00.

JIM BROWN, *Towards a Chemistry of Reel People*. Talonbooks, \$3.00.

FRANK DAVEY, *Four Myths For Sam Perry*. Talonbooks, \$2.00.

BARRY MCKINNON, *The Carcasses of Spring*. Talonbooks. \$2.50.

DAVID PHILLIPS, *Wave*. Talonbooks, \$2.50.

DAVID PHILLIPS, *The Coherence*. Talonbooks, \$1.50.

IN THE LAST YEAR OR SO, Talonbooks has emerged as a major force in creative publishing on the West Coast. Its books, designed by David Robinson and Gordon Fidler, has been consistently handsome. Talon also represents a particular editorial stance: its publications are the result of the editor's involvement with his writers, and a certain real commitment to those writers' visions. I suspect it is this involvement with the writers that makes it possible for Robinson and Fidler to work so creatively with them in the creation of such lovely books. Moreover, their tastes in poetry are not too narrow: as well as the poets under review here, Talonbooks has recently published plays by James Reaney and George Ryga, poetry by bp Nichol and others, including the masterful *Selected Poems* of Phyllis Webb. The five poets under review in no way present a single-minded approach to their art.

The title of Jim Brown's *Towards A Chemistry of Reel People* reveals a lot about the contents. The book is full of

wordgames that are serious; they are always interesting and sometimes very moving. Puns in spelling abound, for, as the preface asserts, "spelling, the magic power of language / cast, mould, the spell works for a time but if applied again and again, absolutely the language becomes a dead spelling". It is this almost magic awareness of language that Brown seeks in these poems. He is yet another recent poet who is attempting, through a variety of means, to become, in Jerome Rothenberg's telling phrase, a "technician of the sacred". And, like certain shamans of old, Brown seeks communion with the gods through ecstasy, through drugs. This whole book is drenched in acid, and other like substances.

A very real problem emerges as a result of this: there are many poems in the book to which I did not respond, but I have been told that I *would* respond if I had experienced acid myself. Surely a poetic mode that excludes certain readers merely because they did not undergo "chemical change" is too exclusive? At

any rate, I feel this problem vitiates some of the very real vitality of this book. For it is very vital in spots, and contains some fine poems. "fog woman tangles with the demonic fog machine" is primitive in its awareness, and attains a kind of mythic splendour in its chant section. And there is the way Brown uses certain key words and ideas, like "reel". In the poem "words" the metaphor of the turning reel is very powerful in its suggestions of people as mere actors, and in dealing, rather negatively, with the idea of fate. The "spellings" of many poems, and the somewhat mad humour of a number of them, despite the tendency towards exclusiveness mentioned above, provide a good deal of pleasure. Finally, the title poem and "war babies" are both longer attempts to come to grips with the personal search for roots, history, and meaning, which seems to be a major concern of so many writers today. These may be acid poems, but they so clearly reach out to every reader they transcend any narrow sub-culture. "notes for an ending", the final section of "war babies", appears to be a devastatingly honest reflection of a single summer's living among a small, tattered, group of heads. It has a kind of power which derives from that honesty more than from any artifice, but the rest of the poem is so carefully articulated for 'spelling', the contrast only furthers our awareness of the poet's particular problems of vision and voice in the whole book.

Jim Brown was chemical, and used an electric typewriter to compose his poems. I'm not sure how Ken Belford writes his poems, but the title of his new book implies a kind of progress. *The Post Electric Cave Man* is a tough little book, in which Belford has moved out of the pos-

sible straitjacket the three line stanza form of his first book might have become. The tone is often one of cool understatement, and he shares, with Barry McKinnon, an emotional affinity with the poetry of John Newlove. Neither writer is a disciple of the older poet, but they often share the same emotional space. All the major traits of Belford's poetry, coolness, understatement, wry precision, a hesitancy to use too 'poetic' a language, can be seen in "I Found, In You":

There was a  
small red wetness  
sometimes a  
hole in the  
night. Wherever  
I didn't look,  
curved. I could  
best describe  
it, I found  
by not.

The book's title implies a turning away from the city, from technology, and most of these poems are about people outside the city limitations. Yet 'post-electric' does not mean without cars, for cars are a major image/metaphor in these poems, partly because Belford is so aware of distance and the need to cross it, a very Canadian concern. As in Newlove, there is something dumb-animal-like about many of the characters in these poems. Belford is writing stories *manqué*: the story is deliberately left untold, the characters are deliberately left undeveloped. The effect is of eavesdropping on a private conversation between strangers: we know nothing about them, not even who they are, but we are involved because they are human, they are like us.

The fine photographs of Soloveoff and Clarke become abstract patterns on grey paper, and match the mood of the book perfectly.

As I suggested above, Barry McKinnon shares certain emotional attitudes with Ken Belford, and *The Carcasses Of Spring* demonstrates this. There are some major differences though, and for me they mark McKinnon as the more interesting, and potentially more rewarding, poet. This is because he is more personally present in his poems than is Belford in most of his (Belford telling stories of others, McKinnon, of himself). He puts his case well in what could be taken as his *ars poetica*, "the apology":

often there is pain  
when I do not write poems  
its as if I do not love  
  
for you there are my bad poems today  
(all love is by degree)  
  
and often there is pain  
when things are not  
perfect

That poem is followed by "pages from a prairie journal", a series of prose/poem confessions in which "the prairie night still has a way of touching the deepest conscience", and in which the desire for perfection contrasts with a far reaching awareness of its impossibility. Another search-for-roots poem, it is the kind of poem McKinnon is best at, going back to places he once knew. As John Newlove has said: "Remembrance is a foolish act", but also, by implication and the presence of the poem, a necessary one. It is necessary to McKinnon anyway, and out of such necessity he creates these poems. Throughout this book is imagery bespeaks a unified, if very stark, vision: broken record players, guitars, etc., carcasses of broken bones, are strewn throughout. If the tone and approach remind one of Newlove's poems, this is not because McKinnon is copying the older poet, but

because such poets as Purdy and Newlove broke trail in an area which is very pertinent to the concerns of many younger poets. But McKinnon speaks in his own voice in the best of these poems, such as "his wife", "the war", "short story of a gentle man" where the third person allows for a certain wry wit, and the centre-piece of the collection, "letter 11: for my wife". This is a powerfully felt attack on Romantic 'lies' about "the first time". Remembrance hurts here especially, but the memory is only too clear:

and you I remember  
had trouble your  
eyes squinted shut  
as if in pain  
and my eyes squinting in the pain  
I knew you would suffer  
from

and it is a lesson, cut in stone, fully felt in the heart. Yet it moves to a positive conclusion that is not an escape, but a result of having recognized and accepted all the pain, of having seen "it was not beautiful / but I had come / to love you". It is for such powerful poems that *The Carcasses Of Spring* deserves to be read.

Frank Davey's *Four Myths For Sam Perry* is divided in four sections: amulets; sentences of welcome; a light poem; sam. It is a deliberate division, and the book moves to the final poems about/for Sam Perry with all the accumulated weight of meaning Davey can provide. It should be read as a whole then, and in proper order, yet I find that certain poems excite my interest, while the rest fail to hold it. So I don't accept the total book, despite my interest in its purpose, but only respond fully to a few separate poems.

In "amulets", the lovely first poem "A Song to Mary", with its personal reflections, repetitions of phrase in articulating

the growth of love, remains with me long after some of the later poems have been forgotten. But immediately, with "The Making", a poem about poetry and ancient politics, Davey moves away from the kind of personal and private vision of "Song to Mary" to embrace a public and political poetry of wide implications. In "sentences of welcome" he attempts such a poetry. "Sentences of Welcome" itself is a pollution poem, and a very good one, for it is obviously deeply felt, and the lamentation plus somewhat hopeful prophecy of its tone moved me. But in "Watts, 1965", "Hill 488" and "Torrey Canyon" he fails to move me poetically even though I agree with his political sentiments. Those who disagree with him politically would probably find even less in these poems than I do, which is precisely the inescapable danger of such poetry. "Amchitka", however, is a rather successful concrete poem, the artifice of its form effectively distancing it as "art". "When" is a quiet and reflective post-apocalypse poem, and comes across nicely through its use of understatement and refusal to invoke political rhetoric. The last poem in this section, "For her, A Spring", is a self-conscious "fuck poem", and I'm not sure why it's placed there. As a possible response to all the destruction and death imaged forth in the preceding poems? Possibly, but the connections are not clear. "a light poem" is a long reflective, personal, historical, political poem in nine parts which succeeds as the poems in the preceding section did not, moving strangely through historical / political allusions and discussions to the image of new life in his woman's belly seen as an answer. Throughout, the sharply defined opposition of light/darkness serves the inter-

esting thought that there is a greater darkness in those whose minds do not want to know darkness at all, than in those who accept the eternal opposites. On re-reading the poem reveals a mature complexity of thought and emotion: it is Davey's best attempt yet to create an argumentative poem.

All these poems lead up to the last section, "sam". Sam is myth, and these poems celebrate his mythic sacrifice *cum* martyrdom. Sam is seen as a magus of sorts; in the first poem he ritually fucks "his girl" in the basin at Hot Spring Cove. This first half of the poem is ritualistically fascinating, but it does not, for me, make Sam the mythic figure he must be if the rest of the sequence is to work. Sam is anyone, the name is meaningful only to those who knew him (in the poem that is, and that's where Davey must succeed in his attempt to apotheosize Sam Perry, or else he fails, here, as poet, though not as friend and follower perhaps). So that in the second poem, we must take the poet's word for it that Vancouver was "Sam's city" in the more important sense that it somehow belonged to him. I am not fully convinced by the poem that this was so. These are interesting poems, with many small beauties in them, but they fail precisely where they are meant to succeed. Don't take my word for it though, for this is a vexatious area of criticism, and the book has much to offer the interested reader, both in its successes and its failures.

David Phillips writes a poetry I just enjoy, without being able always to say why. His work strikes a sympathetic chord in me, and I find I do not really read him as critically as I do many other poets. So it is obvious that I shall recommend both *Wave* and *The Coherence*. I'd

like to try and give some reasons though, just to fulfill my duties here. I like the shape his poems take: he uses short sharp lines mostly, and the words connect in both directions, so that the (pseudo)-statements he is making accumulate meaning as the poem progresses. Another result of his formal games is a kind of 'rational' ambiguity which is always intriguing. This can be seen in the relatively simple "Reply":

I'm sorry  
for the wrong reasons  
  
what  
in Christ's name  
  
are  
the right  
  
reasons  
she asks me  
  
to zip up  
her dress  
  
the blue one  
her skin  
  
seems darker  
with  
  
such cloth  
next to it  
  
what reasons are  
my hands  
  
fumbling  
to answer

He titles one of his best poems "A Confessional in Five Parts", but all his poems are confessionals, although very different from the poetry of the "confessional school", and they deliberately short-circuit the normal orders of speech in order to somehow communicate the 'real', the emotional sub-stratum syntax often hides. One section of *Wave* is titled 'Real

dreams & other touchings', and that word 'touchings' is the real clue to his power: his poems are attempts to touch both their subject matter and the reader.

David Phillips and bp Nichol are close friends and their poetry evinces a common sense of the importance of language, the Word. Many of the poems in *The Coherence* are to or for bp, and are interesting to anyone who likes either poet's work because they do not share lifestyles despite their agreements in poetry. So Phillips reaches out to bp, tries to communicate with the other poet, or with other people, in his poem/letters. This might make these poems too private, but Phillips is always careful to speak so as we not only overhear the conversation but recognize its general importance. There are other, more obviously public poems, however, which also succeed admirably in rendering Phillips's vision. The best of these are his poem for Malcolm Lowry, the exciting "The New Eyes" where he takes off from a Cezanne still-life to investigate the possibilities of vision, and "Four Dreams in that Language" where "dream" is not a private state merely, but a part of a shared, visionary, experience.

Both his books are of interest, then, as, it appears, I think all these books are. I don't want to sound too positive about them because I do not like them all equally, nor do I think they are all equally worth the interested reader's money and time. Moreover, in certain cases I found the books interesting not merely despite, but because of, their flaws. But they do make a good, beautifully packaged, introduction to one range of West Coast poetry at the beginning of the seventies and the Phillips, McKinnon, and parts of the Brown, books especially, are more than just interesting, they contain true poetry.

# SHAKING THE ALPHABET

Peter Stevens

PHYLLIS WEBB, *Selected Poems*. Talonbooks, \$8.00 hardcover, \$5.00 paper.

FROM THEIR VOLUMES of selected poetry most poets reject those poems they have become dissatisfied with. Phyllis Webb has been very rigorous in this refining process; these *Selected Poems* contain only about a third of the poems which appeared in her first three books. *Naked Poems* is published in its entirety though this book misleadingly titles the section 'From *Naked Poems*'. It seems that John Hulcoop was largely responsible for the selection but evidently he worked in conjunction with the poet.

Hulcoop has also contributed a long introduction to the volume, an introduction which gives a brief biographical outline but which is mainly devoted to an analysis of some ideas and images in the poetry itself. It is very sound and illuminating, perhaps somewhat excessive in its praise of certain poems but obviously written out of a careful and meticulous reading of the poetry. A pity it is spoiled by a glaring error (a confusion about *Preview* and *First Statement*) and a strange puzzle associated with a Conrad quotation, arising, I think, from bad proofreading.

Hulcoop summarizes Phyllis Webb's poetic career as a movement from "obsessive subjectivity to self-objectification". Certainly an early poem such as "Poet" shows an almost morbidly subjective insistence on the poet and her desire to retain for herself a withdrawn and confined space in order to examine it tho-

roughly, pacing the walls of her cell until she discovers that she has been pacing

for the word, and I have heard  
curiously, I have heard the tallest of mouths  
call down behind my veil  
to limit or enlargen me  
as I or it prevails.

The poet, then, measures out her own small compass in order to create a cosmos, or more exactly, she allows a cosmos to take shape, largely or minutely, within the walls set by herself. Her mind focuses within limits, and her thoughts are given weight by filling the space and by opening the possibility for extension, an interdependence of self and the self's deliberately circumscribed choices. She herself says she is "shaping the world in the intimate/terms of self".

She fills her poetry with large themes: love, history, time, public life, and they are expressed in images of bones, the sea, open landscapes and nakedness. But paradoxically she also tries to enclose in the poems images of defined areas such as gardens, momentary scenes, brief private affairs. The poetry vibrates between extremes: words such as "everything" and "nothing", "yes" and "no" keep cropping up, and what she shapes in her poems can be seen as being similar to what she says about the shape of prayer:

curved and going nowhere, to fall  
in pure abstraction, saying everything  
and saying nothing at all.

The essential irony at the heart of the poetry is that her remoteness that centres on accepting life within limits drives her towards contemplation of suicide (one of her best poems is on this subject) just as her search for a pure poetry drives her towards silence. The last poem in the book is a simple "Oh?" isolated on the page, a zero that opens up another irony, for it is a nothingness that is a question in itself as well as being a nothingness that is questioned. It opens up the possibility of a continuing search for "the No beyond negation" which can be transformed at times into the positive "Yes" at the end of "Poetics Against The Angel Of Death" or even the ambiguous nothing in "I Can Call Nothing Love" in which love and poetry are equated, as "A smile shakes alphabets over my belly/and I bend down scrabbling 'Yes' from a young Adam."

A tension develops as the poems become more disciplined, for underneath that deliberate and measured surface there seem to be cries for unfulfilled desires to be considered. Love can create its own enclosed world, "withdrawn/into the well" and it can also create "that place of perfect animals and men", though the poet knows that such a place can never permanently exist. Always, then, there is the desire to love, for in the "quivering / instability of love / we shake a world to order", but also there is the knowledge of the impossibility of love. Love can catch the moment but not an Eden. We can wall ourselves inside our privacies but we wall out too much and there is too much we can never altogether wall out. Desire and unfulfilled desire, privacy in isolation and the demands of human love achieve equilibrium

only momentarily, and the poet accepts her solitude even as she regrets it:

leaving brothers, lovers, Christ  
outside my walls  
where they have wept without  
and I within.

Still, "two bodies are better than one for this quilting/throwing into the dark a this-ness that was not", so that "a grace is made" even though it is of "dubious value". The value is in the making. These ideas culminate in *Naked Poems*. Nakedness is our shelter" she says in an earlier poem and the five sections of *Naked Poems* try to abstract the shelter for two at the level of minimal or bare necessity. The first two suites come across distance to a small room with little furniture where a world of love through particularities of body and mind exists. Two come together, create scars and bruises of love as well as elements of clarity and perfection for a time. No permanence results but the act of love flowers in the cluster of poems called "Non Linear" suspended at the centre of the sequence. These poems are complete moments of made grace, "an instant of white roses", "a stillness in jade", "a new alphabet", "pale /delicates at peace".

The two closing sections of the series try to weigh in the mind what was embodied in the flesh through love, for it is the senses, "the five gods of reality" that "bless and keep [her] sane". Ironically the titles of these last two sections throw the equilibrium of mind and body in doubt — "A Suite of Lies" and "Some Final Questions". Desire is both satisfied and incapable of satisfaction, for it goes/out of the impossibly/beautiful". Life is enclosed and "diminished", yet the senses can lift a reality into the mind and make it a balance of sensuousness and intellect:



want the apple on the bough in  
the hand in the mouth seed  
planted in the brain want  
to think "apple".

Love has been abstracted, the poet has removed herself in a search for an openness in a closed world. Her reclusiveness seems a negation of love — some readers find *Naked Poems* too arid, too much a denial of the sensual. Yet she is too much aware of pain and evil and death in her other poems ever to accept anything passively. There are degrees of acceptance and rejection: "The degree of nothingness/is important", she says in "Sitting", yet this poem still contains "fire" and her state at the end is still human, even though it is "only/remotely human".

All this makes the poetry sound deadly serious and bleakly intellectual, and at

times certainly the convolutions of her poetic thought are tortuous and tortured, but the poems also contain ironies, a delight in word play and in some of the later poems a kind of undercutting self-mockery. On occasions she uses grating and grotesque diction, and I find very annoying her use of colloquialisms and slang, for it draws too much attention to itself in the general context of the poetry.

Phyllis Webb has created her own distinctive world through her poetry. It is good to have this selection not only as a measure against which to set contemporary sloppiness, anti-intellectual hysteria and private triviality but also as a considered body of work with its own clarity, intellectual toughness and verbal precision.

## NOT THRONES AND CROWNS BUT MEN

*Clara Thomas*

CLAIRE PRATT, *The Silent Ancestors*. McClelland & Stewart, \$7.50.

METHODISM was a dynamic, missionary religion; its converts were equally assured of their stature as men and their shortcomings as sinners. Their preachers exhorted them to repent and be saved and they did not hesitate, in their hymns, to exhort their God,

When wilt Thou save the people?  
Oh God of mercy, When?  
The people, Lord, the people,  
Not thrones and crowns, but men.

In the 19th century, they spread across the earth and in Newfoundland, an emigrant methodist minister was the father of E. J. Pratt.

*The Silent Ancestors*, subtitled "The Forebears of E. J. Pratt" is a special kind of adventure story. For five years, from 1964 to 1969, Claire Pratt travelled, followed up clues and unravelled mysteries of the past on a treasure-hunt whose constant characteristic, she says, is,

that it always seems to be just a little too late to find the buried treasure. Each of the scattered gems, however dust-covered and rusty, must be stored and saved against the day it can be properly polished and placed in the mosaic.

Her patience and her zest have both formed and livened her book. Many readers whose interest centres solely in E. J. Pratt and his work, will be captured by the three-continent panorama of the Pratt settlements and will see her family's story as Claire Pratt sees it — an adventuring river, of which her father's life was one tributary and whose course is, ultimately, the journey of man.

"The search for Joseph," she calls her quest:

It is to lose the present, the comparative physical ease of the 20th century and return to a rougher, simpler, and in some ways happier time, to claim kinship with the toilers of the earth. It is to become acquainted with the suffering, the darkness, the spontaneous and irrepressible gaiety that breaks through the darkness, and the love that has fashioned and shaped us into the creatures we have become. It is to reach back in time and take hold of the ages as they in their endless variety keep pace with the circling seasons, ringing the changes from birth to death, to death to birth again.

The Pratts were dales people from the North Riding of Yorkshire, leadminers in a network of mines that had been worked since long before the Romans came to Britain and exported lead to Rome. They worked in underground darkness and they lived with poverty, but in the 18th century John Wesley rode "like a spring wind" into their valley and brought them a joyful sense of the dignity of man in the eyes of God. An "earnest, loving, simple people," he called the dalesmen, and they flocked to Methodism. Claire Pratt sketches in a valuable social, cultural and religious background to illuminate the history of her family.

In the course of one decade of the 19th century, "catapulted by change and lubricated by Methodism," the Pratts spread out to India, America, New Zealand, and Newfoundland. John, the father of E. J. Pratt, had already been trained as a Methodist preacher. In 1873 he left the dales for Newfoundland, changing his familiar Yorkshire circuit for Western Bay, Bona Vista, Cupid, Fortune and Grand Bank, at the far end of the inhospitable sea."

E. J. (Ned) Pratt, the third of his sons, was born in 1882. It is important to remember, as Claire Pratt reminds us, that "he was brought up in the middle days of Queen Victoria and in many ways remained a Victorian all his life." Pratt was nearly forty before he settled in Victoria College as a Professor of English and he was in his forties when he became known as a Canadian poet. His attitudes were not established by the events of the twenties, the thirties or of the war years; they had been established long before, in a Newfoundland youth and a variegated young manhood as draper's apprentice, teacher, preacher, travelling salesman and scholar. Until now, his formative experiences have best been told by Henry Wells and Carl Klinck in their *E. J. Pratt*. Its biographical chapter vibrates with the warmth and the zest of Pratt's own voice and one has felt on reading it, that the authors were setting down the poet's very words.

*The Silent Ancestors* culminates in a chapter on the abiding qualities of the Pratt family and one on the poetry of E. J. Pratt. "The Pratts, along with countless other families in England and throughout the world were born, suffered, and died in an ambience of poverty and religion." Gentleness, conservatism, cau-

tion and courage are the traits that persist and prevail in all the family's branches — these and the strong and recurrent tendency towards the aesthetic and the artistic. It is striking that in the far-flung ramifications of four generations, the Pratts have produced so many artists — and, of course, one very great distinction of this book is that it is the story of an artist by his daughter, who is also an artist. Claire Pratt works usually with paint, pen or stylus; her father worked with words: but surely the basic artistic quality in each one of them is an expansive visual imagination. It operates on an epic scale in Pratt's poetry and it is able to encompass the epic quality of a family's migrations in his daughter's work. She expands the vision of the critics who have seen Newfoundland and the sea as sufficient answer to Pratt's own expansiveness:

... back of that is an entire area, harking back to a time long out of memory in which forces are inevitably at work forming and composing the sinews of thought and habit that ran as inevitably through his life and writing as did those of the sea. Out on the remote hills of Yorkshire is a quality of expanse, of hugeness, in which man, like the incidental characters in a Japanese mountain landscape, is in his place, of nature as well as in it.

The element of "hugeness" which she sees as coming down to her father through his Yorkshire heritage, Claire Pratt categorizes into two parts: "the struggle from which emerges the hero; and the wind, giving rise to the mystic. In discussing the various elements of my father's work, these two elements will be seen to run like interweaving threads." The mystic quality she links to Methodism, or, more precisely, to Pentecost, "and I use the term in what may be called its aesthetic sense

— the sense in which we speak of the Descent of the Dove or of the Holy Wind that 'bloweth where it listeth'." To her, the poem where the mysticism of the Methodist may be most clearly seen is *Brébeuf and His Brethren*:

Here, the raptures of Swaledale have been transmuted into the religious zeal of the Holy Fathers. . . .

The poem is filled with suffering beyond the realm of mortal imaginings . . . it is masochistic suffering at its most intense level. But beyond this there is a grace above the explanation of the psychiatrists, and I think it is this that gives the poem its melody. The Pentecostal wind blows through it from first to last, the wind that blew the missionaries to the far corners of the world, and that carried with it the song so familiar to those whose lives have been conditioned to the broad sweeps of nature such as are found among the moors of Yorkshire.

Claire Pratt regards the world which her father created in his poems both as extension of himself and the "medium wherein his character with all its contradictions, seeming or real, is resolved." The wind of grace quickens his poetic universe to life, and laughter makes it bearable — "laughter in its two parts, delight and humour, often, but not inevitably intertwined." There was, she testifies, a high degree of euphoria in Pratt's poetry, and in his writing of poetry. In every way, the very act of writing set Pratt free; the shaping power of the artist gave him dominion over the paradoxes in man's experience that he knows to be unresolvable and accepted as such:

If he did not write about his heroes *per se*, their qualities appear and again in such poems as "The Dying Eagle" or "Putting Winter to Bed." It is the great one put down, finally, by forces beyond his control. It is in these where the need for humour is most urgent, the need for accepting life as it is, on a plane where humour becomes one with compassion. Life is what life is.

Nothing in this book will close the doors to critical inquiry into Pratt's poetry, nor does Claire Pratt intend so to do. There is an important sense, however, in which it will now be imperative for any critic of Pratt to read her work, for she explores areas that only she can know, and her research has opened vistas that inevitably add an extra dimension to our perceptions. She has broken the silence of "The Silent Ancestors" to add to our understanding of her father and his

work and to reaffirm the continuing wonder that inspired and informed all his poetry. Pratt's imagination encompassed and, in fact, revelled in the immensity, the power and the complexity of the universe. But his respect was most deeply engaged by the strength of the human spirit against all odds and his central concern was always, like the Methodist hymn-maker's, "Not thrones and crowns, but men."

## FIDDLEHEAD'S ENERGY

*Christopher Xerxes Ringrose*

JOHN ROBERT COLOMBO, *The Great San Francisco Earthquake and Fire*. Fiddlehead Poetry Books, \$2.50.

LEN GASPARINI, *Tunnel Bus to Detroit*. Fiddlehead Poetry Books, \$1.00.

BRENDA FLEET, *Bullets and Cathedrals*. Fiddlehead Poetry Books, \$2.00.

THE RANGE OF WORK available in Fred Cogswell's Fiddlehead Poetry Books is now considerable. 1971 has seen the publication under his imprint of the revised *Plainsongs* of so venerable a figure in Canadian poetry as Dorothy Livesay; of the three books under review, two are by relatively young and little-known poets, while Mr. Colombo, if not exactly venerable, has an extensive list of publications behind him. The Fiddlehead Books are thus more than a series of pamphlets by writers of promise, though they do consistently attempt to encourage new talent, and with striking results: in this trio of Fiddlehead Books, for example, Miss Fleet can fairly be said to have upstaged Mr. Colombo.

*The Great San Francisco Earthquake and Fire* consists of fifty-eight found

poems which John Robert Colombo has constructed from published eye-witness accounts of the 1906 disaster. It differs from Mr. Colombo's earlier experiments with "redeemed prose", such as *The Mackenzie Poems* and *John Toronto*, in being taken from prose ostensibly interesting for its subject-matter rather than its original expressiveness. While *The Mackenzie Poems* set out to heighten the effect of Mackenzie's rhetoric, the San Francisco poems arrange statements from various sources — some flamboyant, some restrained — and have the "poetic" form sift interesting effects from the prose. Interesting effects there are, and more striking than in *The Mackenzie Poems*. Those who found less than impressive the effect of Mackenzie discoursing in free verse on "The Removal of John Col-

borne" or "A Corrupt Administration" might pause at the quietly balanced phrases of an anonymous spokesman observing the unfortunate San Franciscans:

They told each other  
in the most natural tone  
that their residences were destroyed  
by the flames, but there  
was no hysteria,  
no outcry,  
no criticism,

Not surprisingly, the eye-witness accounts contain a good deal of cliché—"girls in the bloom of youth", "gruesome scenes", "the ravages of the fire" and so on—as well as terrible sights described in simple terms. The two kinds of language sometimes lie side by side, and in such cases the facts seem to redefine the cliché; one of the "gruesome scenes", for example, was that of "scores of half-starved dogs/[...] found eating human bodies".

The "poetic" arrangement on the page invites us to contemplate such effects, but it does more: it supplies, if not a metre, a rhythmic scheme for the prose passages. In casting the accounts into verse form, Mr. Colombo usually proceeds in one of two ways. He sometimes uses the line-endings as a kind of punctuation, or to emphasize existing punctuation:

On the step of one bank,  
with the fire only a block away  
I see a man wringing his hands  
and crying aloud:

But often he makes a more serious attempt at rendering it into free verse by seeing the prose as composed of "feet", each with a heavy or light accent and a number of unaccented syllables, and then writing the poem with one, two or three such feet per line:

During the day  
a blast could be heard  
in any section  
at intervals of only  
a few minutes  
and buildings  
not destroyed by fire  
were blown to atoms

The first method is innocuous, if not particularly enlightening; the second alters the pace of the original prose, its speeding and slowing, by making the units of its composition shorter. But the rhythm of the new poem is repetitious, because the play of the unstressed syllables is not sufficiently varied and continuous; and the syntax, chopped into shorter units, has the hiccoughing effect of a translation from morse code.

In *Tunnel Bus to Detroit* Len Gasparini sometimes has his poetry skirt deliberately close to the rhythms of prose, or those of the found poem. Unfortunately, the flatness of the conclusions to some poems—the girl who after an abortion "... vowed / That she'd never become pregnant/Again.", or that poem which ends "GET OUT! WE DON'T SERVE INDIANS!"—issues in bathos rather than in subtle effects. In fact, the general standard of the poems in *Tunnel Bus to Detroit* is lower than in Mr. Gasparini's first collection, *Cutty Sark*, published in 1970. In the earlier book, the poems seemed to grow from two different stances: the romantic, as in the touching "The Photograph of my Grandfather Reading Dante", and the "knowing realism" of, say, "Greasy Spoon Blues". In *Tunnel Bus to Detroit*, knowingness has the upper hand: many of the poems assume the tone of one who has seen enough (of lust, crotches, graffiti, farts, and other phenomena) to be indefatigably frank. "Nursery Rhyme" gives us a moth-

er copulating with the milkman while her child cries in its crib. The poem comments:

Getting laid means extra milk  
For this divorcee and her ilk

Baby she goes about it gaily  
Inflating your economy daily

Doubtless the restriction of awareness here is deliberate, but I find the pose repellent to no particular end; nor do I respond to the title poem's invitation to compare erotic fantasies. Occasionally Mr. Gasparini cuts through his own "horny truckdriver" paraphernalia to give us something finer, as in his response to the "Woman in Labor": "For your sweet sake/ The world should be a streamlined womb/ With chrome-plated parts". But the total impression is not of fineness at all, and I am rather surprised that Fred Cogswell encouraged Mr. Gasparini to publish his second selection so soon after *Cutty Sark*.

*Bullets and Cathedrals* is rhythmically most subtle of these collections, as, for example, in the onomatopoeic meter which opens Section II of "Discord":

Afternoon's melting frost, dripping  
from rooftops, sound a monotony  
that evening freezes in silence.

Many of the poems in this, Brenda Fleet's second collection, are elegiac in tone, even when they are not obviously so in subject matter; this derives in part from the rhythms of her work, which are halting, careful, somehow defensive. The imagist poems she writes so well give rise to the form of her longer poems, where, as in "Tribute to Paul Erlich", a sequence of images works alongside a more abstract statement to give the sense of a spoken voice in search of accuracy:

We will remember  
a few rituals  
rain on the green leaf  
the whole ocean  
when the snail moves

.....

we have philosophized  
on the four elements  
brought values to birth  
recognized beauty  
now, when we are still able  
to speak of delicacy

Miss Fleet's ability is apparent in the way in which her lines are made to bear convincingly the tenor of the poem and to evoke the precise emotional response she requires — as the cockroaches in "Tribute to Paul Erlich", sole survivors of ecological disaster, are envisioned "glaring at the universe". In "Quebec", too, we are carried beyond what is blandly regarded as "the antique trade" by Miss Fleet's insistence (which is at the heart of the view of modern Quebec which informs the poem) that these objects have a human past: "in my city where they sell the old people's/ rocking chairs and/ crosses".

Here the emotion we are made to feel subserves the poems' themes; the reservations I have about *Bullets and Cathedrals* arise from those poems where an emotion is strongly evoked, but in excess of the presented cause: when we share feeling but cannot understand it. We see this in "Pictures", the poet's indictment of the circumstances of her childhood. The accusation, or inability to accuse, seems important:

Though I cannot blame  
my parents or their parents  
the same error is perpetrated  
with each generation

and the vignettes which support it are charged with feeling, but that "same

error" remains indistinct; we sense its power, but the poem does not allow us to understand it. Certainly the offered explanation ("... they forgot to let go/ so I am never alone") does not carry sufficient weight.

It is because the poem affects us powerfully that such an objection arises. The problem is not confined to one poem; from its presence throughout the book I suspect that it stems from a view

of poetry as self-expression (in the more limited, emotional sense of "self"). But one is grateful for what is good in *Bullets and Cathedrals*, and for having such work brought to one's attention. I see that Miss Fleet thanks Fred Cogswell "for his constant support and belief"; one might add in conclusion that the writer's friend is the reader's too: we owe a good deal to Mr. Cogswell's energy and judgment.

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## GET USED TO IT

MARGARET ATWOOD, *Power Politics*, Anansi, paper \$2.25, cloth \$6.00.

MARGARET ATWOOD the poet generally operates on the basis of a tactile world hallucinated and at the same time engineered by her imagination. Thus a bowl of fruit or a photograph is never simply discovered "there", but rather arranged so that the form is understood to be wrought for its greatest intensity. That is, all phenomena, all we are allowed to see, *mean*, and the author is always behind, leading, pushing, but never giving, the meaning. Or at least not giving it away (Margaret Avison's distinction).

Working that way, Margaret Atwood gives you just what she wants, and while that is usually enough for beautiful poetry, you often want to know more, maybe more than you should. *Power Politics* is a book of beautiful poetry. It offers lots of refracted material for the sense and opinions, and it remains a puzzle, or maybe a mystery. Probably the author wanted it that way.

If there's one thing Margaret Atwood is on top of it is the current sense of love as a political struggle. The success of the writing in this book depends on the composition's being attended to in the same perplex (see Doris Lessing's *Golden Notebook*). I think that the verse is the best that Atwood has done, because it takes itself seriously as subject, not as conveyance. Consciousness is how it is composed, as Miss Stein said. Read the

following quatrain aloud, for rime and line:

You take my hand and  
I'm suddenly in a bad movie,  
it goes on and on and  
why am I fascinated

The book is a sequence of lyrics on the state of affairs which tend to become affairs of state. The episodes are violent often, and usually inflated in imagery, all the while couched, as they say, in quiet detached voice. Atwood trademarks, but here centrally located, focussed relentlessly. "I raise the magic fork/ over the plate of beef fried rice," and she plunges it into him, whereupon he escapes his mortal head to become a comic-or-comic-book superhero flying over the heads of the town. In bed she arranges his body into the shape of a crucifixion and then a pieta. One finds it difficult to decide whether she is feeding his fantasies or her own. Such is the nature of politics or the power of poetry.

The images are often like that, people turned into their ikonic representations. He becomes a statue of a general, she the hanged (wo)man of the tarot pack. He becomes for a while a saint's effigy she has set up so that she can pray to him, and she enjoys the power that that gives to the artist; then she expresses fear when he "cheats," becoming a real person demanding the vote she owes:

These days my fingers bleed  
even before I bite them

Can't play it safe, can't play  
at all any more

Let's go back please  
to the games, they were  
more fun and less painful

But she breaks the rules too, fracturing the artificial construct, turning the "I" of



the poem(s) into Margaret Atwood the poet in political trouble. For instance (and here I refer to the "more" one would like, ex-poetica, to know) one often hears that the lover may be using the established poet for gain in his own, presumably artistic, career. She accuses him of "giving me/ a hard time again for the fun/ of it or just for//the publicity." Just before turning him into the super-hero she says, "the real question is/ whether or not I will make you immortal." But she knows the game if it is there: "Please die I said/ so I can write about it." Politics makes strange bedfellows. Politics is a dirty game. But politics is everywhere, at the table, in the study, inside every closet you open. This is another way of saying that the trail of innocence fades when you gain knowledge and skill. "'Do you want to be illiterate?/ This is the way it is, get used to it."

But the experienced one longs for the ideal:

A truth should exist,  
it should not be used  
like this. If I love you

is that in fact a weapon?

When she is in this mood she resorts to the simplicity of the body, in heat, naked, making a noise to smother thought. Of course it doesn't work:

The earth doesn't comfort,  
it only covers up  
if you have the decency to stay quiet

At times she is utterly bitter:

Next time we commit  
love, we ought to  
choose in advance what to kill.

One senses that yes, the old story, these two lovers will burn themselves, destroy

each other with their relationship; but more broadly, that's the only kind of man-woman relationship there is. Some are only more intense than others. Death is, after all, inevitable, whether slow or fast, whether of a snail or the sun.

With that as the inescapable fact one is not satisfied. One wants at best to know the variations of encounter in the heat or decay. That's the body of this book. It is also the purpose of the form, a sequence, as I said, of lyrics that do not diverge from one another in subject, but present the subject and say to hell with it, you are going to get it all, with as much art and event as possible in the time covered. This book of poetry does something that few of them do nowadays. It hurts.

GEORGE BOWERING

## A DAMP FUSE

GEORGE RYGA, *Captives of the Faceless Drummer*. Talonbooks.

GEORGE RYGA seems rapidly to be gaining a reputation as a sort of wild-eyed apologist for the new revolution. His first play, *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe*, made several patrons of Vancouver's Playhouse Theatre uneasy. *Grass and Wild Strawberries*, a raucous celebration of youth and the drug culture, confirmed those suspicions. (Some 5,000 season ticket holders decided not to renew their subscriptions to the theatre the next season.) His latest play, *Captives of the Faceless Drummer*, provoked the establishment to retaliation. The Board of Directors of the theatre announced that the production originally scheduled for February 1971 would be "deferred." The reason given was that the play was based on the FLQ political kidnappings in Montreal and therefore

(presumably) too inflammatory to present in potentially explosive Vancouver.

The play is now available in print and even a cursory reading of the text shows that Ryga is anything but a revolutionary. The play is set in the future and deals with the confrontation between some Paul Rose of that time and his hostage. In the few brief hours before the release of the diplomat and the violent death of the young revolutionary, the two men confront one another across a gap that is wider than the generation which separates them. During the encounter they come to understand each other better. But neither changes. Both remain captives of their particular temperaments, prejudices, and ideologies. Both continue to march to the rhythm of an alien drummer whose colours they may wear but whose true face they do not discern. The young radical, who is known only as The Commander, is a sort of Marxist who justifies his hatred by recalling the murder of his Uncle Steve, a union organizer of bush workers in Northern Quebec who was killed by company goons, and the death of a revolutionary girl friend. His program, however, seems less political than existential, aimed not at changing governments but at altering people. In the play he comes to realize that he has failed and that, in a way, he died when he first set eyes upon his hostage. Although Ryga is not explicit, he seems to be saying that violence puts an end to any possibility of constructive revolution because "a bomb planted by a revolutionary has the same size and explosive power as a bomb planted by a hired criminal." In the end, The Commander is alone, unable to trust his lieutenants, a mystic and a criminal who represent the two extremes of revolution.

In opposition to The Commander, the diplomat Harry is the embodiment of those qualities of compromise, gradualism, and gutless liberalism which Ryga sees as being responsible in different ways for much social injustice and spiritual barrenness. Harry calls himself a "realist". He lives by regulations and tactics. His belief in reason is so blinding that he is incapable of understanding or dealing with violence even when it threatens his family. His career has followed a carefully planned course and he believes himself to be happy. Yet his discussions with The Commander make him aware that there is something he has missed. He becomes conscious of his life as a long waiting for the "opportune moment" that never came.

If the two men differ in their attitudes towards politics, they are even farther apart in their response to life which for Ryga is often the same thing as their response to women. In *Captives* this fact is recognized by The Commander who says "We'd destroy the world if it wasn't for the women". Harry's basic responses in the play are presented almost entirely in terms of his relationships with his wife and his mistress. His life of careful propriety and intellectualized sex with his wife Adrienne is threatened by his attraction to Jenny, a young student who symbolizes a simplicity and naturalness he cannot achieve himself. But while Harry's women bring him to the brink of awareness, he cannot gather up the courage to leap into the darkness. Thus like so many of Ryga's characters, he remains suspended "between two heights... the cliff above him and the safe levels below." Therefore Harry cannot escape his captivity and his "rescue" at the end of the play is a defeat. He returns to the

passionless level of intellect, habit, and compromise from the heights of intuition which he had glimpsed but could not scale.

Interesting as *Captives* is as a theoretical exploration of the dilemmas of power and revolution, it fails to satisfy as a play. This is largely because Ryga has here been unable to create believable characters to give utterance to those passages of lyric intensity which are, in my opinion, his principal strength. For Ryga's vision is essentially humanitarian rather than political. His imagination takes fire when he is describing moments of ecstasy, suffering or defeat. In *Captives of the Faceless Drummer* he has created characters that are too symbolic to allow his lyric talent full scope. The result is a morality drama in which, unfortunately, the troops are as devoid of feature as the drummer.

NEIL CARSON

## LA QUÊTE DE BONHEUR

L'ŒUVRE de Jean Simard peut se définir comme une longue et périlleuse quête de bonheur. Ce besoin d'être heureux, chez lui, répond à son goût d'être et de vivre pleinement en harmonie avec la nature, la vie, les êtres et les choses qui l'entourent. Son amour de la vie n'a d'égal que sa haine de la mort parce que celle-ci le prive d'aimer.

Né dans une province où, depuis trois siècles, la religion nous a enseigné que "la terre est une vallée de larmes", cet écrivain s'est engagé à démystifier ses concitoyens ensorcelés par de fausses valeurs. Essayiste-romancier, il s'est part-

iculièrement efforcé de dégager l'amour des entraves de l'atavisme, de l'influence du milieu et de tous les déterminismes qui nous ont jusqu'à maintenant façonnés. L'amour fait l'objet essentiel de sa dernière oeuvre, *La Séparation*.

Ce roman reprend avec force et ampleur tout ce que son auteur avait déjà exprimé au sujet de l'amour. S'agit-il pour l'écrivain de relever le défi d'une génération, la sienne, en mal d'aimer? Peut-être... Mais cette oeuvre se devait de naître. En conciliant tendresse et sensualité, dans son *Nouveau Répertoire*, Simard avait fait l'unité théorique de ses idées sur l'amour. Il lui restait donc à concrétiser ses vues idéalisées.

*La Séparation* met en scène un homme et une femme qui ont atteint le faite de la vie et qui, à la faveur d'une séparation, se disent, longuement et sur tous les tons, qu'ils s'aiment.

Que Anne et Carl se soient jetés dans les bras l'un de l'autre, un certain soir, en dépit des "lois sacrées du mariage" qu'ils n'osent adjurer, malgré l'amitié qu'ils témoignent envers leurs conjoints et nonobstant l'amour qu'ils ont pour leurs enfants, ceci n'était pas, en soi, de nature à nous étonner. Le romancier nous a déjà bien montré le faible pour "le péché du Québec", chez les gens frustrés. Mais voilà qu'aujourd'hui il nous présente une femme et un homme qui bravent les interdits de la morale religieuse et tous les tabous traditionnels pour s'aimer tendrement et passionnément comme des tourtereaux. L'auteur leur fait faire un pas vers le bonheur, mais voici qu'après trois ans d'ivresse et d'exaltation, le destin vient éloigner ces deux êtres qui s'aiment toujours. Anne, la maîtresse de Carl, a quitté Montréal avec son mari et ses deux enfants pour aller vivre, pendant

une période indéterminée, au Portugal. Lui, journaliste près de la cinquantaine, reste à Montréal et s'ingénie auprès de sa femme et de son grand fils à cacher qu'il se meure d'ennui. Si Anne éprouve une grande nostalgie, elle en souffre beaucoup moins que son amant. Plus jeune et très peu sédentaire, elle s'adapte assez facilement aux différentes situations de la vie.

Remplie d'effusions romantiques et sensuelles, leur correspondance cherche, sous l'effet prodigieux de l'amour, à réduire les distances qui les séparent. "Il faut, écrit, Carl, nous cramponner désespérément à l'idée que nous ne sommes pas réellement séparés, en dépit des apparences, que l'amour supprime la distance et le temps, comme il supprimait ici les obstacles". Les appels des rendez-vous, à Montréal, à l'occasion desquels ils nourrissaient secrètement leur besoin d'aimer ravivent le bonheur désormais à leurs faits et gestes quotidiens — ce qu'ils n'avaient jamais eu l'occasion de faire auparavant — et les forcent à réfléchir sérieusement sur la nature de leurs sentiments.

Leur liaison amoureuse résulte, en définitive, d'une attirance physique spontanée. Ce fut et c'est toujours la source

de leur amour. D'ailleurs, c'est une évidence que Carl n'essaie pas de dissimuler sous le sens voilé des mots; parlant de leur "commun bonheur" et de leur "commune joie", il supprime tout ambiguïté sur la nature de l'un et de l'autre lorsqu'il écrit:

Et appelons les choses par leur nom, notre  
commun  
plaisir charnel.

L'essentiel de leur bonheur tient donc dans ce dialogue des corps qui entraîne un sentiment de parfait accord, de plénitude et de paix. Dans cette ambiance de compréhension et d'affection, dont Carl se fait l'interprète, leurs relations physiques ont atteint une qualité exceptionnelle.

Cette intimité et ce rapprochement furent pour eux la plus grande source d'un bien-être jamais éprouvé auparavant. Mais il n'en demeure pas moins un bonheur passager. Pour le cristalliser, ils voudraient bien vivre ensemble, "Oh comme ils s'aimeraient, s'exclame Carl, en y rêvant, comme ils seraient heureux! seulement ils ne sont pas libres. Ils sont même séparés en ce moment."

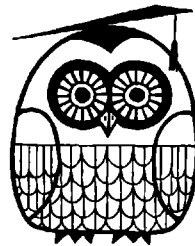
Carl et Anne, pour ne pas ternir aux

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yeux de leurs enfants l'image du père et de la mère, ont choisi de ne rien détruire autour d'eux tant que la chose demeurerait possible. S'ils sont conscients de leurs faiblesses réciproques, ils sont par contre "incapables de briser leurs chaînes [et] envient presque les personnes assez fortes, assez dures, assez courageuses ou assez cyniques pour trancher dans le vif et vivre leur vie." Il leur reste à s'apitoyer sur le mariage qu'ils condamnent. "C'est du reste, constate Carl, l'institution elle-même qui est à blâmer; sûrement plus, en tous cas, que les personnes, qui seraient plutôt les victimes du système." A partir de leur expérience personnelle et de celle de tant d'autres couples, l'un et l'autre multiplient les raisons qui les justifient de condamner un régime qui semble avoir été inventé pour sécuriser la médiocrité; car eux, ils ont la preuve que l'amour véritable, le vrai, a besoin de liberté totale pour naître, croître et se fortifier. La monotonie créée par les liens du mariage tue l'amour et sclérose la vie en la privant de liberté. Pour eux, aimer c'est vivre pleinement, sans contrainte et en toute liberté. Leurs échanges ne se prolongent qu'à la condition d'être gratuits, spontanés et sincères.

Mais, à la suite d'un cauchemar qui semble avoir confirmé ce qu'il redoute le plus, l'indifférence de sa jeune maîtresse, l'amant éploré écrit:

Advenant le pire... ce n'est pas en me  
disant  
la vérité que tu me ferais le plus mal, mais  
en  
me la cachant par pitié. Laissons la pitié  
aux  
époux, les amants n'en ont que faire

Carl n'est plus, hélas, ce que l'on peut appeler un jeune homme. La rapidité du temps qui fuit, les ravages de la conscience

exacerbée par le doute, la tension qui naît de l'absence et de l'esseulement, provoquent, chez un homme qui franchira bientôt le cap de la cinquantaine, un véritable cauchemar. Leur "éternel amour" plus ancré dans la chair que dans l'esprit ne peut résister aux outrages du temps. Dans le monde de la volupté et des sens où ils se trouvent, vieillir devient tragique. Bien que cette fatalité n'atteigne que superficiellement Anne, elle sais très bien que sur le plan physique elle ne fera plus de gains." Quant à Carl, à l'âge des "ultimes amours", il ne lui reste plus qu'à persuader sa maîtresse qu'il craint plus, désormais, les rides de l'âme que celles du corps.

Depuis l'annonce du retour, Carl oscille entre le "doute et l'inquiétude". La routine épistolaire des derniers mois prend l'allure d'échanges conjugaux ennuyants, mièvres et coutumiers. De plus en plus, les missives pâlisent. Il est vrai que la fin du voyage approche et peut-être aussi, la rupture éventuelle que l'on pressent...

Carl et Anne se disent qu'ils s'aiment. Suffit-il de le dire et de le répéter sans cesse pour s'aimer vraiment? Simard le premier refuserait d'y croire. Il sait bien, j'imagine, que trop vouloir prouver ne prouve souvent rien.

Simard serait-il idéaliste rêveur à l'instar du Félix d'autrefois, qui se créait "un bonheur de toutes pièces par un prodige de l'imagination — cette folle du logis — qui était la richesse et le tourment de sa vie."

*La Séparation* laisse entendre que l'amour vrai, le plus beau et le plus grand est bien souvent celui que l'on imagine et non celui que l'on vit. Simard aime rêver avec ses personnages, ne serait-ce que pour oublier que l'amour est une longue

quête de bonheur dont la poursuite dure toute une vie. On se demande si le moraliste-romancier n'insufflerait pas à ses personnages, une vie intérieure, qui ne serait en définitive que la projection de ses propres conflits émotifs?

CLAUDE RACINE

## INTERNATIONAL IDEAS

MIKE DOYLE, *Earth Meditations*. Coach House Press, \$6.00 hardcover, \$3.00 paper.

MIKE DOYLE is a New Zealand poet now living on the west coast and is becoming well-known in the business as the editor of *Tuatara*, a poetry magazine which sees its fifth issue coming out this summer. *Earth Meditations* is his first book to appear in Canada; several sections have previously been printed in New Zealand and, although Doyle has carefully written section I to have a Canadian flavour, his poetry lacks a firm roothold in either country. The landscape Doyle inhabits is international:

Native and immigrant  
live in different places  
in the same location.

Which is to say (I must suppose) that space has nothing to do with where your head is, that poetry knows no nationality, that the imagination is the common denominator.

The main preoccupation of *Earth Meditations*, suitably enough, then, is with the nature of reality. Doyle prefixes many sections with fascinating quotations from the French surrealist painter René Magritte. For example:

*An image can take  
the place of a word  
in a proposition*

Doyle then goes on to develop his stanza using a visual image; i.e., the drawing of an ear in place of the word "ear" itself. Thus we have an excursion into the area of concrete poetry; the book is actually a deliberate collage of many such styles. The syntax is often Joycean, these "new" words ambiguous in meaning and onomatopoeic in sound; there are even some pop-art reflections.

Feel  
that FIST as Clark Kent uppercuts  
slob villains, the balloon  
detonated:

WHAM!!!!

In the main, however, Doyle is academic; he pulls most of his images from the history of intellectual awakening. The pages of *Earth Meditations* are loaded with references to the subjective giants of western consciousness: Jung, Stevens, Jefferson, Burke, Locke, etc.; continually, too, we are confronted with the names of acquaintances, people with whom the poet has had intellectual or emotional contact. "Meditations" is perhaps the key word in the title, since this is exactly what Doyle does: he meditates, he propositions, he theorizes, he speaks his mind in one long humorous catalogue which finishes with the cabbalistic cry of "Shekinah! Shekinah!" (which I believe approximates the final vision of delight). And reality? The solution is Zen-like in its simplicity:

to be one self  
fully  
a love  
<sup>a</sup>  
(life like music)

You could not call *Earth Meditations* avant-garde — not unless you accept the

Black Mountain aesthetic as such. Most of Doyle's lines are projectivist (determined by the poet's breathing pattern) and the fondness for intellectual discussion is something we have all seen in the work of Olsen. Personally, I still have to be convinced that subjective argument, in so far as it depends upon a scholarly backdrop, is a good thing in art. I might know the names of Jung, Wittgenstein, Spinoza, and the others; however, it narrows the field within which your imagery can be understood and more often than not becomes a self-indulgent chant whereby you hope to impress the reader with your education. An old trap.

Still, the book is an interesting one, particularly in its dramatization of Magritte's propositions, and, should you buy a copy, you will find yourself treated to some beautiful photographic illustrations by the Victoria artist Jack Kidder. Doyle is an auctioneer. He sells ideas. You might not agree with his philosophy of acceptance, but in a scene that has been clogged with High Seriousness Negativity (witness all the poetry titles incorporating "dark" or "night" into their metaphor) *Earth Meditations* comes as a welcome change.

LAWRENCE RUSSELL

## THE MOB OF GENTLEMEN

*The Cavalier Poets*, chosen and edited by Robin Skelton. Queenswood House, \$10.00.

ROBIN SKELTON's interesting anthology of seventeenth-century poetry reveals his continuing interest in that "group" of writers whom he calls the Cavalier poets.

The slight introduction very properly urges us to look more closely at that "mob of gentlemen that writ with ease" (thus Pope, in his well-known dismissal of some of his predecessors), and to recognize their very real "capacity for self-mockery, for scepticism . . . combined, frequently, with a moral directness destructive of sententiousness yet productive of dignity". Mr. Skelton understands Cavalier poetry in rather ample terms: it is the poetry not merely of those who were loyal to Charles I, who were attached to his Court and to his various struggles to retain authority. The poets in this mode present "social man": "The Cavalier man . . . is not a polemicist. He may well . . . allude to political events, or write epitaphs upon notable figures or compose wry elegies, but he does not pamphleteer. Indeed, the mode is a little suspicious of public fame; the epitaphs . . . emphasize individual mortality rather than public loss". Their poetry is "candid, witty, subtle, observant, sardonic, passionate, affectionate, and clear-headed . . . a monument to human dignity largely because it chose to avoid pretension while delighting equally in both simplicity and sophistication". There is an erotic strain in much of the poetry, too, but that is part of its careless gaiety and sophistication; erotic themes help to tie together the generation of Etherege-Rochester-Sedley-Dorset, of the Restoration years, with the generation of Lovelace-Suckling-Carew, of the time of Charles I.

Mr. Skelton's very generous notions of what constitutes Cavalier poetry enable him to include a wide variety of authors who flourished between 1625 and 1689. Milton's "Epitaph on the Marchioness of Winchester" is here (written in 1631), but why not "L'Allegro" and "Il Pen-

seroso" which are as much in the Cavalier mode, one should have thought, and far more successful examples of it? There are the familiar poets — besides those mentioned already — including Cotton and Herrick, and the unfamiliar: George Daniel, Thomas D'Urfey, 'Ephelia', Pathericke Jenkyn, and more. Indeed, the chief strength of this anthology lies in its bringing together of so many poems which are otherwise difficult to come by and, in any case, known mainly to the specialist. The 'common reader', for whom this book seems intended, may well think, however, that he has missed little: the four line epigram by Thomas Heyrick, for example, is an inelegant trifle, and Samuel Pordage's contribution is unlikely to offer anyone much pleasure (a word which he rhymes, in his final stanza of "Corydon's Complaint", with Treasure and Measure). Might Mr. Skelton not have been wiser to call his collection "Minor Poetry of the Seventeenth Century"? He would thus need not have stretched his category of "Cavalier" to embrace so many poets who had so little in common except a small and unknown body of work, or poets of stature like Milton and Dryden, or Crashaw and Marvell, who can surely be described in a variety of more telling and typical ways. And he would not have left one worrying over the omission of Ben Jonson, who was, by Mr. Skelton's admission and the general account of others, the progenitor of all this verse — or of John Donne, who was widely imitated by such men as Carew and Suckling and Lord Herbert of Cherbury (who unaccountably receives no mention).

Mr. Skelton gives his poets in alphabetical order, in old spelling texts, with biographical notes appended at the end

of the volume. There is no further commentary. For his texts, the editor has depended almost wholly upon the work of his predecessors, described in the introduction as "the authoritative editions of recent scholars". Although Mr. Skelton's collection affords many delights, I think it is ultimately quite disappointing. It gives a very strange impression of seventeenth-century poetry, for it is really a gathering of one man's favourite minor poems from a particular period of literary history.

P. G. STANWOOD

## MORATORIUM ON MILTON

*Paradise Lost. A Tercentenary Tribute. Papers Given at the University of Western Ontario.*  
Edited by Balachandra Rajan. University of Toronto Press. \$5.00.

*Approaches to Paradise Lost.* Edited by C. A. Patrides. University of Toronto Press. \$9.50.

IT IS FITTING that the University of Toronto should produce two of the several volumes of essays on *Paradise Lost* marking its three hundredth birthday. As Arthur Barker points out, in Balachandra Rajan's collection, Canadians have made major contributions to twentieth-century Milton studies, and the centre of that Canadian study has been Toronto, which has produced, trained, or exasperated into Miltonic comments critics both fit and numerous. Professor Rajan, now busy making the University of Western Ontario the chief Canadian centre for Milton studies, has gathered a fine example of Canadian (or any other!) scholarship and criticism into his book. Roy Daniells' essay on Eden leads off,



followed by Northrop Frye's thematically similar piece on "Eve" and the female principle in the poem; by Barker's study of Milton's peculiarly poetic treatment of regeneration in the poem; by Hugh MacCallum's careful study of Milton's Christology as seen against the background of conflicting interpretations of the Son; and, at the last, by Rajan's own serious, dense study of the relation of responsibility to freedom in the poem, with emphasis on the special emotional, intellectual, and ethical implications of Milton's handling of this theme.

All the essays have something to say, overtly or covertly, about the poem's apparent "distance" from present-day readers, especially student-readers, and in their very different styles demonstrate how that distance may be diminished. Mr. Barker's eloquent interpretation of the poem as a record of the poet's profound frustration and profound hope is analogous, he thinks, to our similar frustration and hope over the plight of the humane studies just now. Notably, all five pieces, even Mr. MacCallum's, by all odds the most austere, stress what we as readers are to learn, by recreated imaginative experience, from the poem; Mr. Daniells and Mr. Frye point to the experiential normality of paradise; Mr. Barker and Mr. Rajan insist on the reader's identification with the action of *Paradise Lost*, so that we can finally "understand" what it means to be sin-free and what it means, having been so, to become and to be mortal.

I will put this another way: these essays are concerned, all of them, with how typology can mediate experience, even to twentieth-century non-Biblical readers. In this sense, Mr. MacCallum's work on the Son is "typical" of the book's method;

he points to the contemporary setting of doctrinal disagreement over trinitarianism and unitarianism in interpreting the poetic role of Christ in the poem, and shows how notions of typology and mediation, now considered so "literary", offer solutions to the problem of Christian salvation. The question of grace is crucial in the metaphoric interpretation of the Second Person: is Christ an exemplar, a type, or the Mediator? In an epic dealing crucially with these questions, poetic devices serve in the end to suggest, even to define, doctrine. That Milton works this way, with exquisite balance among doctrinal positions and poetic choices, should not surprise us.

Mr. MacCallum's essay is the most precise of the five, and the one most concerned to offer for our consideration material outside the poem: his is the only study, in this collection, of ideas in their historical setting. Mr. Daniells and Mr. Frye offer richly mythopoeic interpretations, and Mr. Barker deliberately sets himself across that grain. Mr. Rajan is concerned chiefly with the choices the poet made among his craftsman's alternatives, and why he made them just as he did. Since Christopher Rick's influential study of Milton's style, critics have felt justified in noting how exact the poet's diction is: Mr. Rajan offers a parallel reading, one which concentrates on poetic devices "larger" than word and phrase.

These essays, are, in an important way, humble: Milton means more to these critics than their critical reputation. The essays assume the poem's excellence and our inability wholly to grasp that excellence. In various ways, these authors accept the poem as it is and have made it their job to show us just why it is as it is.

They know the poem inside out, and whatever the variation in their critical viewpoint, one feels that they know the *same* poem and come to the same general conclusions, if not about what its chief marvels are, then about its poetic means and its effect upon readers.

Not so Mr. Patrides' collection, far more varied in all ways. I am sorry that Patrides' modesty restrained him from printing his own lecture in this series, given at the University of York, since his contributions to Milton studies have been impressive. The thirteen essays in this volume, save for Mr. Trapp's, are all quite short, and read like the ceremonial comment they are. Their variety records some disagreement: F. T. Prince stresses the theatricality of *Paradise Lost* over those pieces by Milton officially in dramatic form; after teetering a bit on just how dramatic the poem is, John Arthos decides against its significant theatricality. For Professors Huntley and Samuel, the poem is an epic and makes use of epic resources, drawing into that epic reservoir some materials thitherto not so considered; for Professor Spencer, *Paradise Lost* inverts epic values and practices to such an extent as to deserve the title of anti-epic — indeed, it is *the* anti-epic, which necessarily killed the genre in England. Professor Summers is a gentle American interpreter of the decade just past, discussing the degree to which the poem subverts, not just epic standards, but establishment values then and now. Mrs. Radzinowicz defends the meaning and poetic value of the last two books, wherein man as mortal is prepared once more to receive and achieve the immortality just forfeited; Merritt Hughes' commentary reinforces a view he has expressed earlier, that "obedi-

ence" is central to the poem and that to pass beyond obedience is to enter its reward, or love. Professor Broadbent, following Ricks' lead, shows how delicately diction indicates and fits the divine and mortal environments; Professor Brockbank discusses vicissitude, mutability, and diurnal life in *Paradise Lost*. Three interesting lectures are on topics peripheral to the poem itself — Bernard Harris' comment on Dryden's version, Brian Morris' notes on musical settings to Miltonic works, and J. B. Trapp's long study of the iconography of the Fall from "the beginning" (here located in Dura) to Milton's own time.

The Canadian volume is harmonious, the York volume less so. Oddly enough, the concord of the one and the chanciness of the other forced this reader to the grim view that perhaps it really was time for us to give poor Milton a rest, and instead to think about defining problems of interpretation and criticism of his great poem. As Joseph Summers points out, except for a flurry over Empson's naughtiness, there is no "Milton controversy" any more; in spite of the stylishness displayed here, a good deal in this volume is either what we have known before of ourselves or what these very teachers have taught us earlier. One can see that the lecturers all tried to say something "new" (Summers has humourously put the plight of the "expert" invited to lecture); often the effort to do so has resulted in some new *words* — "syntaxis," for instance — covering fairly common ideas; or a new use of an old word, as in Miss Samuel's essay on "mimesis." Again, topics are yoked which promise a "new" context — "Milton, Andreini, and Galileo" made my heart lift, but the skimpy notions pressed into concubinage did not.

I think of my own sins as I note national styles of saying nothing gracefully: the Englishman shows his sensitivity as a reader (or, his sensitivity to diction), the American his sensitivity as a public citizen in moral realms. Englishmen prefer to ignore the mass of scholarship on Milton, some Americans to recapitulate it *all*.

It is consensus on the one hand and triviality on the other that makes me think Milton might be spared for a little. I know that no such moratorium can be achieved, because we need Milton and think he needs us. My reasons for wishing it, though, are (a) that the consensus now leads to increasing refinement of received opinion (or, busywork); (b) that with Mr. Fish's book (admired by several of the writers in these volumes) "Milton" has at last become inextricably fused with his readers, in true Poulet-style, those readers dissolving consensus by their idiosyncrasy and number. It seems that we need time to get out of the consensus-ruts and to work through our solipsistic obligations to this text. The Variorum edition will insure that (a) is kept available to scholars; (b) will last only so long as the present academic affluence lasts. Meanwhile we might (à la MacCallum, perhaps) try to understand a bit more what went into the poem, to measure it against things other than its own content and our own sensibilities: in short, we might begin to learn a little something, instead of playing word-games (which, it is true, we can play beautifully), about so hard won a poem.

For Milton is a considerable writer—abrasive, soothing, socratic, Jehovan, didactic, persuasive, dictatorial and permissive, patient and critical. He has a lot to say, *about* more than we now con-

sider. To use Mr. Rajan's lovely phrase, Milton's "web of responsibility" involved his own commitment to life and to art; we have some responsibility to his responsibility, expressed in his forbidding, inviting, imperious, perilous poem. If this sounds ungrateful, after my own considerable pleasure from these volumes, I can only admit brutishness—not so much chicken-heartedness (if that describes someone fearful of the Poulet-implications for literature) as sheepishness. I looked up and was not fed sufficiently. I ask for pastures new—and, if I've got to feed in pastures old, then I must express my hopes for the green and told Canadian spaces over the English enclosures and the dustbowls of my own country.

ROSALIE L. COLIE

## NEW-FOUND EYES

IRVING LAYTON, *Nail Polish*. McClelland and Stewart, \$2.95.

IRVING LAYTON, baring his talons of cruelty, lewdness, vulgarity, has always presented those claws in a brilliant polish of cadence and rhyme. He may scoff at "civil polish"—ethical or aesthetic—but how nicely he enamels his scoffing!

The Layton talons may be blunting a little. In *Nail Polish* the old scorn is here: scorn of Marxists, of Christians, of fellow poets, of the "merciless pinheads" of the twentieth century. But the vituperation is turned lower now, when he writes "For Some of my Student Militants", or mocks the pimply self-absorption of "Easy Rider". The old dark vision, still here in epigrams like "Pith

and Vinegar", is converting into a grim pragmatism, as in "Short Sermon . . . by the Rabbi who survived Auschwitz". Even the old bawdiness turns a bit rueful. There are still erotic songs, but Layton sardonically recognizes his present self (in "The Haunting") as "a poet shouting love as if it were a bomb", and he adds a note on himself turned happy husband ("Legend") and another note — more wry — on himself as poet-in-residence, "famed for making love/at the drop of a bra/but no sweet girls came/only the president/of the student's council/the cleaning women/smelling of detergent/and the campus psychiatrist."

This whole volume has less fire than earlier ones, more mist. Less green and gold, more grey and white. Fewer snakes, more worms — "passionless worms/that slide their fearful grey forms/over this astonishing earth". Fewer pin wheels and somersaults and revolving suns, more bubbles and foam.

Bubbles, nothing else  
the intellect looses  
from our genitals  
and death proves  
foam or scum.

The bubbles in *Nail Polish* may be mere silliness, like the "insignificant bubbles" (in "Through a Glass Darkly") "that break/on coming to the top/without the expected pop". But others, fragile poems like "Eternal Recurrence", have a casual delicacy and shapeliness.

Why is this cooler manner emerging? Layton is fifty-nine of course. Yet the brevity of these poems sounds less like the mark of attrition in the singing man, or the swinging flesh, and more like a deliberate attempt at the throw-away style of (for instance) Cohen's songs. This cool style, like the pale sheen of modern nail

polish, is a long way from the bloody brilliance of the earlier Layton.

The new style emerges in "Kilmurvey": muted colours, dimmed shapes, and quieter stance:

Low are the hills, a mere rise  
in the ground, grey with stones and green;  
Stand anywhere and you can trace  
outlines with your new-found eyes  
of stone fences delicate as lace:  
Stand anywhere and you can be seen.

And here is the other source of novelty: Ireland, where Layton in 1969 found "man-humbling cliff and shattering sea"; fences — of spite and pride; men fighting for no cause; love-making brief in "secret ache and turbulence" ("Inishmore").

In "Kilmurvey Strand" he structured his Irish experience into a vortex of whites: old man, white foam, seagulls, clouds, toning into sand, brown, black, and back to the whiteness of clouds and the blankness of "lustreless aeons". "Unhelpful", he says "for myself at fifty-seven /still capable of hope/and anger". But the poem moves from the vortex of dissolution into a sudden flight of thought, neither hopeful nor angry, nor happy, but aware. "One had not noticed before".

Irving Layton has always been one to notice — and to notice his own awareness. "The Bull Calf", "Cat Dying in Autumn", "Keine Lazarovitch" — so many of the memorable early poems celebrate a moment of awareness: "and then I saw. . . ." Such moments come in *Nail Polish*, mostly from confrontation of the question Frost posed in "The Oven — Bird": "What to make of a diminished thing". Layton makes at least one perfect song of his own diminution in "Epitaph for a Poet". There is a fine fall of near-rhymes and alliteration: shoulders — wilder — older; petals — wrinkled; soft-

soot-song-sage. There is witty placing of body-words: thighs, breasts, shoulders (wait for it!) lips (wait longer, then look, hidden in mid-lines) wrinkled loins, forehead. There is a nice anti-increment from "I sang of thighs" to just "I sang". This is the song of Frost's "mid-wood bird." Appropriately, a pale polish, opalescent as a bubble, gleams on this particular nail—the unbreakable claw of ageing.

ELIZABETH WATERSTON

## EXUBERANT SURREALISM

LAWRENCE GARBER, *Circuit*. Anansi, cloth \$7.50, paper \$2.50.

LAWRENCE GARBER'S *Circuit* could be described as a "brilliant" book, though the trouble with brilliance is that it is sometimes merely superficial. There is no denying what the blurb describes as the book's "stylistic dazzle." Garber's writing certainly does not aim at any transparency to reality; it insists throughout on the artifice of the narration, and on the super-reality of the events described. These events are startling, bizarre, and touched by a wild sense of humour. The impressions are conveyed with great vividness, and reinforced by an overflowing abundance of detail. The effect is like a dream, or a comic nightmare; perhaps even the fact that (for me at least) each of the three novellas goes on just a little bit too long is part of this effect.

The narrative images presented are very densely textured, yet, again like the super-reality of dreams, they seem to

exist entirely in their own world, making no contact with what is normally called normality. The central concepts of each story establish their own systems of insane logic; but outwith these systems there is no reference to realism or probability. In "Death by Toilet", the Count undertakes a grand tour of Europe, but the writing makes no attempt to convey any sense of the unique character of the cities and countries he passes through. Barcelona, Paris, and Ravenna exist, it seems, only as aspects of the characters' minds (or bowels.)

The stories, then, by virtue of the force of the writing, the wealth of comic detail, and their exclusion of all other senses of reality apart from their own closed systems, impress themselves on the reader's mind with the intensity of a hallucinatory image. This in itself may be felt to be enough, and certainly it marks a very individual Canadian writer. But the reader, and/or the critic, is perhaps tempted to ask more, to ask, for instance, whether these images have any "significance", whatever that is. The previously-quoted blurb certainly encourages this with its proclamation that the stories "explore the decadence of our literary sensibilities and of our civilization."

Without wanting to hold Garber responsible for a blurb which he probably didn't write, one is entitled to some doubts here. Is it seriously the purpose of his book to explore how much or how little "shock" is aroused by a story whose primary image is human excrement? Or is "These are the Sacred Places" seriously intended as a satire on the movie industry? Mr. Garber seems to be far too intelligent a writer to have aims as facile as these.

So consider the possibilities for an

"interpretation" of "These are the Sacred Places." The first step would presumably be to identify Reynolds Hall as an image of the artist: a point which Garber reinforces by his reference to Kafka's "The Hunger Artist" and simultaneously undercuts by putting the reference into the mouth of his most pretentiously arty character. Hall sets out to expose the "reality" behind the carefully manufactured image of a superstud filmstar called Bruce Karle. But this "reality", as seen through Garber's writing, appears more floridly and lustily unreal than the camp unrealities of Karle's costume-epic movies; and Hall records it in a style which Garber accurately describes as laughably overwritten shit — though again the reference is undercut by being attributed to a rather bizarre nun who wages a continuous war against Hall's attempts to record his insights on toilet-paper. Hall's reaction to events is, physically, to become more and more diseased, while mentally he resorts to viler and viler imprecations against the subjects of his writing. He finally regresses to complete paralysis and dumbness, with his words being spoken for him by an impersonator, Shirley Azfal, who also dubs in Bruce Karle's voice so consistently that the two cannot be told apart. The pretentious director dreams of filming *Paradise Lost* with Shirley dubbing not only God, but all the other voices as well, thus giving a supreme illusion of Divine Control. But Shirley, who may then perhaps be seen as the ultimate artist, has no personality or existence of her own, living only as a series of impersonations.

Et cetera. The ramifications of such an interpretation would have to be pursued much further into the multitudinous detail of Garber's image; neither in this nor in the other two stories is there any

clearcut "statement" to be extracted. Rather, Garber's exuberant surrealism is continuously evocative, suggesting extensions of meaning and application which the reader is free to follow. That is, his narrative operates as image rather than as statement, and the reader may search for the "significance" of these images at any level he chooses. There is, it seems to me, nothing superficial to Lawrence Garber's brilliance.

STEPHEN SCOBIE

# MOUTH EXHAUSTED SILENCE

SEYMOUR MAYNE, *Mouth*. Quarry Press, \$2.50.  
STEPHEN SCOBIE, *In the Silence of the Year*.  
Delta Canada, \$1.00.

OFTEN WITH THE CREATIVE ACT, possibly more than with any other act, the resulting reality falls short of the ideal and of our expectations. Though they come close, and despite their entertaining qualities, this is the case in some ways with the recent books of Stephen Scobie and Seymour Mayne.

Scobie's *In the Silence of the Year*, by using the metaphors of silence and the word, deals with aesthetic and human questions:

I love the things between —  
like silence between two words;

the Hopi Indians  
based their numerical system on 8,  
because they counted, not their fingers,  
but the spaces in between.

When many young and old men are uncreatively dabbling in concrete and

sound poetry — forms exhausted fifty years ago in Europe — it is refreshing to find a young poet affirming, implicitly and explicitly, the value of the well-placed word in the craft of writing. A commitment to the anguish of art is not for the faint-hearted.

Words cling  
in notches of the mind, to wait for service.  
They are masters. . . .

A word is pilgrim, has a thousand homes  
but seeks one shrine.

Thus in these poems Boris Pasternak's classic litotes, "Writing consists of placing one word after another," is poetically asserted in the interplay of words and silence. The ancestry of the religion of poetry in modern times goes back to Mallarmé and the other French symbolists. Scobie seems to profess a faith reminiscent of theirs in the deeply moving poem to his father:

No gap is greater between us  
than this — my inability  
to share your faith. My "Word"  
is different, though perhaps  
I worship with no less devotion.

In addition to the Scottish background of this poem Scobie demonstrates classic themes in "Old Daidalos" and "White swimmer in green water." Most of the poems are terse, untitled and technically well written.

The one disappointing thing about the book is that it is so slight. Like so many other thin books of verse, it has barely enough poems (12 in all) with which to make a fair evaluation of the poet's talents and range. Are many of these young poets intentionally brief and witty or just short-winded, or is the blame with the publishers? What Scobie has given us, though, shows enough promise that we

should look expectantly for his next volume of verse.

In contrast to the purity of thought and diction of Scobie's verse Mayne gives us an earthier vision of life. As in his earlier books, in *Mouth* Seymour Mayne is primarily concerned with sexuality: the loss of virginity and love-making. But to these rather hackneyed themes the poet has brought his craftsmanship, the added perspective of painful separations, sickness and death, and has thus saved the book from being simply titillating juvenilia. One of the most deftly handled and stimulating poems, "Rising with anger", deals with illness and death. The dramatic quality and the use of the imagery in this poem suggest a very sensitive poet. Mayne is at his best in the more ambiguous poems that treat eroticism subtly and he is at his worst in the unimaginative ones. Compare the pithy, delicate and evocative:

After the storm  
your moist eyes  
glisten

with the heavy-handed and prosaic:

you feel the lurch, that funny feeling  
in the belly; buzz of blood,  
neuralgic pain.

The poorer poems, though clever and entertaining celebrations of eros, become tedious as the book progresses. The puns on "head" and "third eye" are over-used and begin to lose any suggestive qualities.

Though the recurrence of the subject of love-making and the images of virginal blood give the impressions (possibly justified) of an undue preoccupation with sex, the positive result of this technique is the continuity of mood and theme from one poem to the next.

With the mature facility that in the

better poems Mayne demonstrates to create moods and to elicit emotional responses from the reader, I am looking forward to seeing this poet try his hand at the treatment of more than nocturnal sexual fantasies and the concavities of the body. I think it is below his talents for him to publish even one poem that appears as little more than an extension of his "head." Let us hope that both Scobie and Mayne will fulfil the great expectations which they have aroused with these books.

JOSEPH PIVATO

## REPRINTS

THE TWO MOST RECENT titles in the Canadian Reprint Series of the Edmonton publisher, Mel Hurtig, are Samuel Strickland's *Twenty-seven Years in Canada West, or the Experience of an Early Settler* (\$8.50), and George Heriot's *Travels through the Canadas* (\$23.00).

Samuel Strickland came of a famous literary family, and his sisters, Catharine Parr Traill and Susanna Moodie, were the great blue-stockings of pre-Confederation Canada. Samuel preceded them to Canada, arriving in 1825, and his *Twenty-seven Years in Canada* was the distillation of half a life as a gentleman settler and — for some years — as a servant of the Canada Company. As a personality, Strickland pales beside his associate, Tiger Dunlop; as a writer he was overshadowed by his sisters. His book has neither the fluency and understanding of Catharine's *The Backwoods of Canada* nor the idiosyncratic charm of Susanna's

*Roughing it in the Bush*, which appeared in 1852, the year before his own book came off the press. Undoubtedly a sense of family rivalry drove Samuel to take up the pen; the result was a pedestrian narrative whose main virtue is its humble objectivity in comparison with Mrs. Moodie's prejudiced eloquence.

George Heriot was of an earlier generation of visitors; he came in 1792 to Quebec as a civil servant, stayed until 1816, and travelled as far west as Detroit at a time when Upper Canada was still in a most primitive stage of settlement. He was a fairly good topographical draughtsman, and his illustrations are perhaps the best feature of his *Travels through the Canadas*, which is a curiously hybrid production; the first volume is a rather detailed account, written without inspiration but with a great deal of observed detail, of the waterways and communities of Canada more than a century and a half ago, while the second goes completely away from its predecessor, and also away from Heriot's own experiences, to describe — obviously at secondhand — the manners and customs of the Indian peoples of North and South America, a subject that evidently aroused some passion in Heriot.

From Oberon Press comes a new translation by Michael Macklen, with an introduction by Marcel Trudel, of Samuel de Champlain's *Voyages to New France*, 1615-18 (paper, \$2.95). The work has long been unavailable, and Dr. Macklem's translation presents it agreeably, bringing out not only the details of Indian life as Champlain so clearly observed and recorded it, but also the largeness and humanity of this great early Canadian.

G.W.



## Vorticism and the English Avant-Garde

WILLIAM C. WEES

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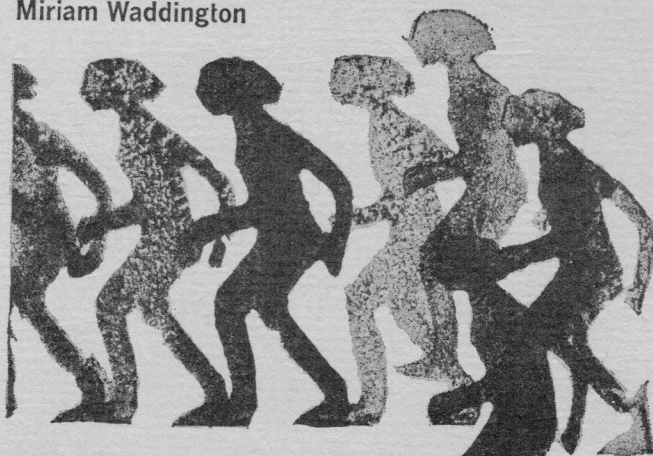
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sleep above the clouds  
in the islands of  
the Hebrides?  
Is there really  
such a place as  
Saskatchewan or  
did I dream Regina  
on a cold river?  
I think Bombay India  
is closer to here  
than Toronto or  
Paris and Pierre Trudeau  
is the prime minister  
of a motley cosmopolitan  
autumn but all the  
cities are somehow empty  
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