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DISCOVERIES AND REDISCOVERIES

Articles

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A QUARTERLY OF CRITICISM AND REVIEW

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Fourth volume in the

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DRAMATISTS IN CANADA
Selected Essays

Edited by WILLIAM H. NEW

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The essays in this volume have been chosen primarily to introduce major Canadian plays and playwrights and to trace the development of drama in Canada. Although the volume does not attempt to provide a definitive analysis of every dramatic writer and movement in Canadian history, it examines the work of leading nineteenth-century playwrights and others, emphasizing the achievements of the past quarter-century — a period marked by an increasing dramatic activity both in English and French-speaking Canada.

In addition to studying dramatists and their techniques, the essays document a number of the social factors that have contributed to Canadian drama. Radio and television, for example, aided the development of Canadian drama by nourishing into existence some of Canada's most accomplished playwrights.

The book contains essays that have been published during the past twelve years in the journal, *Canadian Literature*, and that form an evolving commentary on Canadian drama. Previously unpublished pieces — such as Max Dorsinville's "The Changing Landscape of Drama in Quebec" — have been added to expand the field of survey and to allow for the expression of earlier significant views and of current critical opinions.

The editor of this book, William H. New, is an associate professor of English at the University of British Columbia, and also associate editor of *Canadian Literature*. He is author of several books and many articles.

Dramatists in Canada: Selected Essays, is the fourth volume in the "Canadian Literature Series" of comment and criticism, of which George Woodcock is general editor. Other books in the series are *Malcolm Lowry: The Man and His Work* (First printed 1971, Reprinted 1972), *Wyndham Lewis in Canada* (1970), and *The Sixties:* Canadian Writers and Writing of the Decade (First printed 1969, Reprinted 1972).

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and many others . . .

editorial

HORIZON OF SURVIVAL

BECAUSE THE LIFE OF MOST WRITERS is a struggle — for money, for acceptance, even for the very time to write — they are inclined to see their careers largely in terms of survival, and in a deeper, more biological sense, the theme of survival enters into a great deal of classic literature from the *Odyssey*, surely the prototype of the survival epic, down to Zola and Hardy, down — in our own time — to works like Camus's *The Plague* and even to *1984*, where the survival power of the proles is one of the novel's leading themes.

Is there, then, a special way in which Canadians are committed to the idea of survival? That such a commitment has shaped our literature is one of the basic themes of Margaret Atwood's first critical work, *Survival* (Anansi, $3.25), in which, following the example of Northrop Frye in *The Bush Garden* and D. G. Jones in *Butterfly on Rock*, she outlines yet another schematic view of the nature of writing in Canada.

There can be no doubt of Margaret Atwood's qualifications for this kind of task. In less than a decade since her first book of verse appeared (other than a brief pamphlet in 1961) she has established herself as one of the leading poets of this country, and her two novels, *The Edible Woman* and *Surfacing*, have extended into wider frames that extraordinary intellectual clairvoyance which has enabled her to see so many human predicaments with a lucidity that many people find distressing because it endangers their images of a safe life.

Survival is a fine example of what happens when a highly analytical intelligence of this type becomes involved in the kind of task that is usually performed by semi-writers on the principle that "in the kingdom of the blind the one-eyed man is king." It was originally planned "as a teacher's guide for the many new courses in Canadian literature", but what has emerged from that plan is a highly

intelligent series of critical insights and controversial arguments that will leave most students bewildered. It is as if Third-Eye were trying to instruct One-Eye on how to guide No-Eye on a tortuous quest after the Canadian psyche as revealed in our literature. Yet, juxtaposed with the ten brilliant essay chapters on various aspects of the literary persona (a particularly fascinating one is on the key role of animal literature), there remain the fragments of apparatus that belong to the originally conceived easy guidebook — the lists of recommended texts, the "fifteen useful books", the appendices devoted to research resources — and this has resulted in a strangely hybrid book with clumsy outlines. It is best to forget the apparatus (those who have read enough to appreciate Margaret Atwood's arguments will not need it in any case) and to concentrate on the substance of the essays.

Margaret Atwood presents, and supports with many shrewdly chosen examples, the theory that our literature is still scarred and mis-shapen by the state of mind that comes from a colonial situation; she even has charts which tell us how to define the degree of acceptance or rejection which a writer's work displays. This situation, she suggests, has made ours a literature of failure. Our greatest triumphs as a nation have been achieved by blind collective urges; the "heroes" we name in connection with them turn out to be at best outward successes (rotten with the consciousness of ultimate failure by any standards that count) and often not even that. Thus our literature reflects an attitude to life that aims no higher than survival.

It is certainly a thesis that isolates a habit of thought to which Canadian intellectuals are liable. We pride ourselves on our ironic modesty. When this journal — whose basic subject is the same as Margaret Atwood's — celebrated ten years of publication, the editorial was entitled not "A Decade of Achievement", but "Getting away with Survival". Indeed, Margaret Atwood's special merit is to have condensed into a sharp focus the scattered insights which many other critics have already formulated or half-formulated about the Canadian condition. In developing her thesis, which certainly fits many of the facts about our life and literature, she presents a salutary picture (and salutary in this case, as in most cases, means depressing) of a people who express their nature only in struggle against the forces of economic and cultural frustration which turn almost every Canadian work of writing into a depressive reflection on our slavery.

Yet I cannot accept Margaret Atwood's vision in its detailed entirety, and I suspect she does not anticipate such literal and complete conversion from any reader; rather she has been occupied in creating a logical horizon within which

we can seek our bearings. It is possible to find many important Canadian writers who fit only square-peggedly into the pattern of failure and survival she presents. Robertson Davies, I feel, does not belong, nor does Irving Layton or Robert Kroetsch, and Hugh MacLennan and Al Purdy fit the pattern only partially. Margaret Atwood has in fact drawn quite heavily on a restricted group of young novelists and poets to make her most telling points. She could have made the points even more telling if she had not been too modest to draw on her own verse and fiction, and one suspects a temperamental inclination has led her a long part of the way towards her conclusions.

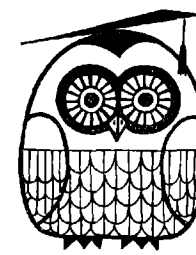
Yet the poets and novelists of failure and survival still surround us in a haunting circle, too numerous not to give a special tone to Canadian writing. And can we be sure that these are not the writers who give faithful expression to our inmost urges? Are we not, as a people, inclined to be content with pulling through rather than triumphantly succeeding? Yet even this does not mean one has to accept literally Margaret Atwood's thesis that it is colonial economic domination that has made Canadians so obsessed with failure. The theme of survival is, after all, not unique; as one of Margaret Atwood's fellow poets remarked in a letter that reached me today, "survival is the spine of worldlit!" Canadians may display an extreme case of this concern with survival, but so did the Eskimos to an even more advanced degree, and it was geographical, not colonial economic, factors that produced the original survival arts of the north. Yet, considered as a critical tool, a frame of reference, a usable hypothesis, it is hard not to accept Atwood's horizon of survival as the circle that best defines the bounds of Canadian writing.

* * *

COMMENCING with this issue, *Canadian Literature* will grow in size to between 120 and 128 pages an issue. This enlargement of content represents an expansion of scope. In the past our pages have been in principle devoted to the criticism of Canadian writing in both French and English, but up to now we have in practice done little more than signal from Vancouver our cordial feelings towards writers in Quebec; on an average less than 10% of our material has been in French. With the increased size of our journal, which has been made possible in part by a special grant from the Canada Council, we shall be able within 1973 to increase to at least 25% the proportion of our

content devoted — in French or in English — to the discussion of writing in Quebec, and in later years we hope further to expand that proportion. Thus we shall be able at last to fulfil the second of the aims with which *Canadian Literature* started publication more than thirteen years ago. The first of these aims was to establish a high and consistent standard of reviewing and criticism in Canada, and if we have not been wholly successful in this task (as the book pages of so many newspapers still suggest by their abysmal inadequacy) at least we can point to the vast growth of serious studies of Canadian writers — many of them published in our pages — since *Canadian Literature* first appeared. Our second original aim was to produce a journal that on the level of literary achievement rather than political fantasy would bring the two leading cultures of Canada together. Politics did intervene, particularly during the middle 1960s, to frustrate this intention, but at last we hope that we have earned enough credit and trust in all parts of Canada for our project of a truly comprehensive organ of Canadian criticism to gain what all of us — led by Margaret Atwood — suspect to be the prime Canadian achievement: survival, with any other success an astonishing bonus.

G.W.



MYTH, FRYE AND CANADIAN WRITERS

D. G. Jones

WHEN ROBERT KROETSCH published *The Words of My Roaring* in 1966, I thought, the Canadian writer is finally home free. It was the first really exuberant novel to come out of the west. After those laborious novels of Grove's in which the heroes struggle to defeat or ironic self-discovery; after the beautifully realized but wracking winter of the soul from which the hero of Ross's *As For Me and My House* emerges, reborn, but barely; after the torturous journeys and almost pyrrhic victories of the women in Margaret Laurence's novels, Kroetsch's hero moves with a kind of magnificent inevitability towards his own triumphant self-realization.

J. J. Backstrom, undertaker and political candidate, has neither money nor education nor influence. He is running on the coat tails of Bible Bill Aberhart and his evangelical politics. But that has little to do with his success. He lives in his own imagination; like the studhorse man in the later novel he lives in his own myth, larger than life. Aware as anyone of the depression, the drought, the general helplessness of his world to change the situation, he is full of energy. Bitten or badgered as he may be by a nagging wife, by personal and mechanical failures, by his own sense of the impossibility and folly of his contesting the election against the elderly, respected and repeatedly successful local doctor, he nonetheless shakes these annoyances off as a grizzly might shake off the rain. And with the rain he wins the doctor's daughter and the doctor's seat in the legislature as well.

Here too we find the first real garden in prairie fiction. And there the great man — "I have these big fists," he says, "I have these perfect teeth" — lies with the moon, the waterlilies, the doctor's daughter. He is Adam in Eden, unused to the place but nevertheless making himself at home.

THE POET is the nth Adam, wrote A. M. Klein:

> taking a green inventory
> in world but scarcely uttered, naming, praising,
> the flowering fiats in the meadow, the
> syllabled fur, stars aspirate, the pollen
> whose sweet collision sounds eternally.
> For to praise
>
> the world — he, solitary man — is breath
> to him. Until it has been praised, that part
> has not been. Item by exciting item —
> air to his lungs, and pressured blood to his heart —
> they are pulsated, and breathed, until they map,
> not the world's, but his own body's chart!

So Klein, the city-dweller, despite the "daily larcenies of the lung," proclaimed in 1948, nearly ten years before *The Anatomy of Criticism*. And three years later in *The Second Scroll* he celebrated the imagination of a whole people, in Israel, recreating the collective poem of language.

In 1954, Irving Layton wrote:

> And me happiest when I compose poems.
> Love, power, the huzza of battle
> are something, are much;
> Yet a poem includes them like a pool
> water and reflection.
> In me nature's divided things —
> tree, mould on tree —
> have their fruition;
> I am their core. Let them swap,
> bandy, like a flame swerve.
> I am their mouth; as a mouth I serve.

The poet speaks with confidence. As in the case of Klein, it is a confidence rooted in a clear conception of the function and capital importance of the imagination, and one very like Frye's, that the imagination creates, and in the case of the writer, creates through the word, the myth within which men may live in communion with all life, within which all separate lives, nature's divided things, may find their identity with the whole of life, with the result that they may praise instead of curse the world.

Frye did not create this conception. It was anticipated by the writers. As Frye would say, he found it in the literature of the world. But it was particularly anticipated by such writers as the American Wallace Stevens, and, in terms still closer to Frye, by such Canadian writers as Klein and Layton and even Ernest Buckler in *The Mountain and the Valley*, published in 1952.

The basic conception of the poetic imagination given such elaborate articulation in his critical theory is not peculiar or opposed to the main development of Canadian literature or the Canadian writer's imaginative convictions. Rather, I suggest that it is but one more expression, given detailed articulation in critical or analytical terms, of a more general conviction arrived at by a number of writers and given a special development in Canada at about the same time. It is shared not only by such writers as Jay Macpherson and James Reaney, who may be suspected of being directly influenced by Frye, but also by those who ostensibly see him as an enemy, Layton, for example, and Dudek, whose *Atlantis*, in its basic image and theme, develops entirely within the same perspective as Frye's. What could sound more like Frye than these lines?

> Not an individuality but an identity
> is what we are.
> That continues, as it lives in the body
> in fraternity with things and men.
> It is the whole reality that is always there;
> something that we are, that we become,
> that now we cannot know or share.

Most of our world is fragmentary, but the poet goes on to evoke the vision of a glimmering Atlantis:

> An architecture of contradictions and inexorable chances
> reconciled at last,
> in a single body.
>
> Atlantis, alone, he concludes is real.

More surprising still is the fact that this conception of the poetic imagination is shared by Canadian writers working in another language and, presumably, another literary tradition.

Gabrielle Roy's allegorical novel *La Montagne secrète* voices the conviction that it is the artist's role to make articulate all that is inarticulate, that in him and through his creation nature's divided things will have their fruition, discover their community with each other, their identity in a single body, that, as a conse-

quence, life may be praised. As the narrator says early in the story: "Thus it was that Pierre discovered what was expected of persons like himself (i.e. the artists) — that they should, thanks to them, rejoice and be sustained by hope."

Anne Hébert arrived at the same conclusion a few years earlier in a talk published in 1958 with the significant title, "Poésie: solitude rompue." There she proclaimed, "Notre pays — our country has arrived at the first days of creation; life here is to be discovered and named." And the convictions expressed in that essay provided the basic poetic platform for the Québec poet throughout the sixties. Whether he said so explicitly or not, the poet became the nth Adam, calling for and taking a green inventory in world but scarcely uttered. One may list a few titles: Yves Préfontaine's *Pays sans parole*, Roland Giguère's *Age de la parole*, Gatien Lapointe's *Le premier mot*, or Mlle Hébert's own poem, "Mystère de la parole," where she writes:

> Silence, nothing stirs, nothing speaks, the word
> breaks, lifts our hearts, seizes the world in a
> single thunderclap, binds us to its dawn as the
> rind to the fruit.

The poem concludes with a kind of prayer that he who has received the office of the word take charge of all the oppressed and disinherited as of a heart grown dark with unrealized life, that both the living and the dead may find their lives justified in a single song between the grasses and the morning light.

WITH THIS LARGE AFFIRMATION of poetic faith, there is a sense in which Canadian writing comes of age. Klein or Layton or Anne Hébert have a clear *raison d'être* for their activity, and they write with a profound conviction as to the central importance and power of the imagination. No doubt that shrewd chameleon A. J. M. Smith had implied some such idea of a poetry's worth in *News of the Phoenix* and *A Sort of Ecstasy*. Some of F. R. Scott's poems have an intensely confident élan. Pratt's long and unfailing career implies such confidence. And the gist of "Brébeuf" and "Towards the Last Spike" is precisely that it is imagination that creates a vision of community and inspires men to realize it. Birney too has an unquenchable vitality and he has a stubborn faith in the imagination of Mrs. A. or Everywoman, who saves Vancouver from damnation. But he is also a man on the run, sniping at a world in which the

individual imagination struggles to survive and frequently loses, and in which the collective imagination is most likely to create a nightmare of destruction.

I remember receiving a note one summer in which Layton wrote that he was writing poems like a burst waterspout. He has been doing that for years. If we look back on the poets before him we do not get this impression of exuberant fecundity.

Roberts peters out between a wilful optimism and a spontaneous melancholy. Lampman dreams, increasingly alone, in the wintry fields. In French, Nelligan begins with a magnificent series of poems inspired by a passionate but hopelessly exclusive ideal and founders on the rocks of the excluded reality; much like the early Duncan Campbell Scott's Piper of Arll, he sinks in his golden ship in a sea of self-doubt. Saint-Denys-Garneau, a truly original talent, turns on himself, denies his joy three times over and forsakes the creative word for the iron cross of dogmatic faith. P. K. Page struggles against a metallic logos, an impersonal technical and rational order whose perspective must be resisted within as well as without, and for some years she is silent, preferring to map her own body's chart in a graphic line less prejudiced by analytic reason. As Margaret Avison puts it in her poem "Perspective," speaking of those who reduce their world to a rational geometry, "your fear has me infected."

It is the doubt within that is most corrosive: the artist's suspicion that his audience is indifferent or hostile; worse, his complicity with his audience, with a world suspicious of the wild energies or dreams loosed by the imagination. Some novels seem designed to dramatize our divided mind in regard to imaginative vision.

Callaghan's novels are a record of the defeat of the imagination. And it is the doubt, the indecision of the best as well as the worst that often ensures its defeat. McAlpine in *The Loved and the Lost* is an intelligent, highly educated, liberal person. He is even in love with the girl, Peggy Sanderson, whose vision of a more open society nonetheless shocks him. No more than the rest of his world can he trust in an order arising from dreaming desire, in an imagination that couples black and white, the church and the leopard. His distrust ensures the destruction of the girl. He abandons her the night she is murdered.

George Stewart in MacLennan's *The Watch that Ends the Night* is a similar case. He loves the girl Catherine and admires her masculine counterpart Jerome Martell, but he stands incredulous before their faith in "Eros, builder of cities". He trembles as they pour themselves out in exuberant activity as if they were themselves the creations and instruments of dreaming desire and the community

it would create. Catherine and Jerome live in their own myths. Almost to the end, Stewart remains a student, fascinated by the power of that insubstantial vision which they proceed to make incarnate in their lives. He ends a convert, but we can be pretty certain he will never be among the saints.

Sinclair Ross's *As For Me and My House* was entirely preoccupied in dramatizing and exorcising that inner division or self-doubt. When Philip Bentley finally submits to Eros, risks rebirth in an illegitimate child, he ends his complicity, resigns from the church and resolves to be no more and no less than an artist. Yet it is not clearly within the scope of the book to indicate what this means, and the conclusion as it stands does not suggest that the artist will have a particularly large or important role to play, or that the life of the imagination may be of profound influence. Mr. Bentley may do no more than open a bookstore in Winnipeg and sketch, which for his own soul's health and, to a slight degree, for that of the body politic, may be something but not much.

Other novels such as Mitchell's *Who Has Seen the Wind* or Wiseman's *The Sacrifice* may be seen to touch obliquely on this theme and to be more hopeful. Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* was one book which, in form as in theme, affirmed the central importance of imagination, of vision or myth, in creating a community in a world divided and infected with fear. Yet none of these authors has impressed us by writing like a burst waterspout.

These are no doubt questionable and certainly invidious comparisons. Yet thinking back on so much of our writing, noting how even Souster depreciates his muse, disguising her in the most ordinary, even dumpiest dress, remarking how Dudek seems compelled to document his vision with fragments of conversations and observations on two continents, as if they were droppings from Pegasus, guaranteed evidence of the scientific validity of the vision of Atlantis, we may detect a certain inhibition and doubt, a lack of faith or fear of heights in the writer, especially if we turn to a Layton or a Frye or an Anne Hébert for comparison.

LAYTON IS PROBABLY our first important poet to pour out books, good, bad or indifferent, with an absolute conviction as to the significance of poetry and the power of the word. He creates and lives in his own myth, most validity in his role of poet in the poems themselves. There he becomes Orpheus, Adam, the dying and rising god, the living word through whom the identity of

all nature's divided things is manifest. He is worshipped and praised, for through him the vision of the community of living things is ever created anew, life is justified and men may praise, not the god but the world.

At best, it is not in himself but in his office as poet, as instrument of the imagination, that Layton finds his authority. As such, it does not matter what sort of scribbler his particular audience may think him to be; he knows that the poet is not irrelevant or powerless, but central to their lives. As he says in "The Fertile Muck":

> . . . if in August joiners and bricklayers
> are thick as flies around us
> building expensive bungalows for those
> who do not need them, unless they release
> me roaring from their moth-proofed cupboards
> their buyers will have no joy, no ease.

It is he who can extend their rooms for them, enlarge their world.

"How to dominate reality?" the poet asks, and replies, "Love is one way, imagination another." And, as the final image of the poet sitting with his consort implies, surely they are inseparable. Eros inspires us with the vision of what we would create, and the imagination comprehends that vision along with its opposite. It comprehends the distance between what we are and what we might be, without losing faith in the transforming power of dreaming desire. Its capacity, as Frye would say, to provide the goals of human work.

It is, I suggest, the courage of such convictions that has increasingly sustained a number of writers in this country and contributed to the remarkable literary production of the fifties and sixties. Such convictions are shared by other writers, of course. By Blake, who has contributed a good deal of Frye's conception of poetry, but also in varying degrees by a Rilke, a Yeats or a Breton, whom Prof. Alquié cites in his rather dry observation:

> The surrealist idea that "the imaginary is what tends to become real" is calculated on the casualty of desire. Desire tends in effect to realize what it imagines.

I quote M. Alquié's remark, because long before anyone in Québec had ever heard of Northrop Frye, the poets and painters were being strongly influenced by the surrealists. That is not an influence shared by writers in English Canada, though it has contributed to a shared conception of the nature and function of poetry. Yet that conception, I suspect, would have developed any way in Québec, and it often appears closer in its terms to a Frye or a Klein or a Layton than to Breton or Professor Alquié.

Fernand Ouellette describes his coming to be a poet as a spiritual birth, an experience of liberation consequent upon his intimate recognition of the two poles of life, the dark and the light, and of the need to reject a Jansenist or Manichean dualism in favour of a vision that comprehends them both (a central theme in recent Québec poetry and, as I have tried to suggest elsewhere at some length, in English-Canadian literature as well). Ouellette, writing of how the profound affront of death, as the ultimate privation, is yet comprehended or transformed on the poetic or metaphysical level by an even more devouring hope or expectation, remarks:

> It's the awareness of death and of hope which transforms me into a demiurge, and not all the "isms", such as surrealism.

Certainly Anne Hébert arrived at her view of poetry through a painful exploration of her own imaginative world, discovering gradually that her personal imprisonment in silence, her sense of isolation and paralysis, was shared by others and was indeed a reflection of a cultural paralysis, a collective vision bequeathed by the past. She came to recognize and reject the past, in the rapacious kings who, in "Le Tombeau des rois", propagate themselves through her; in the wraith-like Michel, who secludes his bride in the closed rooms of the novel *Les chambres de bois* and cannot bring himself to consummate their marriage; in *la grande Claudine*, the bitter, puritanical and fierce jailor to her son François who begins the story "Le Torrent" by saying, "I was a child born dispossessed of the world."

For Anne Hébert, rejecting the old vision and going on to articulate a new, was again a liberation and a birth into the world. It was a living demonstration of the transforming power of the word. In her 1958 essay on poetry, "Poésie: solitude rompue", she writes:

> ... I believe in the virtue of poetry, in the clarion health of all just speech, lived and articulate. I believe in the solitude broken like bread by poetry.

A year later, during a round-table discussion of Canadian literature, the critic Gilles Marcotte broke in at the end to say:

> Je tiens à souligner ... I am concerned above all to emphasize that literature is not simply a diversion, however noble; it is one of the means we have been given to be born into the world, to possess the world. Under this head, the attention which we give to Canadian books is a human act of extreme importance. We cannot abstract ourselves with impunity — that is, without becoming humanly im-

> poverished — from the literary or artistic creation taking place in our midst — at the point I would dare to say of our incarnation . . . Besides, to my way of thinking, it is impossible to be truly interested in literature — conceived again as a means of possessing the world — while totally ignoring that which is being born right here.

Robert Kroetsch was to say essentially the same thing, more simply, during the interview with Margaret Laurence included in the volume *Creation* published by Anansi last year:

> "In a sense," he said, "we haven't got an identity until someone tells our story. The fiction makes us real."

It is much the same conviction that lifts John Newlove out of his usual preoccupations with the experience of isolation, the lack of communication even between lovers, to a large vision of communion that forms the rather magnificent peroration to his poem "The Pride". There the Indian and the white man, the dead and the living, all will find themselves at home at last, "in amazement", when the whole of their lives have been grasped and made articulate by the imagination. Then, he says, we shall dwell on nothing else but those rooted words; we shall dwell in nothing else. We shall become the others in our desires, which are their "hard-riding desires". That vision may be compared to Layton's in "A Tall Man Executes A Jig", where the tall man finally comprehends the living and the dead, the bones of badgers and raccoons, all the generations of life, englobes them, digests them, and becomes one body with the world.

DESPITE DUDEK'S irritation at Frye's emphasis on the Bible as furnishing the most complete grammar of the western imagination, we may note that many of the terms used by the writers themselves are Biblical, that the more profound religious concepts furnish the language in which they define their experience of poetry and their sense of its significance.

Anne Hébert managed to effect an imaginative revolution without cutting herself off entirely from her cultural heritage. She re-interpreted the Christian tradition of her province giving new stress to the *incarnation* of the Word, to the figure of Adam making articulate the Word incarnate, naming and praising the world, to the communion of all life realized in and through the word. And this was doubly possible because she could see in the religious experience defined in these theological concepts the analogy to her experience of poetry.

The poet is not, she protests, the rival of God; but a witness to His grace. Perhaps she would concur with Coleridge in saying that the imagination is the repetition in the finite mind of the infinite "I am". Certainly it is difficult in Miss Hébert's view not to see him as the rival of the priest.

However that may be, the function of the writer has taken on something of that large significance during the past two decades. He is the imaginative man, whose vision reveals and whose articulation makes possible an order and a community. For some in Québec it may be primarily a community of language and culture. For many it goes well beyond that to mean a community with the land and the sensuous world, the world of action and their own bodily life. And such a community is most explicitly evoked in Newlove's "The Pride", and, in terms of its absence, in Atwood's poems on Susanna Moodie or "Backdrop Addresses Cowboy", where the indifferent and hostile progress of western man across North America is seen to have developed an absurd Hollywood parody of a real community. And it is a spiritual failure, as the voice which speaks for the land, for the dead, for the community of life not realized, indicates in the concluding lines, saying, "I am the space you desecrate/as you pass through." For finally it is a vision of a universal communion that is implied or explicitly adumbrated in the work itself.

Gwen MacEwen may follow strange gods, those figures whom Miss Atwood characterizes as the male muse, and in whom the world and the word become one. But when we are addressed as "My friends, my sweet barbarians" and invited to "consume our mysteries", though in a world of computers and superhighways and Alexandrian libraries, we are being invited to the same communion meal as Anne Hébert had in mind. Miss MacEwen wishes us "bon appétit", but she also reminds us not to forget the grace. The world of *Breakfast for Barbarians* is a world of continuous incarnation and transubstantiation. Consuming we become one body with the world, which is the word incarnate.

Paul Chamberland's career seems designed to illustrate Frye's theory of historical modes and his view that since the 19th century we have been moving from a low mimetic through an ironic towards a new mythical mode. Chamberland begins with the inherited tradition of symbolist and surrealist poetry; he moves in *The Sign Poster Howls* and *The Unspeakable* through a period of ironic tirades, confessions of pain and outrage reminiscent of Ginsberg's "Howl" and other poems: he has now begun to speak like a prophet, in oracular utterances, proclaiming the spiritual truths of the age of Aquarius, announcing the imminent birth of the gods. It is a world of myth in which he writes:

I have placed my confidence
in the whole of reality
in the immense
joyous and beautiful
child bride
whose body
is riddled with suns

Chamberland is now the William Blake of Québec poets, proclaiming the reality of vision, the sanctity of Eros, the infernal divinity of man as God's accomplice in his incestuous relations with himself. He echoes George Whalley quoting Coleridge to the effect that behind all poetry there lies the conviction that everything has a life of its own and we are all one life. "I am the Unique and the Universal" he writes in his "Canticle for the New Age".

I am the Ancestor, I am Man. In me all men
advance towards the light, whose seed since the
beginning of time has shone in the gloom: dark egg,
divine embryo. I will be Man on the day that all
men are born in the divine radiance, that day Heaven
and Earth will be forever reconciled.

He is also the nth Adam. He continues:

I invoke my eternal name, my legitimate paternity.
I am the first Adam. I bear in my flesh all the
wounds of man. From the beginning of time I have
been driven by desire.

The writer's role is now conceived in increasingly hieratic terms. "We are waiting," he says, "for the electronic Vedas, the return of a writing, sacred and absolute." Finally, Chamberland affirms the supreme relevance of the creations of the imagination when he writes, "We do not write poetry: rather poetry, which is Reality, engenders us."

Clearly, with such convictions, the writer need not despair of his *raison d'être*, even in a mass society. Poetry finds its justification outside the particular talents of the poet or the particular tastes of a cultivated élite. It shapes the myths in which we live; it shapes us. And Northrop Frye has argued just that.

But why, we might ask, do the poets like Layton attack the critic, often with some venom? Are they not allies? Perhaps Nietzsche, who is one

of Layton's mentors, can suggest an answer. Nietzsche distinguishes between the philosopher who *creates values* and the philosophical worker whose job it is "to determine and formalize some large reservoir of value-judgements, that is of *former value-creations.*" As a critic, the greatest part of Frye's work is of the latter type. His job has been to order and classify, to clarify and explain the type, whether he is talking about the specific forms of literature or the nature and function of the creative imagination. The motive of such workers, says Nietzsche, is to make everything that has heretofore happened and been evaluated into a visible, thinkable, comprehensible and handy pattern; to abbreviate everything that is long, to abbreviate time itself; to *overpower* the entire past. Frye has articulated a critical perspective of such clarity, scope and persuasiveness that he has succeeded in doing just that. An enormous and admirable task but not in Nietzsche's view the primary one, which is to create the future. And that, I suspect, would be in Layton's view the role of the poet.

Something may be said for the creative nature of Frye's work. Yet we may agree that it is one thing to articulate in discursive terms a conception of poetry and another to prove it on the pulse. And beyond the conception of poetry to find the motive of the poem, the necessity within the vision.

Nietzsche's distinction here suggests his distinction between the Apollonian and the Dionysian imagination. The Apollonian artist is not unlike the philosophical worker who overpowers, abbreviates and makes visible an ordered past. His bias is towards spectacle, to fix the world in a vision, large, splendid, richly varied, perhaps, but intelligible to the light of reason. The Dionysian artist plunges into time, risks himself and his world in the flux, dark to all except his desire, to the élan of the dance to which he abandons himself. His is the spirit of music that Nietzsche linked to the birth of tragedy, which gives us the title of Layton's poem and reveals his bias, whereas Frye's is surely towards the Apollonian.

It is the Dionysian poet Layton cultivates, and whose irregular footprints so horrify those whose rooms he would extend; and in a time of cultural disintegration, when the visible or articulate order is so largely diseased, it is the Dionysian imagination that we may need to cultivate, abandoning ourselves to Eros and the deepest springs of our desire. And that is itself no easy matter when we have been so bombarded by voices telling us what we ought to think we desire. "The writer," complains Chamberland, "has a rapport with the whole of the word presently broadcast":

not a commercial that doesn't leave me cold. I am battling the lie, the systematic immorality of the establishments. My weapon is rhetoric, I mean the most lucid awareness that can be exercised in language.

Let the imagination take power: let it destroy the obsolete codes that fossilize man's brain.

We are on trial, he says:

> Our dreams accuse us
> No use pleading not guilty
> And let's not swear to tell the truth, the whole truth
> and nothing but the truth
> We do not even know how to tell the difference between
> true and false

A major preoccupation of the contemporary writer is and probably will be the delineation of diseased desire, an inventory of what in truth he does not desire.

But it may be necessary to prove as well Nietzsche's aphorism: "The greatest epochs of our lives come when we gain the courage to rebaptize our evil as our best."

I think of a streak of perversity in us, that leads John Newlove to frighten himself, time and again, in the night, in the mountains; that leads Susan Musgrave to the "Mackenzie River, North", the vast emptiness "like continents of tooth and stone", where there is "nothing about for us/but fear/And moving,/always moving,/ out of the night/it comes". That led Frank Scott to celebrate the same river, which "turns its back on America".

For it is one of the problems of established culture that it has distinguished the world so thoroughly into black and white and attacked so much of life as a darkness, telling us to desire only the light. And the Apollonian vision and the impulse to overpower the past lends itself only too easily to an excessive and at times almost paranoiac desire for light: the desire to analyse it into a series of rational elements that can then be dealt with systematically by a series of rational techniques, so that man can control life as it were from the outside, rather than participate in it. Then, whatever is dark, if it cannot be eliminated in fact, disappears from the vocabulary and from consciousness.

There is a strong messianic cast to the very terms used here so often to define the role of the artist and of the imaginative vision he serves, as if it would deliver us from the dark once and for all. In part no doubt it does, but it must do this continuously, and, more radically, it must deliver the dark itself, not just make it disappear.

That is why one must insist on the Dionysian quality of Layton's imagination that can dominate reality; it must be qualified by the title of the poem in which he speaks of that imagination; it must spring from "the fertile muck".

Ouellette, too, while leery of the primitive connotations of the word "myth" and anxious to insist on the continued value of the most lucid awareness, also insists on the necessity to breathe, as he says, darkness as well as light, on the virtue of the obscene. The obscene, he suggests, is the crudity of sexual hunger, of raw appetite; and any expression of grief or despair that goes beyond certain limits will be considered raw, crude, obscene by society. Yet, definitively, he writes, it is in accepting the excessive hunger of sex, of poetry, of sainthood that one comes to accept oneself, one's own being. And it is through the power of "crudité" that one advances, he insists, towards God, the infinite, the eternal, towards love, towards the great hope, "le grand désir". The way to the stars is through the fertile muck.

Thus, though the Canadian writer may have arrived at an assured and profound sense of the writer's office, with no need to justify the fictions he creates, as no more than irrelevant "fictions", he is still in no position to whip off an apocalytic vision of the communion of saints, and he may still feel compelled to do battle against the powerful but possibly seductive light of a Frye.

For the artist is almost as much in the dark as ever. He must look deep to discover the real springs of his desire, and he must prove its rhythms in his pulse, beginning with the first word and the second, one by one, one after the other. He must test the false desire against those same rhythms. It may lead Chamberland at this moment to proclaim: "The Milky Way leaps with the inordinate joy of God." It may lead equally to Dale Zieroth's: "Times are when we're/no longer sure of the things/we wanted to say," or "My life fragments too easily, things/ have no core, break up,/sometimes end. I am not tough," lines seemingly flat, but with curious rhythms, carrying conviction. Or Dennis Lee's "Glad for the Wrong Reasons," in which after a nightmare of absence, the glad racket of garbage cans and the familiar features of his domestic life, he can say, "Jesus, there is/something about our lives that/doesn't make sense . . . " Or the devastating opening lines of Susan Musgrave's "Once More":

> We sit by the river
> you, drunk already,
> and I
> your day's feed.

It is perhaps a negative conviction, but it is a conviction.

Miss Musgrave may discover that her most earnest desire is for death or madness: she begins a poem called "Celebration":

> Being someone's last woman
> and the only passenger of the day
> I rode out after madness . . .

Yet given Miss Musgrave's world, her desire for death may be honest, her desire for madness a desire for sanity. In that obscenity she may find a Dionysian music, the birth of Tragedy. "To be born," says Ouellette, "is to have a sharpened awareness of the two poles of life and to feel the tragic in our very being." "We begin to live," said Yeats, "when we begin to conceive of life as tragedy." Yet Layton's "The Birth of Tragedy" concludes with the poet:

> noting how seasonably
> leaf and blossom uncurl
> and living things arrange their death
> while someone from afar off
> blows birthday candles for the world

There is always the point in any society when it is no longer appropriate to rage against the dying of the light. Our mutability is a token of our community with life as a whole. The local tragedy opens into the divine comedy. Frye could speak to that, but let me repeat Ouellette: "It is the awareness of death and hope which transforms me into a demiurge and not all the 'isms' . . . "

The more extravagant the vision of a radiant community the more it is necessary to recall the opacity of the individual fate, the fertile obscenity of death. Thus Ouellette insists upon remembering the deaths at Hiroshima, the deaths on the highway, the death of the man carried out of the barber shop, your death, my death, his own. Therefore Layton, crying his visionary conviction, there is no such thing as death, there is no death anywhere in the land, brings his hand down on the butterfly on the rock — not because he takes a sadistic delight in breaking butterflies, but because he must assert two realities at once: one life and the many unique, mortal lives. There is no divine comedy except through the individual tragedies. Any other proposition would be false.

DURING THE PAST GENERATION Canadian writing both in theory and in practice, both in French and in English, has discovered an assur-

ance, a range and depth, a boldness, that suggests it is entirely at home in the world of the imagination. The news of the phoenix no longer comes to us in rumours, from abroad. The Canadian writer can now live in that fire. Yet he is also aware of the dark that makes the light flame. He is prepared to fly, but he is also aware of the gravity that will ensure that his imaginative flight does not become weightless, an endless drift in free fall. Therefore it is not plain sailing. He has no guaranteed technique. It is with a paradoxical assurance he proceeds.

I am reminded of the strange phrase of Roland Giguère, Poetry is an obsidian lamp: "La poésie est une lampe d'obsidienne."

I am also reminded of Gwen MacEwen, whose "Shadow Maker" may provide a conclusion to these remarks.

> I have come to possess your darkness, only this.
> My legs surround your black, wrestle it
> As the flames of day wrestle night
> And everywhere you paint the necessary shadows
> On my flesh and darken the fibers of my nerve;
> Without these shadows I would be
> In air one wave of ruinous light
> And night with many mouths would close
> Around my infinite and sterile curve.
>
> Shadow-maker create me everywhere
> Dark spaces (your face is my chosen abyss),
> For I said I have come to possess your darkness,
> Only this.

THE OTHER MR. LEACOCK

Carl Berger

STEPHEN LEACOCK was four parts humorist, one part political economist and two parts controversialist. During his lifetime these discrete proportions were hopelessly confused and it is only with a great deal of excruciating research that we can now see them separately and clearly. Literary critics have been mainly interested in his life and times in order to illuminate and interpret his fiction; historians have recently become interested in his writings for the perspective they throw upon the past. The inadvertent result is that we are becoming acquainted with two Mr. Leacocks — the one a kindly and humane commentator on the foibles and fads of humanity, a genius apparently beyond both history and analysis;[1] and the other an imperialist, critic of the Canadian plutocracy, middle-class reformer and an intellectual deeply engaged in the debates of his day.[2] There was, of course, only one Mr. Leacock and an examination of his social values and assumptions may be of some relevance to the interpretation of the humorous works upon which his reputation justly rests.

Leacock was a political economist for some time before his name became a byword for humour. Though his academic credentials were impressive and his position as head of the Political Economy Department at McGill University preeminent, he saw the role of the man of learning in a very different light from what these symbols of professionalism suggest. He had been educated in literature and the classics, had taught these subjects for eight years at Upper Canada College, and was thirty-one when he went to Chicago to do graduate work in economics. This shift from the traditional learning to the new discipline was made by many other Canadian intellectuals in the decades after 1895. O. D. Skelton, who had graduated in classics and English literature at Queen's University and was in the political economy course at Chicago in 1907, suggested the reason for this change when he told the economist Adam Shortt, that "Strikes, trusts, taxes, socialism, tariffs [and] banking bulk a good deal larger in the public mind than the authenticity of John's gospel or the wherefore of the shyness of Hegel."[3] Lea-

cock made the same journey, but, perhaps because he did so only after his outlook was more or less fixed, his allegiance to the new discipline was partial and incomplete. He had no taste for specialized research and no patience with the pretensions to expertise purchased at the cost of cutting up the wide field of human knowledge into tidy compartments. And he did not share the conviction of Shortt and Skelton that the expert training of the economists should be put at the disposal of the efficient, regulatory state. He was as impatient of his discipline as he was of social constraint and regulation and he remained dubious about economics as a body of solutions. In one of his last pronouncements on the subject he said that the current economics of the schools was just a "babble of mathematical jargon, all plots and graphs and curves, signifying nothing."[4] Economics, he believed, was not a science; it was the name of a problem, the problem essentially of a socially just distribution of material goods and this was, in a profound sense, a moral and not a technical question.

True to his classical training he was committed to the view that education was to concern itself with the formation of character, the understanding of man, and the search for truth. He expected the university to be one of the driving forces of civilization, not in the obvious sense of being a part of politics, but as a place where the great issues of politics could be explored and clarified free from intemperate partisanship. Because the ultimate questions reduced themselves to moral ones, to questions about man, Leacock believed that the old learning was indispensable for dealing with those problems that modern political economy grappled with in vain. He also believed that these could be simply taught. Though the delight in entertaining and the desire for money were motives that played a large part in his life, still many of his stories were vehicles for expressing his social ideas and economic beliefs. Leacock was quite conscious of the serious purposes that even light fiction could serve — indeed, it followed logically from his critical view of popular democracy that for purposes of discussion of social and economic questions the generality of people could not be reached through excessively serious books and articles. If the average reader were to be ensnared at all into considering these issues, he wrote in 1920, the message must be hidden among the flowers. "Such is the recognized method by which the great unthinking public is taught to think."[5] It is hardly surprising that the line between his so-called humorous stories and his serious work was blurred and indistinct.

The society that Leacock saw around him in the years before the Great War bore no resemblance to that golden age of harmony and innocence which was invented by nostalgic imagination in the 1920's. The dominant note in his magazine

articles and his satire was one of dissatisfaction and revolt, a worry that traditional standards and historic ties and habits were being eroded, and a feeling that national development was unbalanced and unhealthy. The most obvious characteristic of Canadian life in these years, a fact which astonished visitors like Rupert Brooke, André Siegfried and James Bryce, was materialism, the simple-minded concentration on development and reckless individualism. "Our prevailing passion," Leacock wrote in 1911, "is for bigness, for rapidity of growth, for a sudden and sensational development." "We have gone astray in the wilderness on the false estimate that we have placed upon wealth and mere pecuniary success ... Our whole conception of individual merit and of national progress has been expressed in dollars and cents."[6]

Leacock found the explanation for the degeneracy of the times in the triumph of what he called business values. The whole "bias of our American life [is] towards commercialism" — "business, and the business credo, and business principles have become everything."[7] He was a child of the depression of the 1870's and 1880's and he knew what had happened to his remarkable uncle in the brief western boom of the early '80's: like most children of depression he was uneasy at the sight of prosperity and luxury, and filled with forebodings that these could not last. For the millionaires whose voice had become the voice of the new god Leacock had little but contempt. But it was qualified contempt. Back in 1899, the year in which Thorstein Veblen's *Theory of the Leisure Class* appeared, Adam Shortt had presented the conventional apology for the millionaire as the vanguard of economic advance. "America," he wrote, "is at once the most speculative of countries, and yet the one where mere luck counts for least and ability for most." In spite of speculation, wealth "usually reaches the most capable hands"; the contrast between the millionaire suffocated with wealth and money and others with nothing was fallacious; and the real motive of the millionaire was not money-making — his chief "interest is creative and is akin to that of the scientific enthusiast, the statesman or the artist."[8] Leacock accepted none of this. In his description of the Canadian plutocrats in *Arcadian Adventures with the Idle Rich* (1914) he made much of the illegitimate manner in which their wealth was acquired and, above all, their inordinate luxury and wastefulness. Tomlinson owed his money not to hard work and superior ability but to luck; his son, the perfect representative of the leisure class, spent his time reading inconsequential novels and eating chocolates. Leacock never questioned the permanence of private property, the legitimacy of profit, or the primacy of individual selfishness as the motive of economic progress. What he denounced was not wealth

itself but the easy acquisition of money through get-rich-quick-schemes, the manipulation of paper, gambling and speculation, and political favouritism. He could easily have subscribed to Shortt's contentions, but in the Canada of Sir Henry Pellatt with his extraordinary castle and Mackenzie and Mann who were showered with political favours almost every day, such views no longer coincided with reality and it must have seemed that Veblen was a better guide than Shortt. What obviously disturbed Leacock was that the plutocrats were a living denial of the older ethic, the one he retained, that work was a discipline and had its own rewards and that wealth was merely its token, not its only and exclusive aim.

LEACOCK BELIEVED that the pecuniary standard, the primacy of money-making, and the fascination with size had permeated all institutions and spheres of activity. The university which was once the custodian of a genuinely humanistic education had become devoted to specialization and technical training in the immediately useful.[9] The professor, once the disinterested pursuer of truth, was now the symbol of the useless and redundant because, as Leacock put it, he did not know how to make money.[10] Literature, like religion, was condemned to sterility because all intangibles were irrelevant in an age of materialism.

The acceptance of pecuniary standards and delight in size were nowhere more evident than in the management of national affairs. Leacock's thought on politics was very much part of the long tradition of Victorian criticism of popular democracy, and his denunciation of politicians was lifelong and intense. Long after the plutocrat disappears from his stories, the politician, surely the most pathetic creature in all his fiction, puts in a regular appearance. However much he might attribute Carlyle's pronouncements to indigestion, or Sir Henry Maine's critique of democracy to an excessive exposure to the East, Leacock shared with them, and with others like Goldwin Smith and Henri Bourassa, the concern that democracy had developed unforeseen and perhaps fatal tendencies. "Our politics," he wrote in 1907, "our public life and thought, rise not to the level of our opportunity. The mud-bespattered politicians of the trade, the party men and party managers, give us in place of patriotic statecraft the sordid traffic of a tolerated jobbery. For bread, a stone. Harsh is the cackle of the little turkey-cocks of Ottawa, fighting the while as they feather their mean nest of sticks and mud, high on the river bluff."[11]

Leacock was not talking of the spectacular incidents of political corruption:

he condemned all politics because its practitioners had pliantly accepted the standards of the plutocrats to measure national progress. This was obvious in their total preoccupation with public works; there was, he confessed, something about the Canadian mind that finds gigantic projects irresistible. But for Leacock one of the best examples of how the worship of numbers was undermining the standards of national life was the uncritical acceptance of thousands upon thousands of what he called "Slavonic and Mediterranean peoples of a lower industrial and moral status." Canadian immigration policy was a monument to the mistaken belief that a nation could be built by "holding a basket at the hopper of an immigration chute."[12] Such a policy was not only working against an organic unity of east and west; it was also destroying the bicultural dualism of the country which was Canada's unique national asset. Since the corruption in political life was due to the confusion between business standards and statecraft, and since, as he made clear in "The Great Election in Missinaba County", the malaise had spread to all corners of society, Leacock placed very little faith in organizational improvements. The professionalization of politics, the machines, bosses, cliques and contractors, could not be checked by the progressive remedies of the initiative, referendum and recall. Moralistic attacks devoted to purity only ended in the ironies of "The Great Fight for Clean Government". Though Leacock dabbled with electoral reform, he was convinced that the cure for political depravity lay in the improvement of public morality which would come through the work of the universities and the public schools and with the infusion of ideals into public life. For a while he believed that the World War, with its demands for sacrifices and service, was enough to fill all men with a passion for an ideal, yet he quickly discovered that one of its by-products was prohibition. He passionately hated this measure of "social tyranny," and found that its victory could only be explained by assuming that politicians in fact had no power at all, that the real governing forces in North America were such things as Big Business, Manufacturers, Labour Unions, and various forms of National Hysteria. The most contemptible of all men, the politician was satisfied with something even less than corruption — he was satisfied with only the appearance of power. "He moves about in his frock coat and his silk hat, a garb which he shares alone with the undertaker. . . . The ordinary politician is merely busy picking up his votes from the mud of democracy like the *ramasseur* of the Parisian streets picking up cigar-butts."[13]

By 1934 when he gave his presidential address to the Canadian Political Science Association on the theme of the revision of democracy, Leacock had

come to the furthest edge of despair. Nineteenth century political freedom, he argued, rested upon an economic base which favoured individualism, government by representation, and legislation by discussion. The growing complexity of modern technology and society, however, made government by parties and parliaments "a vast complicated artificiality which serves only to conceal its own insufficiencies." For the party system he could only say that it was at least one solution to a major problem of civilization — how to keep a fool in his place and make him imitate wiser men. But for the ordinary citizens all they can do "is to try to get a set of men, trained and specialized to carry on the government, to cut loose from the mock allegiances and fictitious opposition of party."[14] What he hankered for was not the rule of the expert manager, but the kind of leaders that Sir George Parkin had thought Upper Canada College could produce, perhaps also the return of the Union government that had come into existence in Canada in 1917, a government which at least in its own propaganda had put the national interest first and had submerged partisan politics.

Leacock's imperialism was inextricably intertwined with his social satire and his distaste for the perversions of Canadian politics. Imperialism, in one sense, was the voice of an older Canada, the Canada of Macdonald reminding the new country of Laurier of its historic obligations. Leacock was one of its most authentic spokesmen. He reiterated that this imperialism had nothing to do with economic greed or territorial acquisitions; it was in fact the antidote to materialism as much as it was a denial of colonialism and prolonged subordination. It was born in the English associations of the farm near Lake Simcoe but it was always much more than a sentimental admiration for British culture and the historical connection. For Leacock the imperial ideal meant a determined effort to accept the obligations of nationhood and to fulfill the promise of freedom. Fresh from his study of the fathers of responsible government — Baldwin, Lafontaine and Hincks — Leacock claimed that these men had believed in two ideas which were still the foundations upon which Canadian development must proceed. The first of these was that the steady extension of Canadian self-government could only find its logical culmination in a more complete consolidation of the British Empire. "I am," he testified, "an imperialist because I will not be a colonial. This colonial status is a worn-out, by-gone thing."[15]

As Leacock and other imperialists saw it, Canada was virtually an independent state; the only power which she lacked was control over issues of peace and war, over foreign policy; this lack was dwarfing and incompatible with her actual importance and power; the only way Canadians could attain full national rights

was to gain a voice over the destiny of the British Empire which was as much theirs as any Englishman's. When he declared in 1906 that "We cannot be an independent country,"[16] he did not mean that Canada would for ever be a colony; he meant that given the interdependence of nations and what he took to be the very real threat of war, Canada could never attain independence in complete isolation. To say that Canada had no need for maritime defence could only be based on the assumption that "no foreign nation could ever quarrel with us, or on the theory of a parasitic subordination to the United States."[17] A sharp sense of Canadian nationalism pervaded Leacock's imperialism: he rejected from his depths the view of Canada as an outpost of England or a transcript of British society. Though he admired such English institutions as Oxford, he could say that "we do not want to take things over ready-made; . . . we believe we have a national task of our own and we want to confront it with our own strength."[18] His descriptions of how the old and declining Britain would be surpassed in power by the young and larger countries like Canada led Winston Churchill to term his speech "offensive twaddle". It was, ironically, John Ewart, one of the great Canadian critics of imperialism, who chided Leacock for his bad-mannered remarks about Englishmen.[19]

When much later someone asked him whether he was interested in going home to England, Leacock replied by describing what he loved about Canada — the great spaces, the north — and concluded "Thank you, Mother England. I don't think I'll 'come home'. I'm 'home' now."[20]

The second idea which Leacock traced back to the Baldwin-Lafontaine legacy was the "real and organic alliance of the two races"[21] in Canada. As his allusions to the immigrants suggest, Leacock was not unaffected by the popular racial cast of thought of his day. For him the real Empire meant the white Dominions and Britain, not the tropical dependencies. Yet in Canadian politics he was no intolerant Anglo-Saxon supremicist. "In one sense of the word," he candidly wrote in 1910, "this is not a British country." Its roots and traditions run back to France as well as Britain and the presence here of two races is "our greatest national asset."[22] He believed that the French-Canadian desire to preserve their rights, privileges and "nationality" was compatible with traditional Canadian conservatism, but what he and other imperialists discovered was a French-Canadian nationalist movement which emphatically denied every one of their tenets and sentiments. Leacock could not possibly sympathize with the visions of Henri Bourassa, and for those separatists of the 1920's and 1930's who dreamed of a Laurentian republic he had only warm ridicule. Laurentia, he wrote, "is a

lovely place: there are no English there, and no capitalists or power companies, and there are no soldiers and armies, and it never goes to fight in Europe; in this dream world the Government is all by orators — young orators — and they talk and talk, and write newspapers and pamphlets, and fall asleep and wake up and talk. No one quite knows where this Laurentia is, whether Montreal is in it, whether it has ports and ships that block the outlet of a continent, or whether it is up somewhere in the snow near Peribonka, in the country of Maria Chapdelaine."[23] Leacock's intellectual commitment to the dualism of Baldwin and Lafontaine collided with the announced purposes of the French Canadian nationalists and he reconciled these two facts by convincing himself that the nationalists did not represent the true feelings of French Canada. Though he lived in the city where the two cultures touched there is little evidence of any meaningful French Canadian contacts in his life, and aside from his early histories, none of his books. One who described conscription in 1917 as the triumph of democracy purified could not have had a very penetrating insight into the feelings of French Canadians.

The truth seems to be that Leacock was able to retain an academic allegiance to the idea of the duality of cultures in face of much disturbing evidence because he subscribed to certain widespread views about French Canada which turned out to be untenable. It was much later, in 1943, that he himself came to see this, only after another war had swept aside the convenient rhetoric of the *bonne entente* and only after a lifetime of observation convinced him that the separation of French and English children in Montreal was "as complete as Turk and Christian, as Mohammedan and Hindu."[24] In one of his finest autobiographical passages Leacock dwelt on this division:

> In the days of peace that once were, many of us British people in Canada, and certainly most of us British people living in French Canada, considered the presence of the French, of their separate language and distinctive culture, a decided asset to the Dominion. It seemed to us to balance and offset certain shortcomings of our own people. The hysteria of the swing to prohibition led us to admire the refusal of the French to be carried away . . . We admired the quiet contentedness of the French Canadian *habitant* and its contrast to the eager haste, the get-rich-quick, the quest for money of the restless English. We liked the stories that Dr. Drummond told us of Jean Baptiste coming home again from the States, of Louis Hemon's far-away-and-long-ago picture of the world of Maria Chapdelaine. Around French Canada hung the romance of history, the appeal of a lost cause and the respect for a people happy in their own lot. Above this level of the plain life of simple people was the pride felt by the educated and academic classes of

> society living in a dual culture, in drawing upon two languages and two great literatures. . . . It looks in retrospect like a beautiful landscape, now a deserted garden . . . The old rallying cries no longer call to the heart. Where now is the twin glory of Montcalm and Wolfe, the brotherhood of Lafontaine and Baldwin, each elected by the other's people in North York and Rimouski?

Leacock's description of the loss of credibility in these views was the admission, not of one man, but of a whole generation of English Canadians. A tradition had collapsed and nothing remained, certainly not the vain dream of bilingualism. "The French have no right in law or in history or in common sense," he concluded, "to think of Canada as a combination in which all grave policy must depend on French Canadian veto or consent. The British have no right to misuse the British connection and the British heritage to give an unfair deal to the French by sheer majority power."[25] All the rest depended on men of goodwill and fairness.

Leacock's imperialism, then, rested on the belief, mistaken as he later recognized, that Canada with her unique foundations in a duality of culture could best attain nationhood within the imperial system. It expressed the conviction that only within the context of her historical ties could she attain not only the status of a nation but the functioning power of one. But it was also rooted in a profound rejection of the country, and it is this which joins his distaste for politicians and the triumph of pecuniary values to imperialism. Imperialism was a means of escape — an escape from the stupefying preoccupation with materialism and the coils of partyism and race and religious wars into the high uplands of wider activities and concerns. After paying his respects to the mud-bespattered politicians with their views of statecraft hardly rising above the village post office, he wrote: "This is the demon we must exorcise, this the disease, the cankerworm of corruption, bred in the indolent security of peace, that must be burned from us in the pure fire of an Imperial patriotism that is no theory but a passion. This is our need, our supreme need of the Empire — not for its ships and guns, but for the greatness of it, aye, for the very danger of it."[26] Leacock's imperialism, like Kipling's, was at once a rejection of the ceaseless getting and spending and an idealistic antidote to the follies of the age.

As it turned out it was not any commitment to imperialism that drew men back to service, but Canada's participation in the World War with its insatiable demands for sacrifices. The war generated an indescribable idealism in many quarters of Canadian society, especially among the Protestant clergy, and it seemed that the sense of sacrifice it evoked was the real answer to the self-indul-

gent luxury of the rich. Only sacrifice and self-denial could burn away selfishness and restore direction to national politics. Even Leacock's imperialism was transformed: he later confessed that he had been mistaken in his advocacy of Canadian representation in the Imperial Parliament. The war had proven that the shared values and intangible bonds of Empire were more powerful than constitutions could ever be: the legalistic debate over the Statute of Westminster left him untouched. His later books on Empire were completely dominated by economic considerations. The war, moreover, had thrown a lucid light upon the nature of capitalistic production and distribution and increasingly Leacock became preoccupied with economic problems and social justice.

In his diagnosis of the ills of capitalism, Leacock was the disciple of no single thinker. Too much of his analysis consists of personal predilections projected on to all of society for that to be the case, and, in any event, Leacock was too unsystematic an economist to be imprisoned in any theory or doctrine. Yet Leacock's economic thought does bear upon it the unmistakable imprint of the ideas of Thorstein Veblen under whom he had studied at Chicago and whose *Theory of the Leisure Class* had first attracted him to that university. It was Veblen's fate, as it was to become Leacock's, that he was frequently mistaken for an amusing clown and his abstruse books forgotten except in academic circles. The essence of Veblen's teaching did not primarily rest on his mordant commentary on the eccentric habits and "conspicuous consumption" of the idle rich. What Leacock himself termed "the central point" of Veblen was an explanation for the obvious disharmony between the productive capacity of technology and the persistence of poverty and periodic crises in the age of financial capitalism. Veblen saw the economy as divided between two irreconcilable forces — the one represented by the engineer who was concerned with workmanship, efficiency and increasing production, and the other symbolized by the financiers who controlled the instruments of production and were animated by atavistic values. They were concerned exclusively with making money and their relationship to machine production Veblen described as systematic sabotage. These ideas were most fully elaborated in his *The Theory of Business Enterprise* (1904). The point of the *Theory of the Leisure Class* was that by drawing innumerable parallels between the behaviour of primitive tribes and the mores of the rich, Veblen demonstrated how wasteful and pre-industrial the values of the financiers and all coupon-clippers really were. It was in terms of this conflict between those who produced goods and those who made money that Veblen explained the major problems of American capitalism.

Though there is no indication that Leacock ever understood, let alone accepted, the complicated theory of instincts or the technological environmentalism which underlay Veblen's thought, there is no doubt that in his *Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice* (1920) he followed Veblen's general approach. Leacock saw the problem in terms of the "contrast . . . between the vastly increased power of production and its apparent inability to satisfy for all humanity the most elementary human wants,"[27] and he advanced two explanations for this paradox. The first lay in the wastefulness of capitalist production — in the channeling of resources and energies into the making of nonessential luxuries and in war destruction. Leacock's personal abhorrence of waste was abiding: he husbanded his own resources very carefully; nothing figures in his pictures of the plutocrats so prominently as their "shameless luxury", and during the war he appealed for a campaign for "national thrift".[28] He was convinced that perhaps nine-tenths of all workers were involved in basically wasteful occupations. Leacock's second explanation for the failure of machine production to fulfil human needs related to the fact that the supply and value of commodities were determined not by the upper limits of machine production or the satisfaction of wants, but in terms of guaranteeing satisfactory returns. Supply and values are the outcome of "competing forces that are not based upon justice but upon 'economic force'." Ideally, if a large enough quantity of any commodity were produced it would ultimately be worth nothing at all: sellers therefore adjusted price and quantity in order to ensure returns; the whole system rested on artificial scarcity. "Precisely here," wrote Leacock, "is found the key to the operation of economic society . . . The world's production is aimed at producing 'values', not at producing plenty."[29] In pitting productivity and social justice against the concern with money values and a brutal conflict of forces Leacock was true to the tenor of Veblen's analysis. It followed from this diagnosis that the betterment of society could never automatically come from unlimited technical progress or mere development, nor did it necessitate, as Leacock's rejection of socialism made clear, any wholesale alterations in the fundamentals of capitalism. The solution lay in the encouragement of countervailing powers like labour organizations and in the regulatory activity of the state, in "a progressive movement of social control." The war had taught everyone the lessons of social obligation: if a man were obliged to die for his country, society owed him the opportunity for a livelihood. The "government of every country," he concluded, "ought to supply work and pay for the unemployed, maintenance for the infirm and aged, and education and opportunity for the children."[30]

For a brief moment, Leacock was inspired by the example of war-time regulation and a genuine humanitarianism, and he stood with many others on the brink of a new era. This enthusiasm and idealism, however, vanished in the early 1920's. By the 1930's he spoke less and less of a progressive movement of social control and more and more of the spectre of socialism and the dangers of restraint and regulation. The connecting link between his rejection of socialism in *The Unsolved Riddle* in 1920 and his writings of the 1930's were those stories, published in the 1920's, in which he made very clear his suspicion of restraint, restriction and regulation.

Leacock was fascinated with the construction of utopias in which the fundamentals of an ideal social system were realized in their simplicity and one of his favourite devices was to take a simple item from the popular culture and develop it into a kind of anti-utopia, until it became a caricature of itself. His story, "The Man in Asbestos: An Allegory of the Future", published in 1911, was an early example of this style. In *The Garden of Folly* (1924) and *The Iron Man and the Tin Woman* (1929) he turned his irony and satire upon nearly every popular fad of the twenties — popularized psychology, personality building courses, intelligence tests, love of gadgets, spiritualism and many others — but his most effective pieces are those in which he dealt with the hateful way that social regulation impinged on the deeper aspects of human life, especially on love and courtship. "The Iron Man and the Tin Woman" was a satire upon the faith in gadgets and labour saving devices: it had reached the point where men used robots to propose to women in order to spare themselves embarrassment. In the tale, "When Social Regulation is Complete", the two lovers encountered "Preventive Officers Against Premature Courtship", possessed a "Suitable Acquaintance Tag", and had to obey the "Use-of-Endearing-Terms-in-Public-Places-Act". "This present Age of Restriction," Edward tells Angelina, "seems to have begun bit by bit; first one thing got regulated and then another. The more people got of it, the more they seemed to want. . . . It began with the world war and after that it all came in a rush."[31]

This impatience with restraint and restriction underlay Leacock's attack on socialism in 1920 and throughout the 1930's and early 1940's. He was very much a participant in the great debate of the depression years over social control and the role of the social scientist in the practical world, but the extent of this participation was concealed by personal preference. Just as there are few direct and specific allusions to the Canadian context in his stories, so too in his polemical essays there are few specific references to the current Canadian scene. He pre-

ferred, he frequently said, to deal with movements and ideas rather than parties and personalities, and he expected that just as humour should be kindly and not vicious, so also it should be possible for decent men to discuss fundamentals without being bad-tempered and nasty. At a time when governors of universities were hounding academic socialists, Leacock defended their rights to free speech provided they were not merely propagandists in their classrooms.[32] But in spite of such disclaimers, those against whom his darts were directed understood well enough. When in his *Hellements of Hickonomics*, published in 1935, the same year that the League for Social Reconstruction put out its blueprint for a socialist Canada, *Social Planning for Canada*, he denounced that man with "his goddam Social Plan",[33] there was no doubt as to whom he had in mind. When he appealed for a group of apolitical men to lead Canadians out of the depression, F. H. Underhill said of Leacock that he "rushes madly into Fascist mysticism, shouting *à la* Carlyle for leaders who will act and not talk, their action apparently to need no guidance from trained specific intellectuals but to be decided by pure intuition."[34] And when in 1934 he warned of the growing unrest and longing for security in Canada and a possible social catastrophe, it was obvious that he was referring to the growth of C.C.F. strength which took that party to power in Saskatchewan in 1944 and within an ace of victory in Ontario. Even his critique of economics may be read in an anti-socialist light, for to question that subject as the key to all problems in the 1930's was like doubting the efficacy of prayer at an earlier date.

His case against socialism in the thirties was the same as that established in his *Unsolved Riddle*. In the 1930's, as in 1920, he found the essence of the socialist argument in Edward Bellamy's utopian romance, *Looking Backward*. As some observers have pointed out it was unfair to take a book published in 1888 as though it were the latest pronouncement of socialist thought[35] and Leacock was certainly aware that democratic socialism had since that date abandoned its revolutionary aims, had settled on a policy of gradualism, and was in many respects profoundly individualistic.[36] Yet he insisted that Bellamy's commonwealth, where the instruments of production and distribution were owned by the state and administered by elected officials, necessarily and inevitably had to be the only logical conclusion of all socialism. The Canadian social democracy outlined in *Social Planning for Canada*, with its Benthamite zeal for rationality, efficiency and order, and with its board of experts overseeing even the nation's mental health, could only have confirmed him in that conviction. Revolutionary or gradual, socialism was all the same — it expected a sudden and mechanical

transformation in human nature and assumed that democratically elected boards of officials would behave quite differently than popular democracy in the past. And above all, what Leacock rejected in his addresses to the Canadian Political Science Association as well as in his stories in *Afternoons in Utopia* (1932), was the restriction on individual freedom and the uncontrollable itch of all moralists and reformers to tell other people what to do.

The uncritical adherents of free enterprise on the right were just as dangerous as the planners on the left, and Leacock's attacks on the outmoded clichés of laissez-faire were consistent with his earlier views. He enthusiastically supported R. B. Bennett's new deal in 1935 and announced in a preface to the published version of the Prime Minister's first radio address that laissez-faire, under whatever captions it appeared, "was evidently no cure for social injustice, for social inequality, for industrial crises, for low wages, for the starvation of the submerged poor and the intolerable opulence of the over-rich."[37] Laissez-faire economics was bankrupt: the only thing left of Adam Smith was the principle of human selfishness, that "the world can only be run on the principle of every man for himself."[38] That motive and that system had produced prodigious wealth; it could not ensure its just distribution. Only the state could do that through social welfare and the creation of equality of opportunity. It was on the idea of the "social heritage", a concept shared by the founder of social credit, Major Douglas, and Veblen, that Leacock based his argument. No one brought anything into the world with him, Leacock explained, "Each of us has his natural claim to a share. We are, as it were, the joint heirs of a great estate, whereas our present social order dispossesses ninety-nine to instal one. We may imagine that, in a general way, of all the wealth produced in a year, a certain part is due to the original heritage, and each of us has the right to that, whether we work or not. Rich or poor, wise or stupid, lazy or energetic — that much is ours."[39] Though this conviction led him to support the welfare state, Leacock came down in the end to insist on the primacy of individualism. It was because "we want to retain the essentials of individual freedom," he concluded, that "we must be prepared to restrain its incidental injustices."[40]

There is one final dimension to Leacock's response to economic breakdown which further affirms his hatred of restraint and limitations. One of the main contentions in the socialists' indictment of capitalism in 1930's was that the long period of Canadian economic expansion which had concealed the weaknesses of the economy had come to a conclusive end and that rationalization and planning were necessary adjustments. Coupled with this belief was the feeling that the

outer limits of geographical expansion had been reached and that Canada could absorb no more immigrants. In his three books, *The Economic Prosperity of the British Empire* (1930), *Back to Prosperity* (1932) and *The British Empire* (1940), and his last articles warning of imminent catastrophe, Leacock rejected these notions of the stationary state. His short-run solution to the depression lay in the establishment of a new gold standard and in inflation; but the path to permanent recovery was to be found in further expansion within Canada and in the economic unity of the Empire.

Leacock was convinced that the insistence on political liberty had undermined imperial economic integration and he insisted that the unity of an earlier day could be restored. "Is there no way to get back to what we have lost?" he asked in 1935. "George III and Lord North and those people had the right idea: an empire, a real one — ships, colonies, commerce. Can we not still find it?"[41] The Dominions were practically empty countries; their resources, a heritage of all the British people, were rich and immense. He then proposed an elaborate and complicated system involving an imperial super-tariff, common currency, regulated triangular trade between Britain, the Dominions and the tropical dependencies, a quota system on exports and imports, government purchase of Canadian wheat for storage in England, the stimulation of immigration (of the right sort) by chartered companies, and a pool of investment funds. For Canada his dream was no less grandiose: a rush to develop her natural resources, the construction of highways, the rebuilding of railways, the reconstruction of her cities, and an immigration programme which would help expand her population to 200,000,000 people. There would be ceaseless expansion northward. "The course of civilization," he wrote in paraphrasing the chief theme of his friend Vilhjalmar Stefansson, "moves northward." "We can abolish cold" — cities like Montreal will rise in the far north. He had never been there, he confessed, but the thought of it as he sat in his study made him feel good. We are the trustees of that vast territory, he added more soberly, "let us see to it that in the new trust of the future of the North we make fewer errors than in the old."[42] Only by the denial of limits, only by hectic development under the stimulus of free enterprise and under the auspices of the welfare state could a political upheaval in the post-war world be avoided.

It is tempting to see this appeal for imperial economic integration and Canadian development as the result of Leacock finally giving way to that temptation to construct his own utopia, or rather anti-utopia. Could it be that his books on Empire were huge satires on the current zeal for reducing economic life to a

system? What better way was there to satirize the faith in planning than to employ it to reconstruct Lord North's empire, what more effective way of poking fun at the folly of sudden solutions? Surely Leacock knew better than to expect such heroic measures from the politicians who gathered at the Ottawa Conference of 1932 and to whom *Back to Prosperity* was ostensibly addressed. And what was his endorsement of Canadian development but a harking back to the boomsters of the Laurier era with their endless designs for transcontinental railways. But to see these works as an elaborate joke would be to attribute to Leacock more cunning than he really had. They confirm, on one level, his failure to solve the problem of capitalism as he had defined it in 1920 and, on another plane, they suggest that in terms of his early remark about the Canadian mind finding grand material projects irresistible that never was he more Canadian than in his last pronouncements.

The most arresting and persistent features of Leacock's social thought were his virtual indifference to institutions, his hostility to restrictions, and the unresolved tensions in his outlook. He had no feeling for the malleability of human nature and he hated the gross oversimplifications that were preliminary to reconstructing society. In a profound way he believed that laws, institutions and politics in a conventional sense were of secondary significance in human affairs. "In all institutions," he wrote, "in all laws, the inspiring spirit must come first . . . Laws merely express and make regular the forces that the mind and will of society have already brought into being."[43] His imperialism was as much an inspiring spirit as a political programme; the ills of popular democracy were to be cured, not by institutional correctives, but by good men and the uplifting of public morality; the depression and the threat of social upheaval were to be vanquished by a will to recast an Empire and turn back over a century of history.

Leacock was a man of passionate convictions and his mind fell prey to a series of utopian idealisms. Yet he knew too much of human nature to expect, perhaps ever really desire, the attainment of these hopes. And certainly he knew how easy it was to accommodate the temptations of this world and do the radio broadcast for Pond's Cold Cream and write an indifferent history of Canada for the House of Seagram. It almost seemed that in his social writing he was often gripped by the feeling of how simple great changes could be, if only the will were there, and that he immediately drew back, conscious of the foolishness of such hopes. It is not accidental that so much of his social thought hinges on the perception of opposites — the promise of a Greater Canada and the squabbling of politicians, potential plenty and the facts of waste and poverty, the admiration

for the "economic man" and the existence of the "idle rich", the desire for social justice through progressive control and the suspicion of control and regulation, the disdain for mere bigness and his own worshipful attitude to population figures. He said of humour that it rests on the strange incongruity between our aspiration and our achievement; it might be said of his social thought that it rested on the tension between an idealism which led him to hope for a better world verging on perfection, and a pessimism about human nature which warned him that it could never be.

NOTES

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3 Douglas Library, Queen's University, Adam Shortt Papers, Skelton to Shortt, July 27, 1907.

4 Stephen Leacock, "What's Ahead for Canada?" *Maclean's Magazine*, LVI (May 1, 1943), 12.

5 Leacock, *The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice* (Toronto, 1920), 104.

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11 Leacock, "Empire and Education", *Empire Club Speeches, Being Addresses Delivered Before the Empire Club of Canada During its Session of 1906-07* (Toronto, 1907), 285.

12 Leacock, "Canada and the Immigration Problem", 317, 318.

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17 Leacock, "The Great Victory in Canada", *National Review*, LVIII (Nov. 1911), 390.

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19 John Ewart, "A Perplexed Imperialist", *Queen's Quarterly*, XV (Oct., 1907), 90.

20 Quoted by Frank Watt, "Nationalism in Canadian Literature", *Nationalism in Canada*, ed., P. Russell (Toronto, 1966), 246.

21 Leacock, "The Political Achievement of Robert Baldwin", 163.

22 *Ibid.*, 164.

23 Leacock, "Canada and the Monarchy" *Atlantic Monthly*, CLXIII (June, 1939), 743.

24 Leacock, " 'Tale of Two Cities' ", *Maclean's Magazine*, LVI (Mar. 1, 1943), 41.

25 Leacock, *While There is Time: The Case Against Social Catastrophe* (Toronto, 1945), 119-21, 126-7.

26 Leacock, "Empire and Education", 286.

27 Leacock, *The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice*, 25.

[28] Leacock, "Our National Organization for the War" in Miller, *op. cit.*, 409-21.

[29] Leacock, *Unsolved Riddle*, 73.

[30] *Ibid.*, 151-2, 128, 140.

[31] Leacock, *The Iron Man and the Tin Woman With Other Such Futurities* (Toronto, 1929), 15.

[32] Leacock, "'Academic Freedom"', *Maclean's Magazine*, XLIX (Feb. 1, 1936) 14-5, 38-9.

[33] Leacock, *Hellements of Hickonomics in Hiccoughs of Verse Done in Our Social Planning Mill* (New York, 1936), 3.

[34] F. H. Underhill, "The Conception of National Interest", *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, I (Aug., 1935), 407. In connection with Leacock's *Back to Prosperity* (1932), Underhill commented: "Professor Stephen Leacock still remains our leading humorist when it comes to writing serious books about Canadian social problems." *Canadian Forum*, XIV (Nov., 1937), 74.

[35] F. W. Watt, "Critic or Entertainer? Stephen Leacock and the Growth of Materialism", *Canadian Literature*, 5 (Summer, 1960), 36. R. Cook, "Stephen Leacock and the Age of Plutocracy, 1903-1921", 178n.

[36] Leacock, *Elements of Political Science* (Boston, Revised Edition, 1913), 383-4.

[37] Leacock, "Foreward", *The Premier Speaks to the People. The Prime Minister's January Radio Broadcasts issued in book form. The First Address...* (Ottawa [1935], 6.

[38] Leacock, "What is Left of Adam Smith?", *Canadian Journal of Economics and Political Science*, I (Feb., 1935), 43. See also his "The Economic Analysis of Industrial Depression", *Papers and Proceedings of the Canadian Political Science Association*, V (1935), 5-24.

[39] Leacock, "Social and Other Credit in Alberta", *Fortnightly Review*, CXLVI (Nov., 1936), 529.

[40] Leacock, *Back to Prosperity, The Great Opportunity of the Empire Conference* (Toronto, 1932), 8.

[41] Leacock, "Economic Separatism in the British Empire", *Quarterly Review*, 265 (July, 1935), 11.

[42] Leacock, *The British Empire. Its Structure, Its Unity, Its Strength* (New York, 1940), 65; *My Discovery of the West* (London, 1937), 290-304. His "Reflections on the North", which originally appeared in *The Beaver*, Dec. 1936, has been reprinted in that magazine, Summer, 1970.

[43] Leacock, *My Discovery of the West*, 305.

RINA LASNIER ET LA CONNIVENCE DES SIGNES

Jean-Louis Major

"Passé un certain point, il est sûrement un moment où l'extase n'est plus un tourbillon ou une folie des sens, mais la lumière qui provient d'une exacte perfection."

(E. Pound)

TOUT EN SITUANT la poésie de Rina Lasnier à l'opposé de certaines tentatives actuelles qui font de l'extase un divertissement, cette phrase d'Ezra Pound[1] pourrait définir d'une façon adéquate quelques-uns de ses moments privilégiés, car la visée essentielle d'oeuvres telles que *Présence de l'absence* (1956), *Les gisants* (1963) et *L'arbre blanc* (1966) trouve à s'accomplir, me semble-t-il, dans une forme proche de l'extase. C'est donc à preciser la qualité de cette "lumière" ainsi que les conditions de l' "exacte perfection" du poème que s'attachera ma lecture du dernier recueil de Rina Lasnier.[2]

Mon point de départ pourrait se fixer sur à peu près n'importe quel texte de la section intitulée *La Nuit*. Je choisis, à cause de sa brièveté, *L'iris sauvage*, un poème qui met en oeuvre divers procédés d'écriture que l'on retrouve tout au cours de l'oeuvre:

Iris, blason royal de la nuit des marais,
robage germé bleu par floralie de reine,
coeur resserré sur des effluves intouchables
et sur l'obscur d'une blessure d'apanage;
la corolle a la majesté courbe de l'acanthe
et du don déversé aux larges bords des paumes.

Iris, nuit investie dans l'étroitesse du signe
par cette deuillante mal évadée de la bourbe.

(*La Salle des rêves*, p. 30)

J'y reconnais d'abord les vers charnières qui accentuent la structure d'ensemble:

> Iris, blason royal de la nuit des marais,
> . . .
> Iris, nuit investie dans l'étroitesse du signe

Comme dans presque tous les poèmes d'une certaine étendue, ces vers jouent ici sur la reprise de quelques éléments. Et les termes qui s'y retrouvent marquent du même coup le mouvement du poème par les modifications qu'ils subissent dans le système du vers lui-même. Deux termes remplissent cette fonction: l'un, "iris", occupe la position initiale dans les deux vers; l'autre, "nuit", se déplace le long de l'axe syntagmatique. A quoi l'on peut ajouter les termes "blason" et "signe", dont la position est intervertie d'un vers à l'autre. Etroitement liés entre eux par une structure et des termes communs, les deux vers clefs se répondent et, d'une certaine façon, se répètent: chacun oriente l'iris vers la fonction de signifiant mais selon un mode particulier.

Le premier vers établit "blason" en apposition à "iris", manifestant ainsi la volonté de faire entrer l'objet dans un ordre de signification explicite. D'entrée de jeu, le poème annonce donc la fonction symbolique de l'iris, mais en même temps il la restreint car le blason est une forme hiératique du symbole. La structure appositive ne correspond ici qu'à une association intellectuelle: l'écart d' "iris" à "blason" est immédiatement comblé par la logique de l'intention discursive. Que l'on ajoute l'épithète "royal" n'y change pas grand'chose: ce n'est que redondance pour assurer l'ampleur et l'élévation du ton. "Nuit", l'autre terme clef, se trouve relégué à la fonction de déterminant et escamoté dans le cours du vers.

A un premier niveau, le vers se donne comme une description et, plus exactement, comme une interprétation de l'objet. On peut le lire de deux façons, soit: Iris, blason dans la nuit des marais, soit: Iris, blason (symbole, signe) de la nuit des marais. J'ai tendance à croire que la première lecture est la plus juste, mais d'une façon ou de l'autre, à cause du caractère intellectuel de l'apposition, la valeur de "nuit" demeure limitée et proche d'une représentation univoque. Toute la strophe se développe d'ailleurs sur le mode d'une description en deux temps: d'abord la fonction de l'iris, qui est celle d'un signifiant emblématique, puis, dans les cinq vers suivants, sa description, rehaussée en particulier par les valeurs métaphoriques de la blessure et du don.

En vérité, seul le "couplage" avec le début de la seconde strophe donne tout

son sens à l'apposition de "blason" à "iris" en ouvrant "la nuit" à une véritable portée symbolique. A lui seul, le premier vers ne parvient pas à faire valoir les connotations symboliques de "la nuit", parce que le terme ne joue que dans les limites d'une détermination logique s'ajoutant à "blason", qui constitue le pivot, et le point d'appui de tout le vers.

Dans le second vers charnière, construit selon la même structure grammaticale que le premier, la nuit est associée directement et immédiatement à l'iris. Le déplacement de ce mot a un premier effet au niveau de la constitution sonore du vers: alors que le premier vers est dominé par le son *a* dans "blason", "royal" et "marais" qui atténuent les *i* de "nuit" et "iris", le second prolonge et accentue les deux *i* de "iris" avec "nuit", "investie" et "signe". C'est un procédé fréquent dans la poésie de Rina Lasnier que le redoublement ou la répétition d'une consonne ou d'un son vocalique dans un même vers, mais l'effet n'en est pas le même selon que la structure sonore est soutenue ou non par la création d'une structure particulière du sens.

Dans ce deuxième vers charnière, la juxtaposition de "nuit" à "iris" transforme totalement la lecture. Alors que le passage de "iris" à "blason" s'effectuait sans difficulté, par simple prolongement logique, l'écart entre "iris" et "nuit" oblige à un réajustement du système de signification. Tout se passe comme si, pratiquant jusqu'à ce point une écriture "réaliste", le poème rompait par une seule opposition l'enchaînement du discours. Le blanc qui sépare les deux premiers mots de ce vers est d'une autre nature que ceux entre les autres mots du poème. Aucun signe lexical n'annonce le changement de mode d'écriture, et la structure apparente se répète: Iris, blason . . . , Iris, nuit. . . . Mais, en fait, de l'un à l'autre rien ne se répète. C'est la nature même des rapports de sens qui est modifiée. Alors que le premier vers attribue une fonction à l'iris, ce vers-ci change l'essence même de l'iris: la nuit devient substance de l'iris, l'iris est immédiatement perçu comme nuit. Toute notion de signe est expulsée de la lecture: nous quittons un système où des choses sont signes d'autres choses, où telle valeur est attribuée à un objet, pour nous retrouver de plain-pied dans un univers où l'iris a substance de nuit.

La suite du vers est construite de façon à préserver, à accentuer le rapport essentiel entre "iris" et "nuit". Le déterminant est haussé à l'état d'abstraction: ce n'est pas le "signe" qui, par l'intermédiaire du participe, détermine la "nuit" mais bien "l'étroitesse." La fonction de signifiant symbolique qui, dans le premier vers, est plaquée sur l'iris, est ici effacée par le fait qu'elle ne joue en quelque sorte qu'au deuxième degré, à travers la notion d'étroitesse, qui peut être perçue

immédiatement plutôt que par l'effet d'une description et qui, en réalité, échappe à toute description objective. Alors que le premier vers désigne la fonction symbolique, celui-ci l'accomplit en ne la désignant que de façon indirecte. Empruntant au vocabulaire thomiste, je dirais que l'iris, dont la substance est "nuit", prend ainsi une forme nouvelle, "l'étroitesse". On reconnaît ici l'un des procédés les plus efficaces de la poésie de Rina Lasnier, qui consiste à transformer certains éléments concrets, à leur ouvrir un champ de signification spirituelle en leur adjoignant une valeur abstraite. Ainsi l'invisible fait-il irruption dans le visible.

Le renversement de position des termes clefs et leur projection dans un autre ordre de signification à l'intérieur d'une même structure apparente met en relief un changement de niveau du poème lui-même. Ce qui est en jeu dans les deux vers charnières, ce sont deux formes de la poésie, partant, de la lecture: l'une qui appartient au système de la description, l'autre que l'on peut concevoir comme une perception.

Le premier vers de *L'iris sauvage* prélude à une description qui se prolonge sur toute la strophe. En fait, on peut dire que tout le poème, à l'exception du deuxième vers charnière, n'est qu'une description. C'est une logique de la constitution ou plutôt de la reconstitution de l'objet qui en commande l'écriture, et les termes "robage", "coeur", "effluves", "corolle", "bords" en jalonnent le développement. Mais toute description est, de soi, illimitée même si elle se donne l'apparence d'un arrêt naturel avec l'épuisement des parties de l'objet. Aussi le premier vers et le dernier ont-ils un caractère plus synthétique qui permet de fermer la boucle de la description en même temps qu'il en oriente le sens.

A partir d'une structure fondamentalement énumératrice qui, aux vers deux et trois en particulier, emprunte visiblement à la forme du blasonnement, Rina Lasnier projette un développement métaphorique dans sa forme apparente mais comparatif dans sa signification. Car dans cette représentation de l'objet, tout effort de sens supplémentaire apparait précisément à la fois comme effort et comme supplément. L'axe de ma lecture demeure le déroulement de l'objet selon ses parties; ils s'y joint, par le jeu de l'écriture imageante, les valeurs du don et de la blessure qui elles-mêmes se résorbent dans l'allégorie de la reine-veuve, dont le développement double celui de la description. C'est une représentation culturelle qui répond à la volonté de faire entrer la description dans un ordre affectif et intellectuel, mais le mouvement du sens est en quelque sorte entravé, trahi, par l'effort trop visible du langage. D'autant plus que, dans le même poème, le vers qui correspond à une perception fait contraste par la simplicité du vocabulaire.

En voulant hausser la description à un niveau poétique, Rina Lasnier recourt de façon systématique à un certain nombre de procédés que l'on apprend vite à déceler. Il y a chez elle une façon de forcer l'énoncé qui apparaît dans le choix même des mots et qui impose un caractère héraldique à la description. Bien sûr, dans *L'iris sauvage* la fonction de blason attribuée à l'iris commande d'emblée cette écriture. Mais on la retrouve ailleurs sous une forme ou l'autre. Ainsi en lisant ce vers des *Relais de Marie* (p. 18): "Cet étranger qui passage par son sang pour s'exiler", je m'interroge sur le choix du verbe. Pourquoi "passage" plutôt que "passe"? Qu'ajoute ce mot qui accroche comme une trouvaille, là justement où aucun mot ne devrait retenir, où celui qui parle devrait s'effacer devant ce qu'il dit? Le vers que je viens de citer met aussi en relief un autre trait d'écriture: l'homophonie. La plupart des vers semblent construits sur le retour ou la prédominance d'une consonne initiale ou d'un son vocalique, et ce de façon volontaire plutôt que par appel de sons et de vers. "Je ne suis plus la marcheuse vaquant à ses vocalises," dit l'auteur . . . et pourtant, même en ce vers les sons attendus se juxtaposent. Il faut reconnaître cependant que cette préoccupation de la persistance sonore donne lieu parfois à des vers d'une merveilleuse cohésion. Il semble, en général, que la répétition d'un même son alourdisse le vers lorsque le vocabulaire en est plus recherché ou lorsque la parenté de sons ne sert pas à créer une véritable association de sens. Par contre, elle assure admirablement bien la continuité de l'émotion et de la perception lorsque le language est plus familier, plus près du quotidien.

Malgré tous les moyens mis en oeuvre pour lui donner un caractère de spontanéité lyrique, la description demeure un parcours, et ma lecture n'échappe pas à la temporalité des parcours, de même qu'elle demeure une reconstruction soumise à la spatialité des éléments qui s'y juxtaposent. La perception, au contraire, est une saisie immédiate d'une essence particulière. Pour apprécier la différence, il me suffit de refaire le deuxième vers charnière sur le modèle du premier. Ainsi "Iris, signe étroit de la nuit" n'appellerait plus la perception qui s'accomplit avec "Iris, nuit investie dans l'étroitesse du signe". Ma lecture demeurerait au niveau d'une logique raisonnante pour établir une équation entre l'iris et la notion de signe, laissant ainsi se perdre la fusion de l'iris et de la nuit de même que le caractère intensément existentiel qui est lié à l'expression "dans l'étroitesse". Dans la forme actuelle du vers tout se passe comme si la fonction de signe attribuée explicitement à l'iris cessait d'être lue comme telle pour être remplacée par un acte de signification vécue.

Pour mesurer l'efficience particulière de la forme adoptée par Rina Lasnier, on peut encore la comparer à celle du premier vers de *La courbure* (p. 31) :

Dans la courbure du secret se voûte la nuit

On y reconnaît une structure analogue et des termes équivalents: "la courbure" est le terme abstrait qui correspond à "l'étroitesse", sans en avoir pour autant les connotations existentielles puisqu'il ne fait appel qu'à des représentations géométriques ou spatiales; par contre, le "secret", qui se trouve dans la même position grammaticale que le "signe", évoque des valeurs plus émotives; le participe y est remplacé par une forme active et le terme "nuit" s'y retrouve mais en position intervertie. Il ne manque à ce vers que la structure appositive du début. On constate alors à quel point le seul mot "iris" a un rôle important, non seulement pour faire le raccord avec le début du poème et en assurer la reprise, mais à l'intérieur même du vers. En fait, c'est ce mot qui donne une assise concrète à tout le reste du vers, comme c'est la présence de ce terme concret et particulier, se posant en début de vers comme un point d'orgue lyrique, qui fait de la nuit une substance unique. L'irréductible pouvoir de ce vers consiste à me faire percevoir d'une façon absolue un iris ayant substance de nuit infinie dans son étroitesse de fleur et de symbole: ce que, dans un autre poème (*Le bleu de l'heure*), Rina Lasnier formule sur le mode d'un conseil mais dans une forme qui pourrait être une paraphrase du vers de *L'iris sauvage* :

comme l'iris à vêture de profondeurs entrevues
écoute Dieu prendre pour présence l'obscurité respirante.

Un vers comme celui de *L'iris sauvage* représente la part capitale de la poésie de Rina Lasnier: il est le signe et le lieu d'une communion intime à la densité spirituelle de l'univers. Dans le dépouillement de son expression, cet instant privilégié marque la rencontre entre l'écriture et l'expérience intérieure, en même temps qu'il accomplit le sens même de la poésie. Car, selon Rina Lasnier, "plus le poète aura une haute conscience de la poésie, mieux il l'ordonnera à sa fin qui est la transcendance."[3]

Par contre, il est une autre part de l'oeuvre qui s'attache à décrire les êtres et les choses en y superposant, en y imposant même, une intention spiritualiste. C'est là surtout que l'on retrouve la contention de l'écriture, la somptuosité précieuse du vocabulaire, en même temps que le côté moralisateur de l'oeuvre.[4]

L'écart entre description et perception (qui, au plan de la structure de la signification, est analogue à celui qui sépare la comparaison de la métaphore)

me paraît correspondre précisément à la différence d'orientation qui existe entre la volonté d'assigner un sens spirituel à l'univers et l'appréhension d'une étoffe invisible de l'univers. Rina Lasnier elle-même semble bien reconnaître quelque différence entre les deux temps de l'oeuvre. Dans *La salle des rêves*, elle dispose en des sections distinctes des poèmes tels que *L'iris sauvage* et *Une feuille* ou *Patriciennes*, qui semblent très près l'un de l'autre par leur sujet. C'est que l'orientation des deux derniers poèmes est purement descriptive, alors que le premier a pour noyau une perception qui en modifie tout le sens.

Il y a dans l'univers de Rina Lasnier une densité de l'invisible qui habite les choses et les êtres, du moins certains d'entre eux. Or, il semble que l'on ne rejoigne cette secrète étoffe qu'à certaines conditions: l'expérience en est reçue plutôt que pratiquée, donnée plutôt que cultivée. C'est vrai du sens spirituel de l'univers, ce l'est aussi, croirait-on, de l'écriture elle-même, juste quand elle épouse la perception, légèrement fausée par un haussement du ton quand elle veut forcer la vision ou imposer un sens.

Le poème ne saurait se substituer à l'expérience du spirituel. Dans les instants privilégiés, il se fait lecture attentive et humble d'une présence; ailleurs, il manifeste un orgueil de l'expression qui l'engage dans une toute autre voie. C'est la différence entre, accepter de recevoir et vouloir capter. Tout au plus le poème tentera-t-il parfois d'opérer une médiation. Toutefois, Rina Lasnier nous prévient que l'on ne fait pas violence au spirituel, du moins pas à cette qualité du spirituel. Le premier vers d'*Ecouter* (p. 101) le dit de façon lapidaire:

> Ne précède pas Dieu s'il ne choisit pas ton cri

C'est aussi, me semble-t-il l'un des sens du poème. *Ne touche pas à la mer* (p. 97):

> Si la pluie touchait à la mer par le gain des déluges
> la mer rejetterait l'insipide et ses eaux maigres;
> si les oiseaux la pressaient de toutes parts de cris passeurs
> pour qu'elle s'ouvre à l'acclamation de la foudre,
> et si le vent échouait sur elle et la rebroussait blanche
> comme le ventre de mille coursiers cabrés,
> la mer n'entrerait pas dans la connivence des signes.

Je note que les poèmes qui affirment l'autonomie de l'expérience spirituelle se situent dans des sections du recueil où l'auteur semble s'y résigner et se cantonner dans l'ordre de la description. Par contre, les poèmes de la première section tentent de combler l'écart entre les deux temps de la vie intérieure en effec-

tuant le passage de la description à la perception. *L'iris sauvage* en est un exemple, de même que le poème-titre qui s'installe d'emblée dans une présence à l'invisible:

> Ce lieu de toutes parts comme les nappes du rayonnement,
> cette étendue sans engendrement comme la hauteur suspendue
> et comme les salles de la neige vastement reposée
> de ses naissances stellaires superposant ses tufs fermes;
> c'est le lien de l'âme immobile et avancée devant moi

Le poète s'y donne pour vocation de faire entrer un espace sans limite dans la "terre étroite de moi". On reconnaît dans ce mouvement la "nuit investie dans l'étroitesse du signe". Et ce mouvement, qui caractérise la communion à l'ordre de la transcendance, éclaire le sens et l'orientation de l'autre part de l'oeuvre, où Rina Lasnier évoque la somptuosité de l'univers pour donner libre passage à la dimension infinie en chaque être. C'est précisément le paradoxe de cette oeuvre qu'elle entretienne la conscience d'un irréductible écart entre les deux formes de la vie intérieure en même temps qu'elle s'attache à le combler. C'est aussi le signe de sa valeur qu'elle réussisse parfois sur les deux tableaux . . . ou presque.

Le poème *La salle des rêves* semble situer hors du langage l'expérience de la communion totale:

> Salle sculptée d'un souffle par les ajours du silence
> et les mots n'ont plus le pouvoir altérant de l'oeuvre;
> lieu sans lieu du rêve par profondeur ronde
> et l'esprit n'a plus le harnachement des paroles
> ni les trajectoires d'étincelles à la voûte du songe;
> que je m'accole à cette âme sédentaire du rêve,
> plus liée à ces fonds taciturnes que le germe au soleil;
> que je me sépare de l'âme répondante par la frappe de l'airain
> et cloisonnée dans l'épaisseur comme le son de la cloche;
> proie ployée de l'inexprimé dans le pourchas de la parole
> moins près de moi que l'ombre touffue de l'inexpérimable.

Pourtant, on vient parfois tout près d'avoir accès à ce "lieu sans lieu" par l'intermédiaire du poème lui-même, situé alors "à la charnière du naturel et surnaturel".[5] Mais c'est en quelque sorte comme si la description du visible préparait la perception de l'invisible à la façon de la prière, qui est de nature autre que l'extase mais, semble-t-il, la précède et parfois y conduit. A preuve le poème *Une étoile* (p. 24) qui, en ses deux strophes de niveau différents, représente les deux formes de l'expérience et de la poésie en indiquant peut-être le moyen de passer de l'une à l'autre:

Pour qu'une étoile me regarde droit
ce n'est pas trop de l'encontre de la nuit,
de l'arasement du socle solaire
et me reste l'étroite strie de l'oeil.

Pour qu'une étoile dise l'intention de l'Oeuvre
je la vois laisser préséance à la nuit,
granule grave où s'intériorise l'embrasement,
milieu de moi dont l'obscur est une présence.

C'est, à certaines conditions (celles de la plus exacte perfection de l'écriture), le pouvoir de la poésie de dépasser les limites et les contraintes qu'admet la claire conscience. L'oeuvre de Rina Lasnier en témoigne.

NOTES

[1] Ezra Pound, *Esprit des littératures romanes*, trad. Pierre Alien, Christian Bourgois, 1966, p. 118; coll. 10/18.

[2] *La Salle des rêves*, H.M.H., 1971, 113 pages; coll. *Sur parole*.

[3] Communication de Rina Lasnier lors de la "Rencontre mondiale de poésie" à Montréal en septembre 1967. Le texte est reproduit dans *Etudes littéraires*, vol. 1, no 3, décembre 1968, pages 402-404.

[4] Plus encore dans les oeuvres précédentes que dans *La Salle des rêves*.

[5] Rina Lasnier, ibid, p. 404.

A KNOCKING IN THE CLAY

Robert Gibbs

I was consumed with a desire to write a philosophical-lyrical drama in which all I had learned in philosophy and psychology would be presented to the public in a verse composition. I spent two years upon it, which meant two summers and two Christmas vacations. . . . [1]

THE PERIOD of composing a drama referred to in the above quotation was presumably between 1917, the year Pratt completed his Ph.D. and published his first major poetic effort, the narrative poem, *Rachel*, and 1920, when he formally joined the department of English at Victoria College. The story of "Clay's" fortunes following composition is a familiar one: the preparation of a number of typescripts for circulating among friends and colleagues, their cool and cooling reception of the opus, Pratt's ceremonial immolation of the scripts, and Mrs. Pratt's opportune rescue of one at least, for posterity. To her act of mercy or treason this paper owes its existence.

Pratt has left us his own characterization of "Clay": "... it was full of theories, ethical maxims, philosophical truisms, bald very bald generalizations — practically the whole cargo of the department of philosophy and psychology as it existed twenty years or so ago at the University of Toronto."[2] Pratt had set out to write a lyrical drama, and although he hoped to achieve something "Elizabethan in character,"[3] the result is more Victorian than anything else. There are some affinities in the total design and in the detail with Hardy's *The Dynasts*, but Pratt was neither so ambitious as Hardy nor so sure about his philosophical ground. If anyone, taking Pratt's characterization of "Clay" too literally, should go to the work looking for a complex of philosophical and psychological ideas, he would be disappointed. The conflicting views that beset the later Victorians are all there in a general way, but in no greater depth or complexity than in *In*

Memoriam. In fact, it is with that work that I find its closest affinities both in the conflict and in its resolution.

"Clay" is a study of cosmic irony. The conflict has its basis in the central character, Julian, but it does not work itself out in him. Julian's character and the basis of the cosmic irony remain a "folded scroll" until the end of Act II. There is no development in him up to that point and little beyond it. He appears as a man completely disillusioned from the outset and moves from that state only in the final scene of the play, when he acknowledges an intimation of immortality in himself, which answers rather faintly the cosmic idealism of his friends Thaddeus and Merrivale. The conflict is one between cosmic irony, embodied in Julian in the form of Romantic *angst*, and transcendental optimism or orthodox conservatism, embodied in the other characters. The drama is lyrical, not only because it includes lyric passages spoken by disembodied voices, but because it is essentially a stating and restating of opposing sets of feeling. The events of the play, chiefly two — the storm of Act I and the war of Act II — serve only to fix Julian in his convictions: first, of the meaningless hostility of nature to man, and second, of man's failure to realize any moral progress since Cain. The coming of spring in Act III effects a change in Julian's outlook, but the change is not profound enough to constitute a real dramatic development. The intimation that Julian confesses to having is really in evidence from the beginning, since Julian's state of mind is clearly one of failed Romantic idealism throughout, and glimmerings of that idealism are constantly shining through his darkest utterances.

Pratt himself recognized the failure of the work as a too conscious effort to embody sets of attitudes with no imaginative grasp of characters as people. The play owes whatever force it has to the rhetoric of its outpourings rather than to conflicts within or between characters. Its chief interest for us lies in certain relations it reveals between the writer and his material.

THE OPENING SCENE of the play consists of a conversation between Penrose and Donaldson, two characters who observe and comment rather than express any real concerns or convictions of their own. Their function here is to introduce Julian and his situation. He is a man removed from the world, a kind of Prospero figure, whose knowledge of nature causes the humble folk, whose sick he heals and whose drowned he resuscitates, to regard him with awe. But as Penrose continues his account, the character of Julian becomes more clearly Romantic — Byronic or Tennysonian:

A nature fierce and passionate, his soul
Smoked over with the hottest vapours of revolt
Against the ground-plans of our mother-earth.
His face was of fine cast; his stature tall;
His eyes took on the bluer edge of flame
Beneath grey brows; this was at times displaced
By softer hues for he was as a child
In singleness of heart and guileless ways;
Strange that he looked obliquely on the world
He lived in; everywhere that human feet
Had trod he saw the Satyr's hoof; a core
Malevolent inhered in life; the ape
Was grinning through men's eyes and teeth, and
Marked all his utterance with a tragic note[4]

Here we have the Byronic mixture of hot rebellion and guileless innocence, although Julian never acts in his rebellion and so never has cause to feel guilt. He is no Manfred, but a purely literary echo of the Romantic hero. His vision of nature is Tennysonian; the "core malevolent" points also to Hardy, but his confrontation is emotional and rhetorical rather than actual, so that he never achieves the stature of intensity of a Hardy figure. His "tragic note" is a matter of utterance, a role assumed, not one of life or action. We learn later in the scene that he is a naturalist in every sense of the word, looking into physical processes for clues to human nature and behaviour. To this extent, he is a Wundtian psychologist, but only to this extent.

The second scene begins with Julian in soliloquy on the shore with a storm brewing. The blank verse opening is impressive — Miltonic and descriptive — but hardly the voice of a man communing with himself:

Swift has the darkness settled on the deep;
A moment past, and livid streaks of day
Were casting fitful splendours on the waves.
Retiring, they have left the graying sea
Mantled in gloom.

As the soliloquy moves forward through forty lines, it gathers a good deal of rhetorical force. At one point only does the voice with its echoes of Milton and Wordsworth give way to something more closely the poet's own. The transition is worth observing:

And so, does man's existence find its form
Envisaged in the ocean's eyeless face

Swept by the besom of the winds. Its lines,
Its furrows, all its corrugated cares
Are mirrored in its gulfs. Dark nature's minions
Break from the leash of law, and each with each
Contending, joins the universal strife;
Winds claw rebellious seas; the billows spit
Their salted rheum upon the rocks, are cuffed
And broken in return. *The Atlantic plants*
Its heel of death upon the transport's hull,
Strides over the breaker's line; bludgeons the Cape,
And flung in thunder from the embattled brows
Of jag and bluff, reels with a drunkard's tread
Along the shore, and falls upon the beach.

(italics mine)

The passage opens with conventional diction, as Julian continues to philosophize in rather facile terms about man and nature. The verse begins to pick up with "Dark nature's minions", but the movement, the diction, the effect are so patently Miltonic as to be almost parody. The real change comes with "The Atlantic. . . . " It is as if the word itself triggers the poet's imagination. He leaves for the moment the sea as a purely literary phenomenon and confronts his own particular sea, one of ocean liners and contemporary disasters. Up to this point, the poet in the persona of Julian has been too intent on expressing the besetting mood of his hero, his relentless cosmic irony in the face of nature. The Atlantic releases him from his literary preoccupation and allows him to indulge for a moment his own imaginative bent, that of identifying with the gigantic and powerful in nature. The self-conscious voice of the embittered *eiron* makes way for the true voice of *alazon*. Even the movement from verse to verse becomes expressive and individual. In "Strides over the breaker's line; bludgeons the Cape," the poet becomes his ocean, striding as it strides, toppling barriers, asserting as it asserts a free, drunken play of titanic energy. The force of the lines owes a good deal to Pratt's breaking of the mould in which he has encased his imagination, and the joy carried by the movement is that of one released from unnatural fetters.

Following Julian's soliloquy, six lyrics assigned to various voices act as a choric commentary on the events of the storm. Although Pratt handles the verse gracefully enough, the emotion expressed is overt rather than inherent, and the ironic force is attenuated and weak. The universe seen in these lyrics is anomalous.

Certain stanzas are stronger than others, but for the most part the effect is one of facility rather than power.

> Whose feet and whose wings
> Contend for the prize?
> Seraphs and dragons
> Harrow the skies.

This is a strong enough expression of the anomaly taken alone, but it loses its force in the context of ten similar stanzas, similar in expressing essentially the same thing. Perhaps the tightest single lyric is number four, which treats the theme of the sea's ever-deceiving surface:

> What is that colour on the sea,
> Dotted by the white sails of ships?
> It is blue, you say. We know it not, and yet
> We know the blue of violet,
> The hue of mid-day skies,
> And the sapphire of young children's eyes.
> But *that* we do not know, — unless it be
> The pallor of dead lips.

The ironic contrast here seems forced on to the poem. The succeeding two stanzas simply restate the theme with other images. Yet the theme itself is one that would again occupy the mind of Pratt and receive far more powerful expression in such poems as "Sea Cathedral" and *The Titanic*, where it lodges in strong central symbol.

The third scene of Act I brings to the fore the central conflict of the play. Thaddeus is present at Julian's house and gives his report of the storm. In his view, nature is neutral, and man's tragedy is a result of his own hubris, not of any malevolence in her:

> The oar, the sail, the paddle and the screw
> Are patterns of a moving tragedy
> That men misread. They think by labored art,
> They have snared the magic of the wind's uprising,
> And its down-sitting.

It is a tragic view as old as Job's. Julian's reply reflects sharply Pratt's own sense of its contemporary relevance:

Aye, every step upon the grade seems vain.
And every boast a signal of distress.
The halliard, and the rocket, roar of gun,
The code's weird speech that would out-wit
the air,
Are helpless blazons when the tempest stops
The ear and seals the sight. Death flags the
running storm
With signs of more imperious beckoning,
Than those which from the wireless deck flash
out
Their dots and dashes of a giant loss.

Here where the cosmic irony which Pratt has sought to express lodges in a particular technology, the verse becomes more vital, the rhetoric, fresh and authentic. The conclusion that Julian comes to is more conventional:

A gambler's been at work upon this job,
Or else a journeyman that did not learn
His trade too well, and somewhere a flaw
Spoiling a nobler plan.

He sees caprice not only in the total design of nature but in the workings and evolution of the human heart.

In scene iv, the debate continues with Penrose, Donaldson and Merrivale attempting to counter Julian's cynicism. Donaldson finds in the stoicism of those who suffered from the storm a reason for optimism. Julian attacks the stoical ideal as false, as requiring from a man a surrender of his humanity: "It is a lesson that before it's learned/ A man must unman himself to read." Merrivale, the traditionalist, argues for accepting the divine will. Julian declares the universe to be totally unconscious and uncaring, reasserting his view of God as a kind of tinkerer with man:

A sufferer calls in pain
In the lone watches of his couch, and hears
No answer save the leaden brush of wings
Against the window-pane. The son's last right
To heirship, to inheritance of love
Is spurned upon the doorstep of his home,
His kinship cancelled, and his brother's ties
Dissolved in mutual blood. Named you him, Father?
God. No. Rather a Potter with some clay.

These lines close Act I. Only once or twice has the force of ironic debate lodged where it belongs: in the character of Julian himself. The rest is a far too conscious and too facile statement of its terms by various voices.

To prepare for the second stage of the debate, Pratt opens Act II with a series of fragments intended to provide impressions of the war in progress. This section is perhaps the most prolonged success of the play, and the success rises, I think, from the fact that Pratt has for the moment set aside his main concern and is working with matters that have honestly engaged his imagination. The blank verse owes its vitality here to the life of common speech in the mouths of simple characters; it shows this gain in a flexibility of movement as much as in idiom.

> Great lads those! Every one reliant, firm,
> Steady of step, — muscle and bone storm-hinged,
> Yet supple as the fine battalion's lines
> In which he swings. Straight-eyed with face
> clean-bronzed
> In the clear sparkle of the morning's light.
> How well the khaki takes the October sun,
> Fits the square shoulders, matches cheek and
> hand.
> That lad there, see! third line, first on the
> left, —
> Mine! youngest one of four, turned twenty-one,
> Blue eyes, and hair light brown. Two months ago,
> He left the ship, and with two other brothers, —
> The second and the oldest, both big lads —
> He joined the colours. Soon, at dawn, they say,
> To-morrow, they are off. God wish them well.

The figure of the young man is heroic in his father's eyes, and the poet is sharing the father's frank pride. The poetry is only an approximation of speech, retaining a good deal of fine rhetoric, but fine rhetoric is often present in the speech of simple men under the stress of strong emotion. The illusion of speech is strongly present in the abrupt, broken rhythm. The six "Fragments from a field" which follow are reminiscent of similar vignettes in *The Dynasts*.

> Here, on the double. Cut that out. That shell
> Is half a mile off. What's in this pit?
> A clean half-dozen — tangled up in skeins;
> The first one's dead, and this . . . and so, the
> sixth,

That's all. Make for that clump of wire.
This rain
Beats like a flood.
The smoke's too thick to see,
The slime's a mile deep.
Here, over here,
Three — four, alive; let's get this fellow out,
He's got it worst.

Pratt, like Hardy, is able to depict heroic action best through personae who are not conscious of the magnitude of their actions. Engagement with events, even in fragmentary form, releases the poet from self-consciousness. He stands enough apart from his actors to allow them some of their own life. These vignettes are followed by "Cries Afar Off", a protracted lament in quatrains, part of which appears in the second edition of the collected poems as "A Dirge."[5] It is, like the earlier lyrics, facile and attenuated. The effect is sentimental.

Scene II opens with Thaddeus speaking in his role as Romantic seer. He describes his vision of the war as a universal conflict:

All earth's tribes
Had by some common instinct gathered there,
Peopling the shadows of the awful zone, —
The forest shades, the fissures of great rocks,
And caverns cut within the rotted mould;
Closed up the crimson rendezvous.

The vision is gothic and only vaguely realized — a secondary, literary experience. Nevertheless, it may be seen as an embryonic form of a theme which would preoccupy Pratt later and which would receive expression in "The Great Feud". Julian's reaction to the vision of man engaged in total war is to shift his view more expressly toward fatalism:

O Thaddeus! there is an iron in the will
Of Him who shapes the times. His power is seen
Within the flash that cleaves the oak; it germs
Within the hidden matrix of the earth,
When cities rock before convulsing fires
Prepare their tombs, it lurks within the fang
Of shrike and puma.

Nature malevolent, "red of tooth and claw," shows only a "sterile progression! where each life repeats/ The racial circuit, and finds unrepealed/ The acrid law by which its parent died." The irony of an evolution which maintains not only

continuity but identity between man and beast was to become an important aspect of Pratt's total vision, but here it receives too overt an expression to be imaginatively expressive. Julian's long speech ends with a depiction of Calvary as history's supreme irony:

> There was a hill once climbed, on which the
> world
> Had built the warrant of a grander faith,
> A hope more excellent. A cross was raised,
> And at its foot a river ran whose fount
> Welled from the noblest veins that ever bore
> Imperial tides . . .
>
> . . . Calvary — is but a peak that flared
> An evanescent torch whose light was quenched
> In a red mist of sweat, and man's tired feet,
> When once they scale the summit must, in shame,
> Re-walk the bloody gradient to the grave.

Here the rhetoric is freer of literary echoes; the voice is more clearly Pratt's own. The image of the Cross engaged his imagination sufficiently to free him from second-hand effects. The irony that comes through underlies a clearly affirmative view of Christianity. It is an irony central to Pratt's vision and one that finds its way into some of his finest poems. Thaddeus responds to Julian's despair with an even darker vision:

> Death, — Death stalked everywhere on land and
> sea,
> In clouds that banked the sun, in mists that hid
> The stars, or half disclosed the swollen moon.
> No cavern sunk beneath the earth but bore
> His foot-prints. Deep below the waters' rim
> Great fish had trailed his scent. Earth's
> myriad forms
> Had felt the plague-spot of his rampant touch,
> From the small field mouse caught within the
> fumes
> Of sulphurous air that crept from knoll to knoll,
> Withering the grass-blades, to the giant fighter
> Of storm and wave, that, planked and sheathed
> with steel,
> Felt the swift scorpion in her sides, then
> rocked,

And plunged with bellowing nostrils till she
sank
In a wild litany of guns.

This is one of the finest passages in "Clay". It shows the poet again breaking from a conventional rhetoric into his own rhetoric. It shows again, in its cumulative power and in the identity that the poet assumes with primitive and titanic forces, his tendency to slip from the mask of *eiron* into that of *alazon*. Pratt was to write off "Clay" as a failure, but to any discerning eye, such verse as this from a young poet bears the marks of no ordinary command and no ordinary imagiation.

From this opening, the debate proceeds between Julian and Merrivale. The latter holds out a naive faith in an "inscrutable wisdom" behind the face of things, but Julian counters with a strong argument — the failure of Christianity, as man's brightest hope, to live up to its promise:

If the one,
Who was the very rose-ray of all dreams
The world's imagination fed upon,
Yearned for through centuries before he came,
And raised in retrospect to rank of God,
Worshipped by many whom the world, in turn,
Crowned with a lustre comparable with the might
Imputed to him, — if he failed, as failed
He has with the momentum of the years
Of twenty centuries to make his name
The lode-star of the race — pray, tell me then,
Is there another yet to come . . .

This passage, like the earlier passage concerning Calvary, stands out from the verse that surrounds it. Although both passages express overtly Julian's disillusionment, the grounds of his cynicism, their strength appears to have its source in the power Christ still has to hold the poet and his persona's imagination. In rhetorical terms, the will to affirm appears stronger than the more conscious will to deny. This fact gives to the passage a more truly poetic irony than that overtly expressed. The ambivalence in Julian reflects here, I think, an ambivalence in the poet, which was to affect his treatment of the Christian theme throughout his life.

In Scene iii, set a year later, Thaddeus reassumes his role of principal antagonist. He presents Julian with concrete instances of the human capacities for self-

sacrifice, simple compassion, courage, and aspiration beyond hope of achievement. These constitute the strongest affirmative arguments in the play and lay the ground for Julian's slight change of heart in Act III. Of these, perhaps the first is most significant, although each has its place in Pratt's own humanistic values. Here Thaddeus is describing a shipwreck:

> The boats were few
> And small, and there was left upon the deck
> A sturdier throng who stretched out willing
> hands
> To save the weak. One boat hung yet suspended,
> Filled short of obvious risk, and a slim girl
> Stepped out, and gave an aged woman left
> Unnoticed in the crowd, her place. Her lips
> Were closed, and her face pale, but yet her
> smile
> Made sweet and soft the pallor of her cheeks.

The passage is not remarkable as poetry. It is, in fact, working too obviously for an effect which turns out to be sentimental in much the same way as *Rachel* is sentimental. The figure employed is too evidently that and not a concrete reality. The poet sees sacrificial love here as irrational, since by any rational standard, the aged should have given place to the young. The theme is another that would remain central to Pratt's view of man. Julian concedes to Thaddeus a little at this point, but very little:

> Chaos indeed may well disclose a star,
> Caught unawares within the tangled drift
> Of cloud and chasing glooms. Earth's wastes
> are full
> Of miry swamps and quicksands. Compensates
> The flower, rare and lovely though it be,
> For the death-suctions of the stretching void?

This reply is typical of the purely conventional progress of much of the debate. Thaddeus proposes human compassion, courage and aspiration as ends in themselves, regardless of final defeat. Julian cannot separate human strivings from their outcomes:

> Is there for human kind
> A scale that weighs the profit differently,
> A higher calculus that measures loss

By hidden worths and meanings to the brute
Denied?

The argument does not really proceed beyond this point but consists of rhetorical reiterations, which carry little real force. Julian reaffirms his conviction that the universe is the work of a mad artisan, "who slays while fashioning", in Donaldson's phrase. He and Penrose join Thaddeus in arguing that Julian's is only a partial view and that human aspiration points to something beyond the natural in human nature:

The leap's the symbol of his daring. More!
There are great promptings planted, mightier
Than what sense enfolds; they bid him cross
Spans unexplored, gulfs where the plumb-line
hangs;
Try for vast title-holdings where the hands
Are bankrupt for the bids.

Here the heroic theme that is so central to Pratt's view of man finds eloquent expression in language that is his own. There is a defiance in the tone that counters too effectively the asserted cosmic irony of Julian. Again we detect the presence of an *alazon* with whom the poet can more honestly identify than with his *eiron* figure. Only in Julian's final speech does Pratt's own conviction strike through the conventional mask:

. . . the fight
With nature grows more simple every hour
Her ways are known, but when the struggle takes
Hell's routes and ends in bloody fratricide,
Not once, nor twice, as though an incident
Of casual kind had touched man's history,
But as a baffling epidemic strokes
A thousand times his life, failing of cure;
How strike this foul insistent integer
Clean from his life? The taint is in the blood,
Try surgery there! Find the right scalpel first.

In Scene iii, Julian chooses at last to unburden himself to his friends and antagonists in the prolonged debate. Here the affinity between "Clay" and *In Memoriam* is most strikingly apparent. It turns out that Julian's cynicism has its root in the loss of a friend, who had all the marks of an A.H.H.

Never was a nature
More finely strung to touch or glance or word,
For like a harpsichord it registered
All moods, — the flame of passion in just cause,
Anger and quick revulsion when a deed
Showed foul at the core, and yet his soul could
breathe
Such adoration for a cherished friend,
Such warmth of fealty for a cause held high,
That he could lose the temper of restraint
With lavish offering; as generous in heart,
As keen in mind. Then suddenly, well . . . a
blank,
A veil hangs that may not be lifted here . . .
I saw him dead, his face all passionless, cold,
The luminous shafts that kindled in his eyes
Sparkless as flint in loam, his head, his brow,
The flexions of his body — graven stone.
So cloud and dust have since companioned me;
There's nothing left.

As a revelation, this is disappointing. The sterile quality of the verse points up the fact that the source of Julian's angst is, like much of the angst itself, a literary abstraction. The unlifted veil hides something too dreadful to see in the best tradition of Victorian melodrama. The failure to conceive of any real cause for Julian's bitterness is perhaps the root of Pratt's failure in "Clay."

Act III opens with two lyrics announcing the arrival of spring. Thaddeus follows these with a blank verse paean, which is on the whole conventional and stifled. Two or three lines stand out from their context as genuine Pratt:

Beyond the snow-capped ranges
Lusty young rivers tear and strain at the dugs
Of the foot-hills.

Here again the poet is identifying with the primitive energy of nature, its perennial youth and high spirits. These lines say more than the forty odd lines of their context. The scene proceeds with Julian's protesting Thaddeus' efforts to stir him from his melancholy. Nothing new emerges from the debate until Julian yields at last —

I find the roadways blocked,
And memory ranging through the fungus years

Finds but the husks where it would take the fruit.
And yet there is a knocking in this clay,—
A restless flame,—something that, if it could,
Would leap the grammared confines of slow speech,
And give the echo to your dancing words.

(italics mine)

When his wife asked him why he had called his dramatic poem "Clay", Pratt replied, "Why not?"[6] but there is more to the answer than that. "Clay" here represents the physical confines of the human spirit, both in the individual and in the universal sense. The "knocking" is a kind of intimation of immortality, but it is also a form of resistance or defiance. Pratt's chief concern in the play is with a man whose vision has become circumscribed by the limits of physical sense, yet whose instinctive resistance to such confinement manifests itself as cosmic irony or cynicism. Although the play fails in total conception and realization, it does confront aspects of himself and of the external world that would always be of deep concern to Pratt. Pratt, in seeking to see man's place in nature, often uses the metaphor of speech to symbolize man's humanity. The distinction between articulate and inarticulate in nature is fundamental to Pratt's thinking, and man's central concern as man is for him communication on various levels. The spirit is not something which Pratt and his contemporaries find easy to comprehend or apprehend in the way that the Romantics apprehended it. To Pratt, the deeper levels of man's being, in seeking to communicate with his consciousness, must "leap the grammared confines." The conditions of existence impose mechanical limits; man must live in the order of nature. A condition of man's humanity is for Pratt a resistance to such confinement, an instinctive truancy against the rule of natural law. Pratt came to see the writing of verse as "a grand binge", a breaking out against the confines of decorum, a release of the instinctive self. Pratt's irony rises from his profound consciousness of the "clay" in which man's being is confined. His *alazony* rises from his defiance of a mechanistic view of man. His task as a poet was perhaps to find an adequate means of expressing this dualism in himself. In "Clay", the dualism finds expression only in a limited and fragmentary way. For the most part, the poet is well within "the grammared confines" of literary convention. When his verse does leap into life, the tone is almost always hyperbolic rather than ironic, yet the central preoccupation with cosmic irony reflects more than a purely literary concern. The questions posed rhetorically in "Clay" will find in later poems a more truly poetic lodging.

Pratt himself felt that he had learned something important from the writing of his "philosophical-lyrical" drama: "I came around to the conviction that philosophical and ethical insights whenever they find their way into poetry should be emotional renderings of experience actually lived or imaginatively grasped."[7]

NOTES

[1] E. J. Pratt, cited in Henry W. Wells, and Carl F. Klinck, *Edwin J. Pratt: The Man and His Poetry* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1947), p. 15.

[2] *Ibid.*, p. 16.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 15.

[4] "Clay," (a drama), unpublished typescript, file 18 in E. J. Pratt Collection of Manuscripts, Victoria University, Toronto. All quotations from "Clay" are taken from this typescript.

[5] *The Collected Poems of E. J. Pratt* 2d ed., ed. Northrop Frye (Toronto: The Macmillan Co. of Canada, 1962), p. 18.

[6] Wells and Klinck, *Edwin J. Pratt*, p. 16.

[7] *Ibid.*

DU SINGULIER A L'UNIVERSEL

Marie-Gertrude Grenier

LONGTEMPS IGNORÉE, l'oeuvre du conteur Albert Laberge fut tirée d'un oubli immérité grâce à l'intérêt que lui portèrent quelques critiques des lettres québécoises. Parce que l'un d'eux, M. Gérard Bessette, "lui a apporté la caution de sa culture,"[1] l'intransigeant naturaliste, qui publiait à compte d'auteur pour ses amis et ses familiers sept recueils de contes et de nouvelles tirés à une soixantaine d'exemplaires chacun, est maintenant connu de tous ceux qui s'intéressent à la chose littéraire québécoise. Mais l'ensemble de l'oeuvre labergienne n'en reste pas moins hors de la portée du public lecteur. L'excellent ouvrage de M. Bessette, l'*Anthologie d'Albert Laberge*,[2] présente différents aspects du talent de l'auteur de *La Scouine*.[3]

C'est trop peu cependant pour se faire une idée juste de l'ampleur et de la diversité de l'oeuvre du conteur. On risque alors de ne voir en Laberge qu'un auteur régionaliste traitant presque exclusivement de sujets sinon de thèmes dits "du terroir." Il est vrai que le choix des textes contenus dans l'*Anthologie* révèle sans équivoque possible que Laberge, par sa vision du monde, se situe aux antipodes des écrivains du mouvement du terroir. Le naturalisme souvent outré dont fait preuve ce grand admirateur de Maupassant se veut justement une dénonciation de la mystique agraire propagée par les littérateurs du terroir. Le grand mérite de Laberge, et c'est sans doute pour cette raison que les jeunes écrivains québécois gravitant autour de la revue *Parti-Pris* dans les années '60 l'ont en quelque sorte récupéré et voulu pour précurseur, c'est d'avoir, le premier, refusé de mentir. D'authentique souche rurale, Laberge connaissait trop la campagne et ses habitants, il connaissait trop la stagnation, voire l'état de pourrissement avancé d'une certaine société traditionnelle fondée sur des valeurs surannées pour croire et faire croire au mythe du salut de la nation par le retour à la terre. Cette société sur son déclin conservait suffisamment de force pour im-

poser le silence aux dissidents. Et Laberge la méprisait assez pour ne pas lui imposer de force la confrontation avec le miroir.

Moraliste austère qui n'en cultivait pas moins son hédonisme par la lecture d'Omar Khayyam — il possédait dix-sept éditions différentes du Roubaiyat, son livre de chevet,[4] — naturaliste qui s'exclamait: "Ah, écrire un livre qu'une pauvre ignorante refuserait de lire parce que c'est trop le miroir de la vie, quel rêve!"[5] Laberge fut le chroniqueur passionné des années difficiles qui ont vu le Canada français rural devenir le Québec urbanisé et moderne, le Québec dynamique et problématique que nous connaissons aujourd'hui.

Fils d'un habitant quasi analphabète, Laberge avait accédé à la petite bourgeoisie grâce à la protection d'un oncle médecin qui lui rendit possibles des études collégiales. Chassé de son collège, il connut quelques années de misère et goûta de la vie de bohème par nécessité. Entré au service d'un grand quotidien francophone de Montréal, il s'y tailla avec un acharnement, une ténacité toute paysanne, une place peu conforme à ses goûts, celle de rédacteur sportif; ceci lui assurait néanmoins une sécurité financière. A soixante ans, il prit sa retraite et quelque temps après, il entreprit la publication de ses livres. Les contes et les nouvelles, les poèmes en prose contenus dans ses recueils sont le fruit d'une lente germination. Tout au long de sa vie active, Laberge compila des faits divers, recueillit des anecdotes, jeta sur papier des réflexions, écrivit au gré de son inspiration des pages où il fixa à jamais par l'écriture des moments heureux qu'il avait vécus avec intensité, des sensations qu'il avait perçues avec une rare acuité.

On a souvent, avec raison d'ailleurs, reproché à Laberge de ne pas créer de personnages véritablement complexes mais plutôt des automates qu'il livre pieds et poings liés à leur destin implacable. Le grand personnage de l'oeuvre labergienne, c'est l'écrivain lui-même dont le cynisme, le désespoir, la passion et la hargne animent ces pages où il exprime son mal d'être, son désarroi d'homme coincé entre un monde ancien condamné à disparaître et un monde nouveau où il se sent étranger parce que les valeurs de son patrimoine culturel n'y ont pas cours. Des nouvelles à caractère autobiographique telles "L'homme à la chaloupe jaune" et "La vocation manquée" ne le sont pas seulement parce que certains détails anecdotiques réfèrent à la vie même de l'auteur. L'homme à la chaloupe jaune, c'est l'homme nouveau, sans racine, sans tradition, le voyageur sans nom, le citoyen du monde; c'est un homme seul, sans famille, sans ami, sans patrie. Parfaitement amoral et asocial, l'intérêt, au sens le plus étroit du terme, règle sa conduite. Cet homme qui ne vit que pour jouir, c'est le sage selon Laberge, le

spécimen parfait de la faune urbaine, l'être le mieux adapté à un monde surdéterminé, amoral et inhumain.

Quant au personnage central de la seconde nouvelle, l'orphelin Gaspard, adolescent amorphe et débile, exilé de sa campagne natale et chassé de son collège, qui arpente sans espoir les rues de Montréal à la recherche de travail avant de crever dans un réduit infect, cet être pathétique dans sa souffrance comme les bêtes que Laberge aimait décrire, incarne la fatalité de l'homme sevré de son milieu naturel et projeté par un destin aveugle dans une voie sans issue, dans un monde indifférent où il n'a pas sa place.

On pourra toujours gloser sur le naturalisme de Laberge, lui trouver toutes les épithètes imaginables, le porter aux nues ou le rejeter pour des raisons qui souvent n'ont rien à voir avec la littérature, on méconnaîtra toujours la portée de l'oeuvre de cet écrivain si on la réduit à une suite de tableaux, de scènes de vie croquées sur le vif, d'histoires, de faits vécus tantôt banals tantôt sordides. A une certaine profondeur — c'est précisément cette dimension que l'on se refuse à reconnaître dans l'art du conteur — le naturalisme de Laberge acquiert une singulière résonance. Il échappe à l'individuel et au particulier, caractéristiques de l'univers bi-dimensionnel du réalisme photographique dans lequel il semble vouloir se confiner pour atteindre à la vérité historique, sociologique, voire universelle.

La nouvelle intitulée "La Mouche" constitue un bel exemple du talent dont sait faire preuve un Laberge à son meilleur. Dans ce texte, il traite d'un thème qui a fasciné deux maîtres du naturalisme français, l'auteur de *Thérèse Raquin* et le génial pupille de Flaubert, l'auteur de "La Ficelle." Cependant, une nouvelle comme "La Mouche" donne toute la mesure de l'originalité et de l'indépendance d'esprit du conteur québécois. Rien qui ne sente la plate copie dans cette nouvelle; au contraire, tout y sonne si juste au plan de la psychologie qu'elle ne peut que jaillir des profondeurs de l'esprit, de la conscience de celui qui l'a conçue.

Cette nouvelle mérite de retenir notre attention à plus d'un titre. En plus de ses qualités littéraires incontestables, elle revêt une importance capitale par rapport au cycle du fils puni.[6] Elle constitue en quelque sorte la nouvelle-type de cette catégorie. Ce n'est pas tant qu'elle influence quant au sujet, à la forme, ou à l'écriture, les autres nouvelles de ce cycle. L'ensemble de ces nouvelles, au contraire, est marqué au coing de la plus grande diversité d'inspiration et d'exécu-

tion. Mais "La Mouche" se distingue parce qu'elle comporte le dessein premier, qu'elle est constituée essentiellement du motif fondamental que l'on retrouve dans toutes les histoires de ce cycle, auquel il donne son nom d'ailleurs, le motif du châtiment du fils. Et non seulement "La Mouche" présente-t-elle un exemple frappant de punition, encore comporte-t-elle sur le mode implicite, la cause même, le "crime" qui a entraîné le châtiment dont la fatalité devient la réalisation. Une analyse, même sommaire, de la nouvelle s'impose donc.

"La Mouche", comme la plupart des nouvelles du cycle du fils puni, raconte le déroulement d'une vie. Une vie brève, car les fils maudits de l'oeuvre de Laberge ne vivent guère au-délà des premiers temps de l'âge adulte. C'est l'objet de la hantise, une mouche étrange, verte "chatoyante du reflet des pierreries,"[7] qui donne son titre à la nouvelle. Le héros, lui, est anonyme. Tout au long du récit, l'auteur le désigne par ces mots: l'enfant, l'orphelin, le malheureux, la victime de la mouche verte. Aucun des personnages du récit n'a de prénom, ni de nom de famille. On les désigne par leur statut au sein de la famille surtout: le père, la mère, l'enfant. Tout se passe comme si l'auteur voulait, par ce procédé, mettre en relief ce qu'il y a d'universel dans une histoire très particulière, à ce qu'il semble au premier abord.

Au moment où le récit débute, le héros a trois ans. Son père est mort quelques jours auparavant. La scène initiale de la nouvelle présente le groupe familial au complet pour la dernière fois. La mère, en vêtements de deuil, écrasée de fatigue et de douleur, ne peut retenir un sanglot. Le père repose dans un cercueil de bois brun: on va l'enterrer dans quelques heures. Un bambin pénètre dans la pièce tendue de lourds rideaux noirs masquant presque complètement l'éclat du soleil matinal. Et voici que:

> Par la fenêtre légèrement entrebaillée, s'introduisit soudain en bourdonnant une grosse mouche verte, luisante, bizarre. L'enfant entendit ce bourdonnement, un long, long bourdonnement qui lui entra dans le cerveau pendant que ses yeux fascinés suivaient le vol zigzaguant du brillant insecte qui alla s'abattre sur le front de son père, dans le cercueil brun.
>
> Oh, la misérable mouche! s'exclama la femme en faisant de la main un geste pour la chasser.
>
> Rapide, la mouche verte, chatoyante du reflet des pierreries, s'échappa. Elle voleta un instant au-dessus du cadavre, puis s'élança dans la trouée lumineuse de la fenêtre qu'un souffle de vent avait ouverte toute grande.[8]

Tel est l'événement donnant naissance à l'obsession qui gâchera l'existence du personnage central. L'obsession, si torturante qu'elle puisse être, n'est pas un mal

en soi mais bien le symptôme d'un mal moral. Laberge avait déjà exploité le thème de la hantise dans la nouvelle "Les deux frères." L'obsession manifestait alors sans mystère et sans équivoque l'angoisse ressentie par l'un des personnages. Ce dernier, non sans raison, se sentait responsable de la mort de son frère.

Dans le cas du protagoniste de "La Mouche", l'auteur se montre beaucoup moins explicite. Et la nouvelle y gagne d'autant au plan artistique. Si la naissance de l'obsession est montrée sur le vif, la source du mal moral que la hantise trahit, demeure secrète. Elle transparaît néanmoins dans le sujet même du récit, dans les circonstances qui entourent le commencement du phénomène de hantise, et dans le contenu de cette hantise. Pour bien la mettre au jour, il faut quitter momentanément les sentiers de l'analyse littéraire proprement dite pour emprunter ceux de la psychocritique.

Si l'on en croit Freud et ses disciples, la névrose obsessionnelle résulte, la plupart du temps, d'un état d'angoisse relié au complexe d'Oepide. Cette angoisse est le produit d'un sentiment de culpabilité inhérent au complexe. Au moment où commence le récit, le personnage de Laberge a trois ans, l'âge du petit Hans, célèbre par la psychanalyse que fit Freud de sa phobie chevaline. Cet âge critique dans le développement de la libido voit souvent l'apparition de la névrose dans les cas où ce développement est contrarié et dévié. Le héros labergien en est vraisemblablement arrivé à ce stade où l'enfant mâle désire la disparition de son père qu'il considère comme un rival dans l'amour de la mère. Le hasard, serviable et perfide comme toujours dans l'oeuvre du conteur, comble son désir secret. Les choses ne vont pas complètement au goût de l'enfant cependant. La mère, tout à son chagrin et aux longues veillées funèbres, le délaisse au profit du mort.

C'est un enfant seul et désemparé qui vient retrouver sa mère dans la pièce où s'achève sa dernière veille. Dans son âme bouleversée s'agitent des sentiments contraires: au désir de posséder à lui seul sa mère s'oppose le remords d'avoir causé son chagrin en voulant la mort du père. L'enfant, ne l'oublions pas, en est au stade de la pensée magique. Il croit que la mort du père s'est produite parce qu'il l'a imaginée et désirée. Obscurément peut-être mais sûrement, il s'en tient responsable. Et voici que l'incident de la mouche se produit. Cette bestiole commet une agression pour ainsi dire, un sacrilège, contre le père reposant dans son cercueil. Elle est punie et chassée par la mère outrée d'un tel manque de respect. La réaction de la mère apparaît exaggérée et absurde car Laberge, avec le réalisme souvent morbide qui le caractérise, note aussitôt après que le corps du père sera mis en terre dans quelques heures pour être la proie des vers. Toutefois, l'auteur ici ne se laisse pas simplement aller à son penchant pour le macabre.

Une telle remarque trahit sa sympathie pour l'obsédé mais souligne surtout que le malheur dont il est victime est le fruit d'un hasard, d'un geste absurde qui s'inscrit néanmoins dans le déterminisme rigoureux d'une chaîne de casualité. Nous touchons au coeur de la problématique qui sous-tend toute l'oeuvre de l'écrivain.

Mais reprenons notre analyse là où nous l'avons laissée. L'agression, ou plus justement la conduite irrespectueuse de l'insecte à l'égard du père, est mise en parallèle par l'enfant avec, sinon sa conduite du moins ses propres désirs à l'égard de la personne paternelle. Il enregistre également la réaction punitive de la mère. La nuit qui suit l'enterrement du père, l'orphelin connaît les premières manifestations du mal qui va ronger sa vitalité tout aussi sûrement qu'un cancer.

> Son imagination en délire lui montrait une grosse mouche verte, luisant dans l'obscurité; son vol lourd planait dans la chambre. Elle grossissait, prenait les proportions d'un colossal papillon, d'une chauve-souris. Elle devenait un animal monstrueux et fantastique. Après s'être repue à toutes les charognes, après avoir sucé tous les poisons et toutes les corruptions, la mouche, s'abattait sur lui, elle pénétrait en lui. Il la sentait marcher sous son crâne; elle en faisait le tour à pas précipités, comme une bête prise au piège qui cherche à sortir, à s'évader. Puis, elle voletait éperdument et se heurtait aux parois, rencontrant toujours une barrière infranchissable. Elle faisait l'impossible pour s'échapper et ne pouvant trouver d'issue, sa trompe, comme une vrille, creusait, perçait une ouverture dans le sommet de la tête, pour s'enfuir. Alors lui-même joignait intérieurement ses efforts à ceux de l'insecte afin de s'en débarrasser, de le voir s'envoler et disparaître à jamais. Dans cette agonie terrible, les heures s'écoulaient lentes comme des siècles. Il souhaitait désespérément voir apparaître le jour, mais les ténèbres paraissaient devoir régner à tout jamais. Peut-être était-il arrivé quelque cataclysme et le soleil ne se lèverait plus. L'obsession lancinante le tenaillait. Il s'imaginait être étendu dans un cercueil de bois brun aux poignées nickelées. Une forte odeur de cire fondue lui venait aux narines. La figure douloureuse et fatiguée, une femme était là écrasée sur une chaise, les mains croisées sur les genoux. Sa mère. Elle l'avait veillé toute la nuit et bientôt, des hommes l'emporteraient et le descendraient dans la terre, pour être, lui, la proie des vers.
>
> Par la fenêtre entrebaillée s'introduisait soudain en bourdonnant, une grosse mouche verte, luisante, bizarre, qui s'abattait sur son front. Il entendait la voix de sa mère disant:
>
> Oh, la misérable mouche!
>
> Mais la voix était changée; elle résonnait avec un éclat de trompette et la mouche s'évanouissait.[9]

Il m'a semblé d'une impérieuse nécessité de citer ce long extrait car il comporte, de façon cryptique il est vrai, les données essentielles à la compréhension

du problème qui perturbe et menace même l'existence du protagoniste de cette nouvelle. Pour peu que l'on scrute ce passage, on y découvre les réponses aux questions qui nous sont venues à l'esprit en lisant ce récit. Que représente au juste cette mouche? On ne saurait voir dans cette nouvelle des signes de l'action mystérieuse d'un être de l'au-délà.

SI NOUS NE SAVONS avec précision ce que représente la mouche pour l'obsédé, nous savons qu'elle est objet de dégoût, qu'elle incarne à ses yeux tout ce qu'il y a de plus néfaste puisqu'elle s'est gorgée de tous les poisons, et de plus repoussant, car elle s'est vautrée sur toutes les charognes. Pourtant c'est un insecte aux reflets de pierres précieuses, qui fascine par sa beauté. Incarne-t-elle la libido refoulée à cause des exigeances de la morale inculquée à l'enfant? Cela se pourrait. Les assauts furieux de la mouche et son harcèlement constant traduiraient les tentatives de cette dernière de se libérer de la gouverne d'une conscience par trop moralisatrice.

La vision fantastique de l'halluciné combine les phantasmes d'impuissance aux souvenirs inconscients et fort anciens du traumatisme de la naissance, comme en témoigne l'agitation de bête prise au piège de la mouche à l'intérieur du crâne du héros. Or le tabou que la père fait peser sur l'activité sexuelle du fils peut, dans les cas extrêmes, entraîner l'impuissance. Comme chacun le sait, toute l'éducation morale inculquée à l'enfant repose sur la crainte de la castration. Une éducation morale trop coercitive et surtout trop hâtive peut conduire, non pas à une atrophie de la libido mais à son gauchissement et à l'apparition des symptômes d'angoisse. Tel semble bien être le cas de la victime da la mouche verte. Laberge écrit à son sujet:

> Le plaisir, la joie, l'amour étaient pour lui choses inconnues. Son infirmité l'accablait comme un vêtement de plomb et en lui germait une haine effroyable contre toute ce qui existe, une rancune contre le sort qui l'avait choisi pour victime, qui le sacrifiait.[10]

Cela semble confirmer l'hypothèse à l'effet que la mouche soit un représentation de la libido refoulée.

Néanmoins, cette hypothèse, si plausible soit-elle, n'est pas la seule valable. Une autre m'a été suggérée par l'étude de Marie Bonaparte d'un conte d'Edgar Poe, *Le scarabée d'or*.[11] La psychanalyste démontre avec force preuves à l'appui

que le scarabée représente dans le langage de l'inconscient, la mère. Chose certaine, l'insecte choisi par Laberge pour être le signe tangible de la fatalité qui écrase son héros a ceci en commun avec le scarabée, que sa beauté exerce une étrange fascination sur le protagoniste du conte et qu'en même temps il suscite chez l'un, et le devrait chez l'autre, le héros de Poe, une réaction de dégoût, car la mouche, tout comme le scarabée, affiche une prédilection marquée pour les charognes et les excréments.

Cette représentation de la mère par de tels insectes peut sembler injurieuse et invraisemblable de la part de personnages éprouvant par ailleurs pour leur mère un attachement très fort. Le langage de l'inconscient, qu'on retrouve dans les manifestations névrotiques et hystériques, dans les rêves des gens que l'on dit normaux ou déséquilibrés, et dans les créations artistiques, se doit d'être obscur, parfois antinomique, et la plupart du temps, symbolique, car pour s'exprimer au grand jour, l'inconscient doit contourner les interdits et déjouer les gendarmes de la conscience moralisatrice.

La mère, dans la situation oedipienne que décrit la nouvelle de Laberge, est l'objet des désirs du fils. Ce qui explique la fascination qu'exerce la mouche sur ce personnage. Mais la conscience est en éveil. Le fils se sent coupable à cause des pulsions de l'inconscient qui l'assaillent. Il est pour lui-même, pour son moi conscient qui a commencé d'assimiler les interdits moraux de l'éducation, un objet de dégoût. Par un déplacement fréquent dans de tels cas, il reporte sur l'objet de son désir ce dégoût qu'il ressent afin de se mieux défendre contre lui-même. Le même mécanisme de déplacement exprime sur le mode horrible, son désir de pénétrer la mère: la mouche pénètre en lui, gorgée de tous les poisons et porteuse de toutes les pestilences. Le soleil, symbole mâle par excellence, ne se lèvera peut-être plus. Un cataclysme s'est produit . . . phantasme inspiré par la crainte de la castration, punition encourue par l'obsédé pour avoir satisfait même sur le mode pénible et masochiste de l'obsession son désir de la mère. Puis survient un autre phantasme punitif: l'orphelin qui a désiré la mort de son père se voit mort à son tour, allongé comme le père jadis dans un cercueil de bois brun aux poignées nickelées. Toutefois, même par cette punition, il exprime à nouveau son désir de la mère. Il ne peut posséder la mère qu'en devenant lui-même le père, qu'en s'identifiant à lui par la mort. Il subit alors le même assaut irrespectueux de la mouche que son père autrefois — belle manifestation de la justice du talion régnant dans le monde des profondeurs de l'âme humaine — et la mère, d'une voix éclatante comme celle de la trompette du Jugement dernier, le délivre de son obsession en chassant à nouveau la mouche. La justice divine, incarnée

par la mère, abolit le châtiment car le coupable a suffisamment expié son crime.

Cette dernière image de la fantasmagorie obsessionnelle ne représente qu'un souhait de la victime. La réalité n'y correspond guère. Il n'y a ni pardon ni répit pour les fils coupables, ou mieux pour les fils vaincus dans la dure lutte oedipienne. Par un renversement de la situation, attribuable au mécanisme de déplacement, le fils qui souhaitait la mort du père, ou son équivalent symbolique, l'errance perpétuelle, se voit maintenant, selon la logique inhérente à la névrose, condamné à l'errance comme le Caïn de la Bible et comme le navigateur maudit du poème de Coleridge. Vers la fin de sa vie, l'obsédé créé par Laberge n'est plus qu'une ombre d'homme, dont l'auteur décrit ainsi le tourment:

> Désemparé, pris de l'idée fixe, le malheureux n'avait plus un seul bon moment. Il n'y avait pour lui de refuge nulle part. Le bourdonnement le pousuivait avec la ténacité d'une meute de loups affamés.[12]

Cette meute vengeresse se compose d'animaux totémiques: les loups sont autant de rééditions de l'image paternelle courroucée. Le pauvre obsédé qui aspire de toutes ses forces à la paix de l'âme ne la trouvera que dans la mort, seule capable de donner le sommeil "sans rêves mauvais".[13]

Le récit-type du cycle du fils puni s'achève donc sur une image de désespoir, l'obsédé se jetant devant le canon de l'arme d'un camarade pratiquant le tir à la cible. Il n'est pas rare que des personnages labergiens ploient sous le faix du désespoir et mettent un terme à leur vie de misère. Pour cette raison, on a beaucoup parlé du pessimisme de l'écrivain, pessimisme que d'aucuns jugent étonnant chez un homme dont la vie fut longue, paisible et somme toute assez heureuse. C'est que l'oeuvre de Laberge se résume en un long dialogue de l'homme avec lui-même et qu'inlassablement reviennent ces angoissantes questions: Qu'est-ce que le destin? Pourquoi tant de laideurs, tant de mal? Pourquoi tant de victimes? Pourquoi lui et non moi? L'oeuvre n'apporte pas de réponse: elle est un cri d'impuissance et de révolte.

NOTES

[1] Jean Ethier-Blais, "*Le cycle* de Gérard Bessette, un univers alimenté aux sources de la mort et de l'érotisme", *Le Devoir*, 5 juin 1971, p. 14.

[2] Gérard Bessette, *Anthologie d'Albert Laberge*, Cercle du Livre de France, Montréal, 1962.

[3] Albert Laberge, *La Scouine*, Edition privée, Montréal, 1918.

[4] Gabrielle Clerc, *La vision du monde d'Albert Laberge*, thèse de maîtrise présentée à l'Université Laval, 1961, p. 57.

[5] Albert Laberge, *Quand chantait la cigale*, Edition privée, Montréal, 1936, p. 73.
[6] Marie-G. Grenier, *A Comparative Study of the Works of Albert Laberge and Morley Callaghan*, thèse de maîtrise présentée à l'Université de Sherbrooke, 1971.
[7] Albert Laberge, *Visages de la vie et de la mort*, Edition privée, Montréal, 1936, p. 72.
[8] Albert Laberge, ibid, p. 71-72.
[9] Albert Laberge, ibid, p. 73-74.
[10] Albert Laberge, ibid, p. 75.
[11] Marie Bonaparte, *Edgar Poe, sa vie, son oeuvre*, 3 volumes, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris, 1958.
[12] Albert Laberge, *Visages de la vie et de la mort*, Edition privée, Montréal, 1936, p. 75.
[13] Albert Laberge, ibid, p. 76.

THE HUNTERS TWAIN

Dorothy Livesay

An examination of the narrative background to Isabella Valancy Crawford's poems, The Dark Stag, The Lily Bed *and* The Canoe*; from an unpublished manuscript, "Without, the West drew flaming gates across . . ."*

FOR YEARS since the publication in 1905 of I. V. Crawford's *Collected Poems* it has been held that *Malcolm's Katie* and *Old Spookses' Pass* were the chief examples of the poet's narrative style in verse. Her prose novels and short stories are now being collected and analysed, but their romantic Victorian style aimed at the "lady readers" of the *Toronto Globe*, *Mail* or *Telegram* in the 1880's would seem to have little bearing on the realistic lyricism found in *Malcolm's Katie* (subtitled though it was, "A Love Story").

Valancy, as she was known to her family, certainly suffered from a schizophrenic dilemma. On the one hand she was trying desperately to earn a modest living from her writing by assiduously catering to popular taste; on the other hand she was a young woman alone, without literary friends or critics, who was consumed by a fiery poetic imagination and intoxicated with language and metaphor. Doubtless through trial and error, mingled with some marketing success, she learned in her prose writing how to handle narrative style, characterization and plot; but these became, I would contend, simply the tools available whenever required, in whatever genre the poet was working.[1] Quite another persona appeared when Crawford chose a looser form of documentary verse: the dimensions of time and space were added in the poem *Malcolm's Katie.* Whereas objectivity and aesthetic distance were the strengths of *Old Spookses' Pass,* in *Malcolm's Katie* the subjective feelings of the poet broke through the

objectivity of the narrative. The resulting bursts of song added another dimension to the poetry.

But would a critic be justified, I wonder, if he isolated these lyrics from the main body of the narrative? Crawford's first editors after her death on February 12, 1887 were Mr. and Mrs. John Garvin of Toronto. In their 1905 *Collected Poems* they omitted quite a number of published poems, and several unpublished ones. Then in 1923 Mrs. Garvin (Katherine Hale) edited a *Selected Poems* for Lorne Pierce of the Ryerson Press, in which she "lifted" individual lyrics like "O Love Builds on the Azure Sea" from *Malcolm's Katie*. Later anthologists have "lifted" "The Axe". It seems to me that this practice is dubious. Part of the tension and charm of imaginative poetry resides in its relation to character, time, place. Thus, although Max's song "The Axe" is a refreshingly natural, even Whitmanesque piece of poetry from the Confederation era, it takes on greater symbolic value from its position in the longer poem. This is equally true of other lyrics in which the characters Max and Katie burst out in true aria style.[2] Crawford's lyrics, I believe, were intended to be a part of the structural whole.

Indirect evidence of this kind of organization is now coming to light. In searching through the unpublished papers of Isabella Valancy Crawford at Douglas Library, Queen's University, I have found a curious long poem parallel to *Malcolm's Katie*. Lyrics by Crawford which have been considered her best, and which have been the subject of considerable speculation and interpretation, are in reality part of this long narrative-philosophical poem, beginning "Without, the West drew flaming gates", which, as it lacks a title, I have called *The Hunters Twain*.[3]

The protagonists in *The Hunters Twain* manuscript are Hugh and Ion, "my masters twain" of "Said the Canoe". As was the case in *Malcolm's Katie* we are presented with two young men of very different backgrounds. Hugh, who is part-Indian, part Anglo-Saxon, may be compared to Max, the Scot; both are men of action who possess the gift of song. In *The Hunters Twain* Ion is an exile, an intellectual of a similar type to Alfred in *Malcolm's Katie*. But he is not in any way sinister, or a villain. His name brings up connotations of the Attic myth concerning Ion, abandoned by his mother and rescued by Apollo. Eventually Ion becomes king of Athens. Crawford's Ion is an artist who wants to find for himself "a little Athens" where he may paint to his heart's content and heal himself of a disastrous love affair. Whereas in *Malcolm's Katie* the organizing principle is Narration and the theme is the power of Love, in *The Hunters*

Twain the organizing principle is Time and the theme is Hope versus despair (symbolizing pioneer optimism versus sophisticated pessimism or cynicism).[4]

The manuscript begins then with that theme which will recur again and again. Here are the opening lines:

> Without, the West drew flaming gates across
> The grey, gaunt distance of the wintry street;
> Low down were welded fast against the sky
> Dull, purple bars that held the first fine snow.
> Lower, the old inutterable prayer
> That glows in golden script behind the day
> Stretched its still strength about the darkening world
> And as a cobweb delicately spun
> Her black thin boughs hung orbed against the sky;
> And in their subtle lacings seemed to cling
> Arachne-like, the round, full Evening Star.
>
> Dark on near hills the primal forest heaved
> Its haughty heart against the City's claws
> That lengthened towards its ramparts day by day;
> Dark on near sands the tideless waters stood
> Meek with dun, moaning mist against wan wharves
> Dying to dumbness as the fierce young frost
> Gazed on the shuddering world, ere serpent wise
> He coiled chill crystal folds about its breast.

A description of Toronto in 1876? It would seem likely. This was the city to which Mrs. Crawford and her two surviving daughters came after the death of Dr. Crawford in Peterborough. They lived in rooms above a store in John Street; and though the city could scarcely have been so grim, with "heaving drains" as Crawford describes it in this poem, it must have seemed much more forbidding than the market town of Peterborough. Would she have read Thomson's "City of Dreadful Night", which was first published in 1874? In any event, after the wintry description of the opening lines the leading theme is introduced:

> On such an eve despair is no strange growth,
> But a chief vein that feeds the chilling heart,
> With pausing billows stiffening as they burst
> And Hope an alien flame fallen from the wick
> Of a cold lamp that chills the failing hand.
> Dust, sharp as spearpoints on the rising frost
> Whirled in keen simooms;[3] and, sullen orbs,
> The base stars of the city lamps leaped up.

This is the setting from which both Hugh and Ion hope to flee, once the winter is over. But before we are introduced to these two "heroes" there is inserted in the text yet *another* poem! It is also written in blank verse, and is concerned with the loss of love (Ion's dilemma). It begins obscurely and continues erratically, even chaotically, as if written by someone in a disoriented state:

> Where's speech in anguish? O she never throve
> On the high swell of sorrow's bursting heart.
> Two groans are hers that give themselves to speech:
> "God, God!" With this she wails him up before
> Her bar of desolation, then, "Why? Why?"

A dialogue ensues between Sorrow and a disdained lover. She tells him a fable to prove that he is caught in a mirage, a "phantom little cross of love". His reply is: "Away with Love, away! And give us up Barrabas." From here on the poem dwells on the theme of "Barrabas" who is viewed as the opponent of love but the choice of the people clamouring in the marketplace (the industrialized city?). The passage is placed in quotation marks, but there is no clear indication as to who is speaking (Sorrow or "the man"?).

> Barrabas was a robber. Lack-a-day!
> We of the golden tissues floating far
> And sandals jewel-laced — we need our thieves
> Our Benedit Barrabas who can steal
> With such bland gestures, and wise brows bent down
> In plans financial, that the feeble-folk
> Stand all at gaze in envy and delight
> Yes — even while he plucks the crusts from lips
> Blue with their torture for it. Away with Love,
> Dark God of Voids — and if his frame be knit
> Of any tissue tougher than a dream
> Crucify him — pierce him to death with doubt,
> Loose us Barrabus — we of the jewelled coifs!

After 54 more lines of chaotic and obscure rhetoric on the subject of Love and Hate, the blind woman, Sorrow, vanishes: "The sharp dust caught and veiled her, and she passed." The poem again centres on the young man in the city, and the Barrabas theme:

> The bitter eve grew vocal as he went.
> The infant city nursing on the breast
> Of unhewn woods found virile voice to shout

The cry of eighteen hundred years ago.
The church towers roared it in their evening chime:
"Loose us Barrabas! he will rear us high;
Will lay his gold along our organ pipes;
Will beat his stolen silver in our bells;
And stain our windows with the blood he robs
From the free Melot's heart. O Christ, O Christ!
Thy robe is sordid and thy palms are hard —
Hang on thy Cross! Loose us Barrabas, yes!
And while Christ hangs, the Thief shall build to him."
"Loose us Barrabas", all the busy marts
Buzzed with the cry, for none but robber thews
Can wrestle with fierce fortune, now-a-days.
Vice reared its supple serpent head and hissed:
"Loose us Barrabas — let our fellow free."
Want, lean, lank giant, honest and hunger-blind
Stood groaning 'tween the cries, and questioning:
Might not Barrabas be a newer Christ?
With newer gospel fitter for the time?

But there is one man who is not going to yield to the temptations of Barrabas and the City, and this is Hugh, now for the first time mentioned by name. Hugh for a time is groping and lost amidst the evils of poverty and greed:

With the illimitable wilderness around
From the close city hives rang up the groan
"So little space! we starve — we faint — we die!"
Lord! Lord! to see the gaping city sewer
Beaded with haggard heads and hungry eyes
Towering above the heaving of the drains
And hear the harsh, unreasonable cry
"We starve, we starve!" While half a world lay fresh
And teeming, out beyond the city gates!

In this situation Hugh goes through a traumatic struggle with his Soul, who calls on him: "Up, up, thou weakling! Wouldst thou lay thy palms/ Against a stubborn world, to hurl it far/ Into a truer orbit — then up, up and forge/ Strong sinews for the deed . . . Weld strength with strength, so let us face the world!"

So spake his soul, and plucked him from the town
With its young walls and venerable sins,
The smell of primal woods upon its air
The groans of Ancient Famine in its slums.

The next section of the poem finds Hugh in the forest. It is spring, and the life-giving rains are falling:

All through the night
Life loosed the fountain of his heart
And earth grew tremulous with pulsing seeds
And leaping stems, and juices rushing up
From her wide veins along the barren woods.

Under that influence Hugh's creative powers are released. He sees his task clearly and makes a vow, Old Testament-wise, to lead those whom the city has destroyed into the haven of the forest.

Hugh caught the dove of Spring between his palms
And unashamed before his large thewed soul
Drew her soft plumes against his warm breast
And held her to his ear to coo her rime
Of deep green woods, and creeks and purple hills.

I'll plunge to drowning depth in leaf-built waves
And let them wash me from this clanging world
That shrieks with steam — where mostly men are slaves
That tend on iron tyrants — solid things
That turn and rend the dream-like flesh and blood
That forms and serves them — (I saw one monster take
A serf that served it, in its mighty maw
And comb his sweating flesh sheer from his bones
With glittering fangs . . .)

The leafy shades shall wash
The roaring of the city from my ears
And drive before their sibilant strong rush
The weak despair that sickens all my soul
Bores through my brittle bones, and nips apart
The very sinews of my straining mind.

And here is Hugh's prophecy and vow:

Then will I come again when I am healed
And shout such gospel of the woods and plains
As, like the music of the lean Hindoo
Shall drag from sewers and drains, and noisome holes
Worn-minded men who bore their abject way
In pain and darkness through the city's mire.

I'll have them out! — A saviour of their flesh —
Yes, even while they howl about the streets
"Loose us Barrabas — we will cheapen toil
For him, and throne the robber on our necks!"
I'll have them out! God, knit my sinews up.

Hugh's meditation on the saving powers of nature now begins to stir the more primitive instincts in him. Thus the "ideal" for the poet Crawford is always counterposed with the "natural" man's instincts for self-survival. Half Indian, Hugh turns his attention to the needs of his body:

The primal savage in him shook his gyves . . .
And like a hawk peered up the very sky
For quarry; and shamed, Hugh felt great throbs
wing his dull heels behind the scudding deer,
Beat at his wrists above the bending rod
And leap from out his very breast along
The keen, clear sky behind some dappled wing.
What honey made the marrow of the food
He chased and slew? And from the very leaves
Joy wrung strong wine into his weary soul.

It is after this long, often tedious, but philosophically and dialectically useful introduction that we finally become *engagé*: The actual story of *The Hunters Twain* begins.

THE STRUCTURE of the passages that follow develops in a clear logical pattern:

"Dawn of Day 1"
"Midday Heat"
"Evening Sunset"
"Night (The Campfire)"

The poem then ends abruptly (clearly unfinished) with Hugh's midnight dream: a vision of storm in the wilderness. Broken off as it is at a violent and passionate moment, one gets the impression that the poem, if it had been completed, would have moved into the serenity of "Dawn of Day 2".

Let us return now to "Dawn of Day 1". The two men, hero and anti-hero, are found together in their tent. The hunt is over for the time being: a new day is beginning. Their argument, one feels, has been continuous: Hugh comes to

the wilderness with hope, Ion flees to it from despair. In a curious way they mix their metaphysics with their physical living. Although this section is written as third person narration it is so clearly a dramatic dialogue that I propose simply to set it up that way. So instead of "said Hugh" I will write *Hugh*:

Hugh: Now see
How buxom Hope becomes, with Diane's bow
Laid on her shoulder, and her rosy foot
Inlaid with dew from fern and flag.
Come, grasp her hand, and stumble to your feet.

Ion: Nay . . . Hope built to breathe
From venison and trout and oxygen
Has so much clay knit in her throbbing flesh —
That clay will pluck her back to clay again.
Could I clasp Hope, she should be all a God
The builder not the built, and move strong wings
Wide as a world cleft into semi-spheres
And have great arms to thrust malignant stars
Back from her course along the Universe
And a broad foot to crush the serpent's head
That lifts, and spits his poison in her face:
Hope, less the Goodhood — bury her for me!

Hugh: There cries a loon . . . and all our tent
Glows shiftingly; and on its canvas roof
Dance the dark shadows of deep leaves above.
Come, burst our lintels, and behold
Hope swimming up the dawn upon the world.

Ion: Strong with deer's flesh . . . and the curve
Of tricky trout — stand you, my friend, at gaze:
I'll build the fire, and brew the natant maid
A draught to cheer the kernel of her heart —
Hope, without breakfast, has a swooning trick!

There follows, in true Crawford style, an extended metaphor describing the arrival of the dawn. It is extremely lush, with a sensual, even sexual description of a naked woman, the personification of Dawn, who

Swam against the east, against her breast the night
Broke purple, and her curving arms beat back
The starry surf . . .
Naked, a second, on the shore she stood
With all the innocent small feathered things

Flying to touch the scarlet, lined bars
Of her stretched fingers, and against her knees
Rubbed the soft sides of shadowy deer, and high
The squirrels chattered at her from rich boughs —
Then warmer wound the blood wide in her veins,
She moved an ardent palm, and drew the mists
From lakes, and swamps and valleys, and their folds
Spiced with the cedar and the balsam — bright
On their curled edges with a saffron dye
She upward drew along her rosy knees
Her ivory thighs, the silver of her breast.
So veiled and draped she waited for the sun.

Ion: These mists are prophets of a torrid day
a fierce, red day
Of zenith summer, snorting in sharp peals
Of dry, short thunder, as a stallion snorts
At gaze at midday on an arid plain
The herd afar — where ere the fevered palm
Falls on him, leaps an artery of fire.
What see you in the dawn? Come, prophet, speak!

Hugh: I see dead night . . . and tears that dry
In aching eyes turned on the growing light.

Ion: But that dead night! . . . Many slaves
Died at his burial; where may be their dawn?
Stark at his feet they lie — their leaking hearts
Dust on his sere clothes. Lo, for some the dawn
Is named despair! and you — you call her Hope!

Hugh: Aye Hope . . . and by her sturdy side
And ruddy kertle hangs my fluttering soul.
No goddess she — but God's own very breath
Shaped into one grave splendour of the East
Come, Ion, love her! Clasp strong palms with her.

Ion: Your dawn! . . . Sometimes she drove
The last nail in the gallows — and the wretch
Wakes to the rope beneath her rosy palms.
O God, your Hope! A smoke-wreath of the soul —
Despair a firm flint rock beneath the feet!
Give me despair's strong certainty — I'll stand
On the grim cliff, and dominate the world
Aye — use it tripod-wise, and sybil-like

Look from it through the universe, and see
The birth of ruins, and the horrid flames
Of bursting worlds — The man who hopes and laughs
Is nature's fool and wears her motley well.

Hugh: Then I am grateful for my cap and bells —
... And nature's zany is her king!

In this vein the argument between the two men continues, a bantering irony. Neither wins, but Hugh culminates his case with a transcendental vision of reincarnation as the hope of the universe:

So are the souls of men
Caught from the secret spaces in the war
Of circumstances rudely moulded, and sped on
Along eternity from sphere to sphere
Polished in speeding — O this clanging world
Is no snug nest for doves! My Hope, you see,
Faces eternities — Archangels hold
Her torches high against the mysteries
Their soaring wings still seek — and yet she smiles
Into the daisy, drying on the grave,
And leaves the dewy jewel of her dawn
Starred in its withering breast.

To all of this high rhetoric Ion finally replies:

I hope! in faith, so keenly hope [that]
I see some half-hour hence the flashing trout —
Yet snug in yonder pool — yield mellowly
His rose-leaf flakes and opal curds to us.

And thereupon one of the two friends — it is not clear which — bursts into song, in celebration of "The dawn I love". That song is the well-known lyric, "The Dark Stag", which was first published in a somewhat different version in the *Toronto Evening Telegram* on November 28, 1883. I have indicated in brackets changes that have been made, presumably by Crawford (but why, one might ask, would she have changed that striking epithet, "The stout and lusty stag" to "strong and dusky"?). I have also numbered the original stanzas in the order given in Crawford's revised version.

(1)

"A startled stag, the blue grey Night
Leaps down beyond dark pines

Behind, a length of yellow light,
The hunter's arrow shines
His mocassins are stained with red
He bends upon his knee
From covering peaks his shafts are sped
The blue mists plume his mighty head!
Well may the dark stag flee!

(2)

The moon like a snow-white doe (The pale, pale moon, a
Bounds by his dappled flank; snow-white doe)
They beat the stars down as they go
As wood-bells growing rank. (like)
The winds lift dew-laps from the ground
Leap from *dry shaking* reeds (the quaking)
Their hoarse bays shake the *cedars* round (forests)
With keen cries on the *trail* they bound (track)
Swift, swift the dark stag speeds!

(5)

Roar the rent lakes, as thro' the waves
Their silver warriors plunge
As vaults from core of crystal caves
The *vast*, fierce maskelonge (strong)
Red torches of the sumach glow
Fall's council fires are lit
The bittern, squaw-like, scolds the air
The wild duck splashes loudly, where
The *waving* rice-spears knit. (Rustling)

(6)

Shaft after shaft the red sun speeds
Rent the stag's dappled side,
His breast to *fangs of hoarse bleeds* (fanged by the shrill words
He staggers on the tide. bleeds)
He feels the hungry waves of space
Rush at him high and blue
The white spray smites *his* dusky face (their)
Swifter the sun's *swift* arrows race (fierce)
And pierce his *strong* heart through. (stout)

(3)

Away! his white doe, far behind
Lies wounded on the plain
Yells at his flank the nimblest wind

His large tears fall *like* rain (in)
Like lily-pads small clouds grow white
About his darkling way
From her bald nest upon the height
The red-eyed eagle sees his flight
He falters — turns — the antlered night
The black stag stands at bay!

(4)

His feet are in the waves of space
His antlers broad and dun
He lowers, and turns his velvet face
To front the hunter sun,
He stamps the lilied clouds and high
His branches fill the west,
The lean stork sails across the sky
The shy loon shrieks to see him die
The winds leap at his breast.

(7)

His antlers fall — once more he spurns
The hoarse hounds of the day
His blood upon the crisp blue burns
Reddens the mounting spray
His branches smite the wave — with cries
The *shrill* winds *pausing*, flag (wild winds pause and flag)
He sinks in space — red glow the skies;
The brown earth crimsons as he dies
The *stout* and *lusty* stag!" (strong and dusky)

After this ecstatic song — Crawford's paean of delight in which the poet and her two personae are all worshippers — the narrative moves into description of a magic scene on the lake. It contains perhaps the best example of "clean" direct language, free from Victorian rhetorical trappings. As such, it offers a hint of how the poet's imagination, when released through participation in nature, finds a language that is increasingly fresh and natural. Like Emily Carr, she begins to paint in her own true fashion.

Later they laid the silver bough canoe
On the fresh tide and paddled from the shore.

Hugh: Hush, hush — O paddle, noiseless slip
Through velvet waters, dusky, deep and still

As hearts of newborn flowers and thou, Canoe,
Make smooth thy birchen sides, and like a beam
That pushes night all noiselessly aside
Part the still lake — Lo, all the little isles
Seem at a mid air, mystic anchorage
Sky laved at granite plinth, and cedar crest
As though a god stood doubting — holding them
Between the wave and sky. And shall I pluck
Them up to gem my calm immortal lakes?
Or shall I spare them yet a space to man?
Eastward the large, long shadows lie and gaze
Into brown waters — Westward on gold feet
The sultry light stands on the polished lakes
And eyes the raven thunder cloud that flies
With plumes all rent far down the curving wave.
Ion, behold! here lies the old mossed crib
Knit to yon isle by weft of reaching vines,
Fringed with round lilies; and a bubble floats
On the sleek wave — a little rainbow world
With isles and pines and lilies set in it!
Cool, cool the smooth brown shadows! Lo, how quakes
Yon lily in the deep core of the shade!
There drop the line — there lurks the spangled fin!

Ion: We will bait the hook with Hope
And with keen hope the trout will nibble it!
And then to one — despair — to trout or man!

Hugh: The trout is welcome to the hope a trout
Can nibble from the hook. Now draw
The paddle in — like a swan's foot it shines
And frights the fish — Against this lily bed
We'll lie — and silence-gild our dangling bait.

Here follows a somewhat irrelevant series of expository lines which describe the psychological background of the two young men. The material is interesting but its introduction at this point halts the flow of the narrative and the dialogue. It seems highly probable that if Crawford had ever revised this poem she would have inserted those descriptive passages much earlier on. I therefore omit them here.

Meanwhile the fishing scene continues: two men in a canoe out on a lily pond. It is exciting to find that the next song is none other than "The Lily Bed" (first published in *Collected Poems*, 1905). Ion is the singer.

There has been considerable critical speculation about this lyric. We know now, *in fact*, that there were two men in the canoe. But Ion appears to be the only one, in the song. He pushes his paddle *down* and he is so overcome by the breathless beauty of the landscape — forest mirrored in lake — that the metaphor overpowers him. We feel his utter silence, "cloaked in a golden pause." And out of this silence which has now become personified as a chief "in his lodge of leaves" there arises the image of the tree as a hunter, wooing the water as maiden.

Ion now draws his paddle *up* and as his canoe rocks on the lily-pads the lily blossoms sing to him with "their cool lips" and cling "to the frail sides." And now the lilies have become girls, "With breast and lip they wove a bar." As evening deepens cool winds spring up and "They swayed the high, dark trees, and low / Swept the locked lilies to and fro." The key melody, that couplet, ends the song — but with a difference: "He *pushed out*" from the lily bed. The tale is over. Once again I reproduce the original as it stands in the manuscript, with the revisions in brackets at the side; in this case it is possible that the revisions may have been made by Garvin.

"His cedar paddle, scented red
He thrust down in the lily-bed.

Cloaked in a golden pause he lay
Locked in the arms of the bay. (placid)

Trembled alone his bark canoe
As shocks of bursting lilies flew

Thro' the still *pulses* of the tide, (crystal)
And smote the frail boat's *silvery* side (birchen)

Or when, beside the sedges thin
Flashed the sharp *jewel* of a fin; (Rose . . . silver)

Or when, a wizard swift and *bold* (cold)
A dragonfly *lashed* out in gold (beat)

And fire and flame, the widening rings (And jewels all)
Of waters *whispering* to his wings (singing)

Or when, like a winged and burning soul,
Dropped from the gloom an oriole

On the cool wave, as to the balm
Of the Great Spirit's open palm

The freed soul flies. *Soft* silence clung (And)
To the still hours as tendrils hung,

In darkness carven, from the trees
Sedge-buried to their burly knees.

Stillness sat in *her* lodge of leaves, (his)
Clung golden shadows to its eaves,

And on its *spicy* floor like maize (cone-spiced)
Red-ripe, fell sheaves of knotted rays.

The wood, a proud and crested brave;
Bead-bright, a maiden, stood the wave.

And he had *told his tale* of love (spoke his soul)
With voice of eagle and of dove.

Of loud, *peaked* pines his tongue had made; (strong)
His lips soft blossoms of the shade

That kissed her silver lips — hers cool
As lilies on his inmost pool

Till now he stood in triumph's rest
His image *in her crystal breast*; (painted in her breast)

One isle 'tween blue and blue did melt
A bead of wampum from the belt,

Of Manitou — a purple rise
On the far shore *slipped up the* skies. (heaved to the)

His cedar paddle scented red
He drew up from the lily bed.

All lily-locked, all lily-locked
The light bark on the blossoms rocked. (His)

Their cool lips round the sharp prow sang,
Their soft *palms to the pale* sides sprang. (clasp to the frail)

With breasts and lips they wove a bar —
Stole from her lodge the Evening Star,

With golden hand she grasped the mane
Of a cloud on the azure plain. (red)

It by the *coned* red sunset flew (peaked)
Cool winds from its bright nostrils blew.

They swayed the high dark trees and low
Swept the locked lilies to and fro.

With cedar paddle, scented red
He pushed out from the lily-bed.

The narrative continues:

Thus Ion sang, and rustling thro' the rice
They met the shining fingers of the moon
Thrust thro' the woods to touch the shining lake:
She lifted mellow lips to dying day
And all her kisses quivered into stars.
Then from the large rose of the lake leaped up
A million little lilied mists that played
And curled before the prow; like naiad hands
Bore the birch bark in snowy palms, and hid
The rice, the lilies, and the flashing wave.
A campfire flared far on an ebon spear
Of pine-black land that split the lake, and pale
Their tent gleamed in the light, and Hugh beheld
And sang a paean to its canvas caves.

Hugh's song which follows I have titled "The Tent." As far as can be determined it was never published. Interestingly, although it follows the same metrical pattern as Ion's "Lily Bed" song, it lapses more often into colloquial phrasing.

THE TENT (Hugh's song)

There stands my tent secure between
Two pointed pines, twin guards of green

My palace of mid-pine delight!
The canvas walls no longer white:

By smoke from camp-fires keenly kist
Into a dim, dim coil of mist

By past long summers, bronzed as brown
As cones from pine peaks shaken down.

Would I thy mellow walls exchange
For snowy canvas fresh and strange?

Perish the thought! there's not a rent
Or stain, I'd spare thee from, my tent!

Lo, that long wound healed with a seam
Thou hadst it in Walpurgian dream

Of branches bellowing through the night
As when strong, leafy giants fight,

A smitten pine, his dying grip
Laid on thee with faint finger-tip,

And jagged thee sore — That russet strain
The fire-kiss of a flaming plain!

That patch — 'tis victory's squalid flag
Against thee hurled the hounded stag

Fangs at his throat, he reels! he falls!
His antlers in thy yielding walls.

Thy linen lintel bears a blot
I would not move a single jot.

O misty, yellow, murmurous eaves,
On crooked sticks displumed of leaves

I hung beneath thy trembling thatch
The scaly treasures of my "catch"!

The speckled sweetmeat of the stream
The darling of the angler's dream,

The silver of the creek
That leaps, a pale nymph, from the peak

Of woody hill, and on her way
Shares such sun flashes, as she may;

And from the glittering rays, small doubt
Evolves her jewel's sprite, the trout!

Then later, simple ecstasy
That grew between my pipe and me

Impletion of serene content!
Joy to thy smoky walls, my tent!

Now that Hugh and Ion are safely back at their camp, having lit their campfire and cooked their trout, they cease their singing and take up their longstanding argument. The marked contrast between the characters of the two friends, the optimist and cynic, is highlighted in this dialogue.

So sped the eve, and lying on piled spruce
Beside the red camp-fire, Hugh mused and planned;
And Ion smoked, or sang his sorrow songs

That sounded merrily, to say the least.
Thus Hugh, with eyes large on the ebon woods:

Hugh: A fine, full soil-free grants for every soul —
Pure water — timber — hills for little towns —
Shelter for cattle in the valley dips.
I'll search no further — hither my colony
Shall tramp; here tent, and touch red Plenty's robe.

Ion: Yes — and yonder frowning isle
That burst the lake so furiously at birth,
The wave still hisses round it — there your jails
Can cage their birds. Oh, all fits well!
Heights for your towns and temples — rugged rocks
To hold your ready rogues, meek murderers
Your multi-married, and the hoary heads
That whitened churches, while the hungry hands
Plucked at the public placket — or betrayed
The orphan's trust. Oh, all fits very well!
Prepare the wilderness for crime — and man!

Hugh: Nay, man and crime. . . . name man the first:
He is the stronger — yield him all his rights.

Ion: O optimist! O owl that through the pitch
Of midnight gazes clearest! And no doubt
Sees the grim ruins gay, to his round orbs!
. . .

Hugh: . . . Behold this bay, how firm the sweep
Of the high headlands heaved from its deep heart.
Here wharves shall grow, and docks, and sails shall set
To this large shelter, from the furious leaps
Of yon unsalted sea.

Ion: And to their slimy lips shall steal at night
Lost mothers with their bastards at their breasts
And stare a moment at the town behind,
A moment at the stars, then make the choice
Of filthy water. Spurned merrily by Fate
The madmen of Dispair shall leap from them
And rotting ships, brave in fresh paint, shall swing
Loose from them to the wrecking; thus it holds
in my young, leafy Athens, thus it holds
in Babylon.

Hugh: . . . And thus it holds
Round our rude star: from hurricanes slip up
Sleek calms, and healthier airs — and hideous slimes
Labour with lilies — O, God's moulding place
Is full of riot, roar of furnaces
Glaring of metal, recurring in fierce tides —
Smoke, violence and strife — but ever tends
The storm to music, and the strife to peace.
Mayhap the music sounds dim aeons hence,
Perchance the Peace shapes on immortal shores.

Ion: Hope is your creed! . . . You cling
To rainbows, like the elves in picture books!
You ride the moth, and clasp the trembling reed!
Ion *I* worship — sets my soul that way.
And Hope is Pythia to the God I know,
Utters His will; and looks along His Hand
Stretched through the Coming Ages shaping them.

Hugh: Shall I pass sentence and condemn myself
To present Hell, and consort with damned souls?
. . .
God is God and Hope
His chiefest prophet!

Ion: Prove that! I'll be your pupil then.
Yes, faith, I will.

Hugh: Proof, proof! . . . Nay, work the problem out
Alone; nor waste your toil on it unless
You feel at times the passionate, plain pang
Of adoration paining all your soul
And hear, " 'Tis well to worship" from her lips.
Then seek my God, and you shall find his Hope.

In the meantime, roll up that lusty log
Astride the flames — the night grows pale and chill.

So saying, the hunters' argument trails off into smoke and dreams.

Hugh lay and dreamed, with movements of the feet
And starting fingers, and with pricking ears
Full of the crash of stags, thro' brush and fern
And ripping of deep waves by dappled breasts.
And so his spirit struggled with the earth
Then upward burst to the clear airs of sleep.

While Hugh sleeps, one may ask, does not the canoe speak of "my masters twain"? That song would seem to be most fitting at this point in the narrative; but it is not to be found in this manuscript or in the known Crawford archives. Instead of that song, or any concluding passage on the stag hunt, we have a final fragment which might be titled: "Hugh's Dream". In it the darkness and the violence takes over — indicating those "presences" that are just beyond the rim of the campfire in "Said the Canoe".

He clung against the blackness of a cliff
With bat-sharp nails, and felt against his lips
The awful granite that he could not see.
Against his naked soles he felt a cloud
Rub its dark down as if an eagle passed.
Thunder filled space: the thunder spirits rolled
Their balls in such hot sport, the roaring orbs
Smote side to side. Then to the south some sped —
A riot of red arrows rushing down
On the swift bird that ever flies before
Their ruddy shafts, yet never drops to them.

Below him leaped the thunders of the Lake;
Against his breast, reverberant, the cliff
Belched brittle echoes; burst from every pass
Responsive floods of sound, as to the Joy
Of the wild thunders they lent their rocky throats.
Night! Was this night, or some space set apart
For lasting dark scorched with the lightning's blast?
His soul stood tip-toe for the groan of woods:
For forests grow by sun, but stone and wave
Made all this world; and thunders all its voice.
Deep dawns of newer darkness filled the east
Till, like a swamp-bred monster's hide, the sky
Grew wrinkled with them, and the lightning's shafts
Broke on their fleeter blackness, wave on wave —
Sprang as a growing buck leaps upon his foe
That fights him for his mate — and rearing high
Grew lank against his stretching foe, and roared
[And with fanged furious stabs tore at his throat] (*line scratched*
[And so] with branches locked they strove and reeled. *out*)

So ends this poem which I have named "The Hunters Twain". The great lyric that finally burst to light from its shaggy loins must surely have been "Said the

Canoe" . . . which I re-publish here. Its first known printing was in *The Toronto Telegram*, December 8, 1883.

SAID THE CANOE

My masters twain made me a bed
Of pine-boughs resinous, and cedar;
Of moss, a soft and gentle breeder
Of dreams of rest; and me they spread
With furry skins and, laughing, said:
"Now she shall lay her polished sides
As queens do rest, or dainty brides,
Our slender lady of the tides!"

My masters twain their camp-soul lit;
Streamed incense from the hissing cones;
Large crimson flashes grew and whirled;
Thin golden nerves of sly light curled
Round the dun camp; and rose faint zones,
Half way about each grim bole knit,
Like a shy child that would bedeck
With its soft clasp a Brave's red neck,
Yet sees the rough shield on his breast,
The awful plumes shake on his crest,
And, fearful, drops his timid face,
Nor dares complete the sweet embrace.

Into the hollow hearts of brakes —
Yet warm from sides of does and stags
Passed to the crisp, dark river-flags —
Sinuous, red as copper-snakes,
Sharp-headed serpents, made of light,
Glided and hid themselves in night.

My masters twain the slaughtered deer
Hung on forked boughs with thongs of leather:
Bound were his stiff, slim feet together,
His eyes like dead stars cold and drear.
The wandering firelight drew near
And laid its wide palm, red and anxious,
On the sharp splendour of his branches,
On the white foam grown hard and sere
On flank and shoulder.
Death — hard as breast of granite boulder —
Under his lashes

Peered thro' his eyes at his life's grey ashes.
My masters twain sang songs that wove —
As they burnished hunting-blade and rifle —
A golden thread with cobweb trifle,
Loud of the chase and low of love:

"O Love! art thou a silver fish,
Shy of the line and shy of gaffing,
Which we do follow, fierce, yet laughing,
Casting at thee the light-winged wish?
And at the last shall we bring thee up
From the crystal darkness, under the cup
Of lily folden
On broad leaves golden?

"O Love! art thou a silver deer
With feet as swift as wing of swallow,
While we with rushing arrows follow?
And at the last shall we draw near
And o'er thy velvet neck cast thongs
Woven of roses, stars and songs —
New chains all moulden
Of rare gems olden?"

They hung the slaughtered fish like swords
On saplings slender; like scimitars,
Bright, and ruddied from new-dead wars,
Blazed in the light the scaly hordes.

They piled up boughs beneath the trees,
Of cedar web and green fir tassel.
Low did the pointed pine tops rustle,
The camp-fire blushed to the tender breeze.

The hounds laid dewlaps on the ground
with needles of pine, sweet, soft and rusty,
Dreamed of the dead stag stout and lusty;
A bat by the red flames wove its round.

The darkness built its wigwam walls
Close round the camp, and at its curtain
Pressed shapes, thin, woven and uncertain
As white locks of tall waterfalls.

THE READER of this "reading" is now entitled to ask: does the publication of this hitherto unknown manuscript fundamentally change the critics' view of Isabella Valancy Crawford?

In my opinion it adds to her stature and confirms her virtuosity. It illustrates that she saw herself as a narrative-philosophical poet whose role it was to define the epic aspects of immigration, settlement and pioneer life in Ontario. Further, more than any other Canadian poet of her period, Crawford is shown to be deeply aware of the social, class and moral clashes that arise in a free-enterprise society. Although perhaps she is best known and loved for her lyrics in praise of love, she was no mere lyricist. She possessed a political conscience.

This unpublished manuscript is valuable in another, literary sense. It gives a clue as to Crawford's creative method, "the poet at work". She wrote at white heat impelled by passion. The result is often wordy and even chaotic, showing little regard for syntax, spelling, punctuation or the dangers of repetition. There is clear evidence that she did spend time on revision, but it is difficult to see the rationale behind her revisions (see especially "The Dark Stag"). At times she uses inversion of subject and predicate with great force (as was true in "The Helot" and in *Malcolm's Katie*) but she relies on this rhetorical device too often. What emerges however, from this method of composition (and is it also true of *Malcolm's Katie*, which I take to be earlier than *The Hunters Twain*) is that Crawford worked on a generous scale with a broad canvas in view; and out of this wide documentation of detail and theme she allowed her imagination to lift her free into pure lyric song. She responds to the wilderness with love, not fear; and she believes that love will win, if only man will work *with* nature and not against her. In this sense Crawford is the most modern of the Confederation Poets and the most relevant for us here and now in the Seventies.

ACKNOWLEDGMENT

Acknowledgments are due to the archivist, Douglas Library, Queen's University, Kingston, for permission to search and copy the extant papers of Isabella Valancy Crawford. My grateful thanks are also due to two of my students, Francine Pelletier and Penny Petrone, for their assiduous search in newspaper archives.

In following the original text I have had to make modifications in spelling and punctuation, to suit modern practice.

D.L.

NOTES

[1] For instance, her greatest achievement in the narrative form is undoubtedly the dialect poem, *Old Spookses Pass*: a tour de force linguistically and dramatically. It is set in an imagined locale never experienced in real life by the poet, who never moved west of Ontario. Thus, long before Robert Service arrived on the scene Crawford was writing a true "western" in ballad form.

[2] As in an opera, Crawford has skilfully combined the lyric moments with the dramatic tension. There is documented evidence that she saw and heard Italian opera in Toronto.

[3] Embedded in this poem are two famous lyrics: "The Dark Stag" and "The Lily Bed". There is one unpublished lyric, "The Tent", in the same style as "The Lily Bed"; and a strong indication that the famous poem, "Said the Canoe", was part and parcel of *The Hunters Twain* manuscript.

[4] The total unfinished manuscript is some 800 lines long, in iambic pentameter, written by hand on lined sheets of legal size foolscap. The indication is that Crawford was short of paper and that she used every inch of space, crowding together section upon section. Since only a long pen-stroke separates each "piece" from another, there is as yet no way of telling whether any one "piece" is intended to be a part of the whole structure. Only in the last half is there a flowing, integrated narrative line, combined with lyrical bursts.

[5] Most curious here is the use of the word *simooms* which are found only in desert country: "hot sandwinds".

review articles

THE BEOWULF POET IS ALIVE AND WELL

Peter Stevens

AL PURDY, *Selected Poems.* McClelland & Stewart. $6.95 hardcover, $2.95 paper.

IN A BRIEF REVIEW of *The Crafte So Longe To Lerne* Eli Mandel recognized that "Purdy is clearly another beginning for Canadian poetry". Purdy himself has rejected almost all of his poetry written before the volume Mandel was reviewing, and indeed this *Selected* is chosen almost wholly from his poetry of the 1960s, the period in which he made a new beginning for himself.

In what sense is this poetry a base for new things, a foundation for a new kind of Canadian poetry? The first line of the first poem gives an indication: talking of driving his Ford through Newfoundland, Purdy writes, "My foot has pushed a fire ahead of me." George Woodcock in his personal reminiscence that serves as Introduction to this volume points out that although this appears a far-fetched metaphor, it is basic to the development of the poem. For me the phrasing of this image is a basic ingredient of Purdy's metaphoric method throughout his poetry. His poems are full of poetic compounds of this nature — "mind-light", "God's belly-scratcher", "bone rooms", a lake as "monocle eye" or "glass house" for fish — all these and more remind me of Anglo-Saxon kennings, and indeed Purdy's poetry at several levels is the equivalent within the new Canadian poetry of that first attempt to weld disparate elements into a genuine expression of the emerging Anglo-Saxon nation. So this volume creates a kind of Beowulf poet living in Ameliasburgh, poet of an emerging nation.

The Anglo-Saxon elements in the poetry do not parallel the studied use of Anglo-Saxon rhythms and forms found in some of Earle Birney's poetry, although Purdy's flexible lines certainly have the changing hesitations and speed, the sudden polarized contrasts that occur in some Anglo-Saxon alliterative poetry. Any number of Purdy poems jolt the reader from place to place and time to time:

> Alexander turns from the gates of the Ganges
> and moves with his generals and phalanx to bulldoze the Kremlin
> while the eunuch priests conspire in Assyria
> to defoliate the Vietnamese rice fields of bananas.

And in this same poem Purdy recognizes the primitive and tribal ideas in all of us: "witch-doctors dance in our blood forever", and although he traverses such enormities of space, he returns to the essential human group, coming back to his village of Ameliasburgh.

Purdy's poetry has this primitive quality, but this is not to deny its real technical sophistication and control. Like Anglo-Saxon poetry, it welds together sharply contrasting states of mind and emotional moods: all the memories of the past from the variety of races, all the alien strains grafting themselves onto the poetry. Purdy's is a haunted poetry — the word "ghost" and its variants keep cropping up. The memories contained in a poem can come from within Canada and from without: in "The Cariboo Horses" there are the Kiangs, onagers and quagga as well as the North American Indian horses and the ghosts. There are the ancestral memories dredged from the country north of Belleville, upper Hastings County and Ameliasburgh and Roblin Lake. But there is also a personal investment in the past found in the ghosts of all the other Purdys somehow contained in the land. Somewhere his grandfather exists and will tell him (and us):

> the way it was
> without no streets
> or names of places here
> nothin but moonlight boy
> nothin but woods.

This sense of involvement with the country is robustly manifest in the Arctic poems, not expressed in terms of simple glorification and awestruck wonder (though that tone is sometimes there) but rather in an ambivalent attitude towards his experience of the country in his travels through it, and this again is reminiscent of Anglo-Saxon poetry. There is the attraction of travel, the glowing description of scenes:

> the sun a hovering golden bird
> nothing moves
> soft clouds wait
> like floating houses in the sky
> and the storm beyond the horizon
> waiting . . .

But there is also the fear of travel, never knowing where he is going, simply growing older travelling through time as well as space. He finds an image of himself and man in the constantly migrating birds: "by what bonds/are we always exiles?" And yet his relations with space tend to lead him into notions of transcendence, as travel takes him past the limits of the human condition, expressed simply in "The Turning Point" as he moves into the new space of the Arctic, or stated exhilaratingly when he follows the hockey players as they break out to skate

> thru the smoky end boards out
> of sight and climbing up the appalachian
> highlands
> and racing breast to breast across
> laurentian barrens
> over hudson's diamond bay and down the
> treeless tundra where
> stopping isn't feasible or possible or lawful.

In these transcendent moments he comes to terms with Canada and the universe through which he travels: "our opponents never Geography/or distance".

Yet the land constantly looms large over man's transience and this mixture of beauty, awe and fear in the presence of our space is very much a part of Purdy's poetry:

> the iron north
> beyond the last streetlight . . .
> biting the stammered name
> to pieces . . .
> in a man's cold mouth
> the edge of our loneliness.

This polarized view of the land is like the stance some Anglo-Saxon poets take. Purdy too sees the land as harsh and stubborn, "the country of our defeat". Yet the poetry is full of abrupt flashes of observed detail of nature and the poet's delight as he sees "cedars grow pale green candles" and

> the running animals gather their bodies
> together
> and pour themselves upward
> into the tips of falling leaves

and birds

> perched on rubbery muskeg
> like blue teacups
> or lost brown mittens.

So in spite of the unyielding quality of the land Purdy persists in focussing on spring, with himself always cast in the role of the god of spring with "both hands high/under the skirts of the world".

Still, the elegiac note (again like Anglo-Saxon poetry) resounds through this volume and the central polarity of the poetry is the transience yet persistence of man, the vitality of life in the face of inevitable death: "we live with death but it's life we die with". Perhaps Purdy's best poems are the elegies — "Lament For The Dorsets", "Old Alex", the poems about the dead of Roblin's Mills, "Evergreen Cemetery" (and Purdy has a predilection for graveyards). Yet his elegies do in fact show a triumph, that common human persistence, the persistence of those small Arctic trees whose roots touch permafrost. Their smallness he mocks but he turns on himself because their doggedness is to be admired: "to make sure the species does not die . . . they use death to remain alive".

That kind of courage is the heroism Purdy celebrates, not the epic exploits of the Anglo-Saxon poets. Purdy is conscious that man is his own worst enemy, but he sees man trying to live by ideals and usually failing, yet at least he can admire men like Castro, Che and Kennedy for having those overwhelming beliefs. But he also admires the smaller men: the farmers like Sisyphus, who are continually defeated but who also continually return to the struggle, like Alex whose meanness was transcendent, like his mother biting hard on death, like the 83-year-old Jackson in the Arctic, like the hockey players with their inability to overtake "a hard black rubber disc", like Percy Lawson haggling over a lousy nickel.

This focus on men and on himself is something outside the Anglo-Saxon aura of his poetry. Self-consciousness is a much more modern trait. Purdy is very much a character in his own poetry and often he shows the modern poet's concern with poetry itself. The subject-matter of his poetry at times is simply the process of the poem itself and my one regret about this volume is that it doesn't contain Purdy's best poetic statement of his poetics, "Metrics". We get to know Purdy as man and poet much more than we will ever know the Beowulf poet. And the difference is most marked in the humorous poems, for as Woodcock points out he is "the poet of comedy". At times the comic spirit can get the better of him, and some poems are ruined for me by the cheap wisecrack, the too easy gag. But this is not really apparent in the poems selected for this volume.

And after all it may be the persona of the poet as he appears in the poetry that counts most of all, the poet telling us about himself as Canadian, as traveller, as poet, as man. The man and his country become one:

after a while the eyes digest a country and
the belly perceives a mapmaker's vision
in dust and dirt on the face and hands here
its smell drawn deep thru the nostrils down
to the lungs and spurts thru bloodstream
campaigns in the lower intestine.

Here is the poet who by defining himself in relation to this country and the world has told us something about all of us. If Purdy didn't exist, it would have been necessary for Canadians to invent him. But fortunately he does exist and this *Selected* is the best proof we have so far of his existence as Canadian and as poet.

DIFFICULT SANITIES

Andreas Schroeder

DENNIS LEE, *Civil Elegies and Other Poems.* Anansi.

IF I RECALL it correctly, it was A. E. Housman who used to get so nervous when he ran up against a good line of poetry that he'd cut himself shaving. Since I wear a beard I don't have that problem, but I do admit to a peculiar sense of alarm on those rare occasions when the poetry suddenly gets up on its hindquarters and begins to paw the air. I had that feeling from virtually cover to cover when I first read Dennis Lee's *Civil Elegies and Other Poems,* and having reread the book many times since, the sense of red alert continues to persist. This is indeed an exceptional book of poems.

I think what I appreciate above all in *Civil Elegies* is Lee's forthright honesty. Not honesty because he is incapable of lying, not honesty in a sticky confessional way, but honesty in that he admits that lies exist in his own perception; he doesn't pretend the answers (where they seem available) aren't suspect, he admits in fact that even the problems as he perceives them may be bogus. For there is an unavoidable paradox involved in the business of a man attempting to get an aerial view of the human condition while continuing his race on the ground; somehow he must become observer and participant simultaneously, and, while all certainty is suspended, nevertheless live without pause by the seat of his pants, whether they dress him like the Emperor's new clothes or his everyday, no-nonsense fruit-of-the-looms. In *Civil Elegies* Lee shows that he not only understands the inevitability of such ambiguity, but demonstrates himself to be capable of conveying it equally well:

Supper is over, I sit
holed up in my study. I have no
answers again and I do not trust the
simplicities, nor Sibelius Park;
I am not to be trusted with
them.

But I rest in one thing. The play of
dusk and atmospherics, the
beautiful rites of
synaesthesia, are not to be believed;
but that grisly counter-presence, the
warfare in the lockers,
myself against myself, the years of
desperate affirmation and the dank
manholes of ego which stink when
they

come free at last
— the seamy underside of every
stiff
iconic self — which are hard which
are welcome
are no more real than that unreal man who
stood and took them in;
are no more real than the fake
epiphanies,
though they ache to
bring them down.

For they are all given, they are not
to be believed but constantly
they are being
given, moment by moment, the icons
and what they
suppress, here and
here and though they are not real
they have their own real
presence, like a mirror in the grass and
in the
bodies we live in. . . .

In this book one feels as if the poems are themselves the exploration, the blow-by-blow account of Lee's search for direction and a workable sanity. Almost all are written in the present tense, and almost all include within themselves, uncompromisingly, all the contrary forces and arguments Lee finds himself capable of perceiving, regardless whether those forces might quite possibly overwhelm the poem and inexorably neutralize whatever tentative hopes have been smuggled in between the lines. That too is part of the honesty of the book. Throughout, there is consistent evidence of a lot of damned hard work, by a man who refuses to make himself, or his reader, the victim of short-cuts, who refuses to let the surge of the poetry run away with him. One senses the strain to untangle, to decode the cryptogrammatic, to melt away the deceptive fat build-up around words:

. . . So lady
it is not that
I hanker for new beginnings —
confession and
copout, we know that game, it's as real
as the
whisky, the fights, the pills.
And I do not start this now because the
grass is green,
and not because in front of us the
path makes stately patterns down the
slope to Grenadier
and all the
random ambling of the couples
hangs
like courtly bygones in the
shining air;
the old longing is there, it always will
but I will not
allow it.

But there is
you, lady. I
want you to
be, and I want you.
Lie here on the grass beside
me,
hear me tie my tongue in
knots.
I can't talk brave palaver like
I did 10 years ago — I
used up all the words — but now I
sense my centre in these new
gropings, wary, near yours lady,
coming to
difficult sanities.
I want to be here.

As the title indicates, the book is divided into two parts, the first of which is comprised of a selection of more recent poems, while the second is a rewrite of the earlier book *Civil Elegies* which Lee published in a limited edition in 1968. The first section is private, is personal both in tone and voice; poems charting the difficult births and deaths of domestic warfare, the minuscule progress, the bitter relapses, the infinitely slow and painful process of recapturing one's life after having squandered the length and breadth of it to strangers for a song. For this is one of Lee's major points, of which he speaks with both sadness and alarm: we've handed over the control of our lives to others, we've become suckers for the ad-men dangling fake gaudy baubles

before our eyes; we've been so thoroughly side-tracked so often, we couldn't tell the difference between what we really wanted and what we eventually settled for if our lives depended on it. Needless to say, and unfortunately for us all, such discernment is of course exactly what they do depend on, and so what we have here is the advocacy of a sort of personal buy-back programme which parallels our similar national difficulty and dovetails neatly with the second half of the book, the very public-voiced and rewritten *Civil Elegies*. For the step which irresistibly follows the reoccupation of one's own consciousness is the urge to repatriate one's own geography to settle it in, and here too, the recapture will be painful and slow; Canada is already so firmly in the hands of foreigners that her situation seems every bit as grim and dubious as the personal ones of her citizens:

> Many were born in Canada, and living
> unlived lives they died
> of course but died truncated, stunted,
> never at
> home in native space and not yet
> citizens of a human body of kind. And it is
> Canada
> that specialized in this deprivation.
> Therefore the spectres arrive,
> congregating
> in bitter droves, thick in the April
> sunlight,
> accusing us and we are no different, though
> you would not expect
> the furies assembled in hogtown and ring
> me round, invisible,
> demanding what time of our lives we wait
> for till we shall start to be. . . .

The *Civil Elegies* address themselves directly or indirectly to the entire nation, largely on matters of national independence, national consciousness, national sanity and national purpose. Nine extended poems comprise this section, each pouring through 2 or 3 pages of long, rambling lines. They're formidable, quite without parallel in Canadian literature, and though I feel that if the book has any difficulties, most of them may be traced to this section, there is an intellectual candour, an urgency, in fact a compelling desperation about them which leaves one virtually exhausted by the end of the ninth poem. Lee plays for high stakes here, wrestling with both private and public angels for nothing less than salvation, and with a 26-page battlefield to do it in, the struggle quickly widens and deepens into bulldozer proportions which are overwhelming from any angle. But here again, though the approach is of necessity a bit more meandering than in the individual first poems, Lee keeps a tight control on the proceedings, aware that in the heat generated by such a large-scale enterprise, unacceptably synthetic alloys are too often the result:

> I know
> the world is not enough; a woman
> straightens
> and turns from the sink and asks her life the
> question, why should she
> fake it? and after a moment she
> shrugs, and returns to the sink. A man's
> adrenalin takes hold, at a meeting he makes
> his point, and pushes and sees that
> things will happen now . . . and then in the
> pause he knows
> there are endless things in the world and
> this is not for real.

There isn't enough space available to discuss the changes Lee has made in this new version of the Elegies, except perhaps to say that the transformation is extensive, not particularly in terms of the content, which is the least changed, but in terms of the language and the inflection. What was formerly too often a thin and uneven rhetoric has been smoothed out into a better modulated, more assured voice; the colloquialisms which once stood al-

most bashfully amidst the formalities have now become quite at ease with their surroundings and work along without any undue fuss — the incident of Chartier blowing himself up in the parliament john is an example.

Lee has, in short, quite literally outdone himself in this book, and the result is important not only as a work of art, but as a working record of one man's persistent attempts to regain his footing on the roller-coaster route towards rebirth. It's like a piece of sculpture someone has had the brains not to encase in glass; it demands to be used.

CIRCUMVENTING DRAGONS

Ralph Gustafson

DAVID MCFADDEN, *Intense Pleasure*. McClelland & Stewart, $4.95.
PETER STEVENS, *a few myths*. Talonbooks, $2.50.
FRED COGSWELL, *The Chains of Lilliput*. Fiddlehead Poetry Books, $0.50.
GWENDOLYN MACEWEN, *The Armies of the Moon*. Macmillan, $2.95.

EACH BOOK is to be judged within its own terms. It is the critic's part to accede. Distasteful to Robert Bridges were both the subject and treatment of Hopkins' *The Wreck of the Deutschland*. With his warning that the poem stood in the front of the book he presented like a great dragon folded in the gate to forbid all entrance, he nevertheless presented the poetry to the public.

Reluctantly but within the dutiful demands of this tradition, the above books, not completely but nearly, are presented. The dragons which had to be circumvented were either egocentricity or sloppy artistry or both.

Entry into Hopkins' book was difficult because of prosody. Entry into Mr. McFadden's *Intense Pleasure* is easy because of its lack of it; so easy that the adjective of his title is struck out of existence. I present Mr. McFadden's book with difficulty and irritation. Before setting out to assess this further witness to the state of Canadian poetry in the books sent to me for review, I had been reading Wallace Stevens; I was receiving immortal wounds from the right and left. Mr. McFadden's verse left me total and unscathed. Previously I had been irritated. Last year (Mr. McFadden writes a book a year, I gather), in 1971, he presented a book called *Poems Worth Knowing*. The title embodies the unspoken assumption of every poet who publishes, but he usually has the decency to leave the saying of it to the critical reader. "Not again," I groaned. I was already fed up with the colossal inter-adulation carried on by our Little Press groups. "All right, skip the groans," I browbeat myself. "Here might be Canada's Ezra Pound, Canada's John Clare!" Poems worth knowing? Here is one:

After breakfast
  I listen to music
    or it listens to me
& watch an airplane flying over —

So. But he might have inadvertently succeeded in hiding his great thoughts. I read another poem; about his little daughter eating her own shit. I persisted; children can be adorable. I read others which say that Kerouac is the author's all-time hero and that Michael Ondaatje is a "living legend", I thought, "Well, the verse in this book does resemble the 'spontaneous prose' Kerouac advocated; it does a hatchet job on almost everything, rhythm, music, the works; but if McFadden gets intense pleasure from playing tennis with the net down, leave him alone with his love match. On the Ondaatje theme, I thought, "Mike will get him off that hook." Then it dawned on me. The book is a put-on! I am a dolt. This is comedy. But no. The author's introduction tells us that the author writes poems seriously,

> with sincere attempts at truthfulness, accuracy, meaningfulness & self-discovery.

The self-discovery would eventually take care of itself, I felt; and the guy is truthful — but that's the trouble, therein lies the trouble: he believes that if he tells the truth he has written a poem. Almost as bad, he mistakes domesticity for profundity. He should go out and listen to Richard Strauss' *Sinfonia domestica.*

Nevertheless, I opened *Intense Pleasure.* I read a poem called "Eight Inches of Snow." Mr. McFadden was struggling with himself, asking,

> Should I allow myself the pleasure of writing poems
> when the idea of being a poet sickens me?

I couldn't help him out without denying him pleasure. I turned elsewhere in the book. I read happily that Mr. McFadden understood Wallace Stevens' dump; one of his poems says that instead of his

> writing far into the night . . . I should be spending time
> with real people with ugly fat & hairy ears.

His "Meaningless Midnight Musings" go on to declare:

> I'm no ant. I'm not trying to build a perfect society.
> I'm all gross rotting imperfections of selfishness, I'm interested in my own personal world.

I recommend a dose of Ezra Pound.

Peter Stevens as poetry editor of *The Canadian Forum* must be hard put to keep his perceptions about him. Never has Canadian verse been so dedicated to solipsism, and he must be battered by it. Judged by his new book, he pretty well has kept his perceptions about him. But being perceptive and changing perception into poetry are two different things. His new book, "a few myths", following its title, must be put in lower case. The book is far less like a hawk than a handsaw: deliberate and without flight. The patterned and exploded type on some of the pages is easily framed into sequence. On other pages, the conventional lines are wordy and this is the trouble. This is wordy poetry, willed into existence. The linguistic counterpoint is everywhere; the vital tension is lacking. The result is expository, not creative. The poem "Saskatchewan" will do to illustrate. The poem begins:

> All skylocked, this enormous flatness holds
> Like a prehistoric beast a long machine
> Angularly unheroic.

The poem concludes:

> We'll all drop into deepening well of sky
> Which, patronizing all at last, will stoop down
> And neatly folding all the edges first of all
> Will pick the prairie up, to swallow it whole
> Like an oyster . . .

and so on, without inner tensions, music, persuasion. Our awareness is verbal:

> The river, Lethed by ice . . .
> numbed by ice's tourniquet . . .
> Crocodile logs sniff . . .
> sunflowers . . . prance . . .
> insect Altamira . . .

The title poem escapes the linguistic fatality; so does most of the Vietnam "Warming Up, Tuning In." But the book, and my unassigned look at the sequential new one called "breadcrusts and glass", witness only a pleasant-enough, unmoving, deliberate verse.

I wrote a review of Fred Cogswell's first book. Twenty years ago? Now comes an eighth book, *The Chains of Lilliput*. It issues from the same press which is flooding us with other books by other poets, fledglings and otherwise, that probably would not have appeared except for the guiding, generous hand of Cogswell. As all hopeful poets know, the reference is to the Fiddlehead Poetry Books which Fred Cogswell edits. The series is the contemporary counterpart of the Ryerson Chap-Books edited long ago by Lorne Pierce. Like that older series, the present one is helpful and unselfish and productive and far too prolific, indiscriminate and genial. Its benevolent conservatism combined with the way-out indiscrimination of the self-adulatory Group presses, the togetherness makes one long for the days when it was *hard* to get published in Canada. If genius was stifled in those days at least it was less brutal than the present overkill.

One remembers with pleasure much of Cogswell's poetry. The latest book is genial and unpretentious; and, alas, flat and of startling linguistic sogginess. "A red-blood moon low-hangs the wood / against time's ruthless, slow decay." Other poems sound like that distorted prose currently named "found poems" — as if the adhesion of the word "poems" could rescue the discovered from its assigned vulgarity. Cogswell agrees that poetry won't result from plodding

> through Hansard
> seeking found poems.

But he really should not rhyme "dawn" with "corn" even if his rhyme is trying not to be found out.

Mostly these days Pegasus pulls a hack. But not always. Way back in 1963 (or is that yesterday?) Gwendolyn MacEwen wrote that as the horizons of the world widen for her, "the poetry moved parallel, shifting, forming new complexities and sudden simplicities." Mostly her work is "to chalk out quickly the peril of beauty." As her work has progressed, however, there has appeared a dangerous tendency to devote everything to inward complexity; to confine repetitive communication to the demon of her darker self, the red beast who moves her blood where there is civil war. The pursuit is carried even into an elegy on someone else. Her poetry, at those times, is as egocentric as a dream.

That Miss MacEwen is aware of this danger is proved (and proved beautifully) by her novel, *King of Egypt, King of Dreams*. The theme of the novel is of the wreckage which a dream imposes. The plot is based on the heresy of Akhnaten, Pharaoh of Egypt. But inner existence rather than outward excitement is the true battleground. And so it is with her new book of poems, *The Armies of the Moon*. The inward voyages are continued, to shattered dreams and primordial mysteries, the lens

turns in to the vivid zero
of your dreams,
the place where nightmares
burst like bladders.

Not too happy a simile — and there is other evidence of the strained metaphors which have marked the author's work from the beginning. In her latest book we find it in her fables of the seamstress, of the unseen film projector run by a cruel Technician, and especially in the coyness of her Vacuum Cleaner: "I dreamt I was vacuuming the universe" (Yes, males have the counterpart to this female domain).

What does not help these fables is a new lowering of the level of speech into the colloquial. This may bring relief from the persistent uptight inner world but it fatally tramples its reality. And does witness literature, those dealings with the temporal world, have to descend to flat statement?

But Miss MacEwen is poet. The expository is obliterated and we have such poems as "Hypnos",

and the Enemy is where he always was —
in the bleak lunar landscapes of our mirrors.

Above all, she writes her series of Arcana wherein the return is to her ancient Egypt, to the lovely Meritaton and the hapless Smenkhare. The moving lyricism of these nine poems is of the first intensity and only Gwendolyn MacEwen could have made us this gift.

VICTIMIZATION OR SURVIVAL

Phyllis Grosskurth

MARGARET ATWOOD, *Surfacing*. McClelland & Stewart, $6.95.

IN HER FIRST NOVEL, *The Edible Woman*, Margaret Atwood seemed unable to effect a resolution between a novel of manners and an expression of her essential vision. With *Surfacing*, she has brilliantly succeeded in creating a narrative style which fuses content and form — a quality of prose comfortably close to the diction of her poetry.

I said "It's a heron. You can't eat them." I couldn't tell how it had been done, bullet, smashed with a stone, hit with a stick. This would be a good place for herons, they would come to fish in the shallow water, standing on one leg and striking with the long spear bill. They must have got it before it had time to rise.

This central passage from *Surfacing* summarizes themes that have informed her five books of poetry: anger at wanton destruction; the dehumanization of people to the point where the crucifixion of other creatures elicits only a morbid eagerness to record it; and the supine resignation of the witnesses to the desecration.

Surfacing is about victimization — both external and self-imposed. Atwood has already written about it in many poems, particularly in one she calls "The trappers" in *The Animals in That Country*:

The trappers, trapped
between the steel jaws of their answerless
dilemma, their location,

follow, stop, stare down
at dead eyes

In *Surfacing* the narrator travels north to search for her father, a recluse botanist, who has been reported missing from the isolated island which was once her home. She is accompanied by a married couple, David and Anna ("She's my best friend, my best woman friend; I've known her two months") and Joe, a potter with whom she has been living for a short time. The others have offered to go with her because they are making an improvised film called *Random Shots* in which they attempt to impale the bizarre vagaries of existence.

The tripartite structuring of the novel is an essential key to an understanding of the developing self-awareness of the unnamed narrator. The first part is recorded in the present sense because she has lost her temporal and emotional hearings. The mythologized Canadian landscape becomes a metaphor for something that somehow got mislaid along the way — innocence, security, peace. Her father had once said that there was nothing in the north but the past, so perhaps this journey will be a re-charting of time past. Possibly she can erect a marker on the spot where her head had been severed from her heart.

Everything is disturbingly different until they reach the island. Here she takes over efficiently and naturally because as a child she had memorized its rules for survival, exemplified by the manuals kept in the cottage — *How To Stay Alive in the Bush, Animal Tracks and Signs, The Woods in Winter.* At first the others find everything "neat"; in fact, for a while it is so much of a holiday that they decide to stay on for another week. Absorbed in their own hedonism, it never occurs to them to consult their "hostess" who is withdrawing from them to a point where she feels a menacing sense of entrapment by a decision over which she had no control.

Part II reverts to the past tense as the characters, now truly in extremis, begin to reveal the fear that fills their hollowness. The "armour" (a reiterated image) with which they have fortified themselves in the city, cracks into alarming fissures. Anna continues to apply the protective "vizor" of her make-up, but the true desperation of her marriage to David emerges in a situation where they can no longer cope with their ever-changing rules of who is to play victim and who victimizer. The narrator tries to continue to work at the "career" she had been persuaded to adopt in the city — an illustrator of translations of children's stories. Her fabrications are now distorted and grotesque monsters.

Despite her longing for solitude in which to pursue her quest, her companions are necessary because they help her to identify the enemy. David continues the ritualistic gesture of shaking his fist at the Americans fishing out the lake ("Bloody fascist pigs"), but "she" begins to see that he and the other Canadians are indistinguishable from the Americans in dress, manner, and speech: they are the real destroyers with their slogans, their laminated equipment, and their indifference to the creeping universal disease symbolized by the dying white birches.

Her relationship with Joe also undergoes a series of changing attitudes. He had first been attracted to her because she seemed so "cool", so completely acquiescent in non-commitment. His physical attractiveness and his work are the

only things that define him. She loathes his ugly pots, mutilated and slashed with holes so that she can't even put flowers in them because "the water would run out through the rips." Their basement apartment filled with these objects is an appropriate setting for aborted fertility. Joe, too, begins to lose his nerve. In order to seize some sort of security, he suggests that they get married. When she rejects him, his moodiness stalks her like a lurking predator.

Against this background of alienated relationships, she withdraws into her furtive search for her father. A rationalist, he had believed everything could be explained; a botanist, he admitted nothing that could not be classified. Accordingly she searches through his numerous diagrammed papers for a key to his condition and his whereabouts. Eventually she finds some drawings of Indian rock-paintings. Her first reaction is that he has gone mad; but when she finds a letter from an American academic, she realizes that her father had been abetting him in photographing the paintings as classifiable artifacts. But the level of the lake has been raised by the power company, so she has to dive deep below the surface of the water where she encounters only a floating image of death. Later her father's body is recovered, weighted down by the camera which is as alien to this environment as David's random shots.

There is no longer any necessity for pretence; and Anna now openly describes her as "inhuman" because she has refused to play the game according to their rules. Having accepted the fact of her father's death, she can view her life in terms of the present tense. Redemption lies through expiation, exorcism, and fertilization. After rejecting Joe in Part II, she deliberately lets him impregnate her. Then, just as they are about to depart for the city, she unrolls the film into the lake and flees in a canoe, a refusal to re-accomodate herself to rules and values she can never absorb. It is, in fact, a more affirmative act than Marion's consumption of her surrogate self at the end of *The Edible Woman*.

Left alone on the island, she destroys all the records of her past. Most important of all, she realizes that she has been looking for the wrong person. It is her mother, with her instinctual rapport with what is truly natural who should have been the object of her search. Previously she had described her mother as either fifty years ahead or ten thousand years behind her time — a true earth-mother. It is she who provides her with a legacy for the future. By returning to the primitive life of the woods into which her mother has been re-incarnated, she catches a glimpse of what she might do with her life. She had denied her essential nature when she killed life by an abortion in the city. Victimization is no longer inevitable. Perhaps survival — and something more — can be achieved with Joe who is still "only half-formed."

This novel — like all Atwood's writing — is so richly complex that a review of this length can do no more than sketch some of its aspects. Exploration in depth can be achieved only by complete immersion in her work. When one surfaces, the world looks startlingly new.

WRITER AND SUBJECT

Herbert Rosengarten

ANDREAS SCHROEDER, *The Late Man*. The Sono Nis Press, 1972. $6.95.
AUDREY THOMAS, *Munchmeyer* and *Prospero on the Island*. The Bobbs-Merril Company, Inc. $6.95.

CONTEMPORARY CANADIAN WRITERS, conscious perhaps of a need to free themselves from the taint of literary colonialism, are in the forefront of innovation, ready — perhaps too ready — to shed old skins and assume new ones. Andreas Schroeder's collection of stories *The Late Man* provides a good example of some of the virtues and the vices of this experimental spirit. He has set out to create a new style in short fiction, rejecting (according to the publishers' blurb) "the 19th century quality of reality characteristic of much of the literature hiding under the protection of 'Canadian Realism'." Disregarding the questionable logic of such a statement, it is true that Mr. Schroeder has an acute sense of the "unreality", the nightmare lurking beneath the comfortable conventions of our daily lives; and his rather disturbing view of life is conveyed in stories which reject the usual conventions of character and plot in favour of Kafka-esque non-sequiturs and the techniques of surrealism. The result is a collection which provokes and stimulates in some places, but perplexes and irritates in others.

The stories which are easiest to describe are those which contain "content" along traditional lines. "The Theft" relates the experience of a man who wakes up in his apartment to find two burglars removing his belongings; and when he attempts to resist, they show him that all his things bear the name of one of the "thieves." Here a dramatic situation and sharply-defined characters are created swiftly and effectively; and there is just enough of a twist to give a disturbing overtone to the story. "The Connection" uses the device of linguistic confusion to describe the journey of a Mr. Derringer, bound for New York: at each place he arrives, a message awaits him — or is it for him? for his name suffers a sea-change during his travels, from Derringer to Derring, Farronger, Garroncton and Garotta; and the messages send him from New York to Mexico, and finally Peru, where the story leaves him, now addressed as Señor Tarotina, travelling by donkey-cart towards another identity. Other stories resist summary, because content and structure are so intimately connected, as in "The Meeting," where what is apparently a speech to an audience on the subject of suicide, turns into a discourse on the artifice of narration and the possibility of the narrator and the audience (or reader) changing places. There is subtlety in these stories, and there is power; yet even as one recognizes their force and complexity, one experiences a certain discomfort caused by something other than the sombre vision they present. The problem is that, though each story is effective in creating a sense of the mysterious, in upsetting narrative conventions or expectations, as a group they seem to

blur together in the mind, to become echoes of each other, one story told many times. Perhaps this is the result of Mr. Schroeder's style, which varies little throughout the book: the cool, controlled prose and the flat, unemotional tone create a uniformity of impression, a sameness reinforced by the choice in most cases of a first-person narrator lacking any distinctive qualities. The urge to experiment also seems to become an end in itself, so that what we are sometimes asked to applaud is the ingenuity and skill of the performance, while content in the usual sense is of secondary importance. But despite these failings, Mr. Schroeder writes with commendable precision and economy; and his ability to create haunting images in a few words gives his writing an almost poetic intensity at times.

Audrey Thomas' new book might also be designated "experimental;" but the surreal and symbolic in her work are subordinated to larger patterns of dramatic action and psychological penetration. Mrs. Thomas uses such devices as the diary "confession", dream sequences, and waking fantasies to convey the spiritual confusion of one Will Munchmeyer — graduate student, *père de famille*, and frustrated novelist. Munchmeyer's sense of failure, and his revulsion from an empty marriage, drive him away from his family, in the first instance to a diary, where he confides his loathing for his wife. He sees himself as a modern Gulliver, trapped in the land of the giants, and confronted by the sweaty pores of a merciless Glumdalclitch; but an epigraph from the *Inferno* suggests that Mrs. Thomas wants us rather to see Munchmeyer as a latter-day wanderer traversing the circles of Hell, and moving up towards less-than-divine versions of Eden and Beatrice. At the end of the first section, having parted from his family, Munchmeyer is alone and depressed, and his state is mirrored in the faulty gasoline advertisement which flashes "Super-Hell" at him out of the darkness. The second section presents a dream episode in which Munchmeyer is captured and imprisoned in a department store, where a mysterious young man tortures him with his own fears and inadequacies, until he manages to take refuge in the Mothers' Room. The final section, entitled "Resurrection: Mr. and Mrs. Lodestone", describes Munchmeyer's return to confidence and self-respect, helped by the understanding and affection of Maria Lodestone, housewife and mother of a young baby. The book's mixture of psychological and religious symbolism is rather crudely summarised here; but in structure and in narrative detail, *Munchmeyer* has the trappings of Christian epic. However, the parallels are not forced or mechanical; Munchmeyer is allowed to find his Eden, but he is still *l'homme moyen sensuel*, troubled by unsatisfied longings; he finds his way to Maria, but she is someone else's wife, and he must solace himself with fantasies, or with the grosser charms of Mavis Marvell, queen of Crescent Beach. Munchmeyer is a sympathetic character because his rehabilitation does not make him a saint: he continues to indulge in adolescent daydreams, in which he is by turns the lonely but successful writer, the pathetic down-and-out, the cruel and inspired artist; and his entanglement with Mavis hints at future tribulations — a return to the Super-Hell he thought he had escaped.

His creator, the novelist "Miranda Archer", tells her own story in *Prospero*

on the Island; in a journal covering seven or eight months, she relates the daily events of her life during the period of *Munchmeyer*'s composition. The strongly circumstantial quality of her narration, with its many allusions to details of British Columbian life and topography, suggests an autobiographical basis for the story, so that we may be tempted to see it as a kind of "Writer's Diary" rather than as another novel in its own right. It is certainly a highly personal account; but the character of Miranda is too completely realised to be regarded simply as a voice for the thoughts of the real author. In some ways she is a female counterpart to Munchmeyer: much more sophisticated, sensitive, self-critical; but, like him, haunted by fears of inadequacy, potential failure, departing youth. Munchmeyer retreats into fantasy, a world where he is, temporarily at least, in control; Miranda has taken a more positive step by retreating to an island, but there she still finds herself wracked by guilt and uncertainty. Her creative powers are renewed and her self-confidence partly restored by her relationship with an artist who has also retreated to the island to work, and whom she dubs "Prospero". The artist comes to exercise a decisive influence over her imagination — as well as arousing her sexual awareness — and she is drawn to him by his calm, methodical ordering of things. Despite his importance to Miranda, Prospero remains a rather shadowy figure: Miranda is more concerned with the analysis of her own responses to him than with the creation of a rounded portrait; but this externality endows him with an enigmatic quality, something which presumably Mrs. Thomas wanted to convey.

The literary parallels with Shakespeare's Prospero are few, and deliberately played down; the characters themselves discuss whether their island contains a Caliban, but reject the idea. Nor is there much stress laid on the device of a novel about a novel, or on the similarities between Munchmeyer and his creator, though we are often reminded of him by Miranda's self-questionings or her need of reassurance by one less anxiety-ridden than herself. The relationships between a writer and his subject, between "reality" and artifice, are, one suspects, of as much concern to Mrs. Thomas as they are to Mr. Schroeder; but in *Munchmeyer* and *Prospero* their importance is hinted at rather than made a dominant theme: they contribute another level of possible meaning to a broader whole. Mr. Schroeder's impatience with traditional techniques is quite understandable; but in fiction, stylistic innovation does not necessarily lead to clearer vision, nor is the search for deeper truths made easier by the rejection of "realism" — Canadian or any other. Mrs. Thomas has wisely chosen a middle course between tradition and innovation, and her writing is the richer for it.

books in review

PUBLISHING WITH INSPIRATION

PAUL-ANDRE BIDEAU, *D'un mur à l'autre.* MADELEINE OUELLETTE-MICHALSKA, *Le Jeu des saisons.* YVES THERIAULT, *Le dernier havre.* YVES THERIAULT, *Cul de sac.* CLAUDE JASMIN, *Et puis tout est silence.* All Les Editions de l'Actuelle. n.p.

DESPITE THE AMERICAN TAKEOVER of two large firms amid great lamentations in the last few months, Canadian publishing may well be in a healthier state than ever before. The dramatic increase in small presses, each of which seems to be operating with more imagination, courage and inspiration than the old established houses ever had, is surely a good sign. And what is perhaps most encouraging is that the phenomenon is taking place simultaneously in both English and French Canada.

Jean-Guy Pilon's Editions de l'Actuelle is one of the latest arrivals in the Quebec publishing world. The format, cover illustrations and printing of the books Pilon has so far released are uniformly excellent. L'Actuelle has apparently adopted the policy of balancing promising new novelists — Paul-André Bideau and Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska — against established writers such as Yves Thériault and Claude Jasmin.

Bideau's *D'un mur à l'autre* is an experimental novel consisting mainly of two monologues. Madeleine Ouellette-Michalska's *Le Jeu des saisons* is the story of of the thwarted love of a young Montreal girl and a French immigrant, set against the climatic correlative of the Quebec winter and summer. Both novels explore the ancient problem of communication between individuals, and both reveal genuine sensitivity to language and character, although with the uneven success to be expected of beginning writers.

By contrast, Yves Thériault's two books, *Le dernier havre* and *Cul de sac*, and Claude Jasmin's *Et puis tout est silence* (first published in 1959, then again in 1965) are marked by polished and even craftsmanship. Thériault's capacity to produce book after book (some 40 volumes to date) of undiminishing quality has long been one of the marvels of Quebec writing.

Jasmin's and Thériault's three novels all employ the same basic technique — flashbacks by a narrator who is at the point of death. *Cul de sac* is about a Quebec engineer who achieves international success and fame, then loses everything because of alcoholism. His monologue is delivered while he is lying helpless at the bottom of a ravine, gazing into the sky at a hawk which periodically dives and tears away part of his flesh.

Thematically the book is far from original. It is based on Jacques Maritain's idea of "*le don de soi*" — giving of the self — which has inspired a number of Canadian novelists, Robert Charbonneau and Morley Callaghan in particular. The protagonist, like so many of his counterparts in Canadian fiction, is psychologically deformed by his repressive upbringing — "Etait-ce un vieux fond de jansénisme qui lui imposait de nous voir comme des enfants plutôt que des hommes?" Quebec Jansenism again rears its ugly head. The hero is trapped by life, by the realization of his own mediocrity as a human being and by the existential

vacuum. In other words, he is almost the archetypical Canadian hero. The best tribute one can accord to Thériault's skill as a novelist, then, is that he is able to take such time-worn material and still produce a fascinating book.

The performance is repeated in *Le dernier havre*, which deals with the common problem of enforced retirement after an active life. An old fisherman, living in uselessness with his son and condescending daughter-in-law, decides to recondition secretly an abandoned fishing boat and to die as he has lived rather than waste away. Reading Thériault's two novels one after the other, it is intriguing to see him move from the mind of a world-traveled, well-educated engineer more or less in the prime of life to that of an old man who knows only his little village and the sea. The author has immense powers of empathy. The engineer rings true in every respect, and so does the old fisherman. Vocabulary, diction, particular details of the trade, psychology and atmosphere are all convincing. In *Le dernier havre* one can smell the inviting pure salt air, and one can feel the mounting excitement of the old man as his boat takes shape for the final voyage. One can also appreciate the hero's observations on the small-town hypocrisy surrounding him. Old age provides the freedom of complete honesty; he can chuckle to himself when his daughter is scandalized by the advent of the mini-skirt and observe that it is about time a man could see how these gorgeous young things are put together.

The protagonist of Claude Jasmin's *Et puis tout est silence* looks back on his life as he is lying pinned under the beams of a collapsed barn. Descriptions of the working-class areas of Montreal are rich and accurate. Also convincing is Jasmin's portrayal of a young Quebecker reacting against his family, his acquaintances, his society and the religion which had been thrust upon him. He is a French-Canadian Holden Caulfield, searching for meaning and rejecting what he discovers to be phoney. But just as he is physically trapped under a pile of heavy lumber, he is psychologically trapped under the collapsed edifice of his past. When finally he reaches the point of prayer, he addresses himself to "un Dieu que, cette nuit, j'invoque à ma guise en lui disant du fond du coeur que sa volonté bizarre et inexplicable se fasse . . . " Thy bizarre and inexplicable will be done!

Anton Chekhov, commenting on the art of fiction in a letter to a friend, once remarked that the main key to success lay in one special talent possessed by his grandmother. The old woman could tell a story in such a way that everyone listened, held by the narrative interest until the last word was uttered. In the three novels we have glimpsed at, both Yves Thériault and Claude Jasmin, whatever criticism one might feel inclined to make about lack of originality and profundity, prove once again that they have a large measure of the special talent of Chekhov's grandmother.

RONALD SUTHERLAND

KENNETH LESLIE

KENNETH LESLIE, *The Poems of Kenneth Leslie.* The Ladysmith Press, $3.25 paper, $6.95 cloth.

IN HIS POEM "Street Cry" in the 1938 volume *By Stubborn Stars*, Kenneth Leslie called attention to his isolation as a poet largely without an audience:

I build my stand here in the market-place
and show my wares, but no one stops to
buy. . . .

Although that collection won the Governor General's Award in 1938, his "wares" have continued to go unnoticed, particularly in Canada, up to the present. The publication of a book of poems from his four volumes of the 1930's, along with a number of previously uncollected works written since, must be regarded as one of the events in Canadian letters in the past year, for it grants public and critics an opportunity to decide whether or not Leslie finally merits greater accolade than one page in *The Penguin Book of Canadian Verse*.

While it is true that Leslie has much in common with his Canadian contemporaries, it is probably with his friend Robert Frost that he bears closest comparison. It is more than in the matter of association with a region, Frost with New England and Leslie with his native Nova Scotia, and of values that have their roots in the region and their ramifications wherever man lives. The only way a poet can make his audience perceive such abstractions as beauty is through sensible things, and Leslie is at his best when he adequately uses the things Canadian, and especially Maritime, that he knows best — sea and cliffs, "cod lines on the floor", porridge, the feeling of the entrapped fish. Beyond this, there is a similarity with Frost in manner, sometimes in tone. Leslie's "The Ski Runner" (from *Windward Rock*, 1934, his first book), is a kind of hybrid "Stopping by Woods" - "Road Not Taken" poem. There are Leslie pieces that do not measure up to Frost counterparts: "*Requiescam*" (from *Windward Rock*), for instance, plays with death in somewhat the same way as "Stopping by Woods" but is utterly lacking in the force of surprise. But "The Ski Runner", though lacking Frost's subtlety, is more muscular than Frost, as the skier contemplates

Two ways for home: one undulating and
slow,
the other sheer and swift; how shall I go?

The Leslie sonnet continues as a powerful statement of the need for the mind to succumb on occasion to the indispensable intuition of the body. This is not to suggest that Leslie is as superb a poet as Frost; few poets in the twentieth century have been. It is, however, to say something of which Leslie can be justifiably proud: that in some of his poems he can hold his own with his friend.

There are serious weaknesses in Leslie's early work, of course. Sometimes he can find the appropriate imagery to carry the burden of his traditional insight (in, for example, "Poor Herbert", in the *Windward Rock* group), but too often the binding of the sonnet form cuts painfully into the religious and love lyrics, and he will pay triteness for the exigencies of form ("when one but breathes your name my limbs grow weak,/ my marrow turns to water, . . . "). The problem with the early pieces is perhaps that Leslie is too willing to indulge himself in form to the detriment of sense, a luxury no poet can afford; as is remarked to the hedonistic lady in "Amos and the Lady," one might say to him, "Could you but know enough to know your sinning. . . . "

Yet even in the early poems, Leslie sometimes conveys a delicate sense of mood through the precise image; to describe a profound bereavement, he observes quietly, "The light on the foam is a burned-out star." And with the poems

of *Lowlands Low* (1935), among the stock rhyming images there are experiments with the instantaneous insight of imagistic pieces ("Wild Eyes", for example, or "The Curse of Song"). There is a loosening of the sonnet form to marry more securely the basically traditional sound patterns to the sense, and Leslie fashions some memorable lines, such as this description of the oppression of Milton's daughters by a father who places

> . . . his name above
> whatever wish may ache their pulsing throats,
> whatever rage may clench their inkstained hands,
> rolling the billows of his cosmic anecdotes
> over and over their muttered sharp demands.

In *By Stubborn Stars*, especially in the sonnets, Leslie most successfully and with seeming ease makes form the willing mistress of meaning. There is still, in general, too much dependence upon abstraction — life, the soul, death, love, freedom — and sometimes he seems banal (as in the brief sense of tree-ness he proffers in "The Tree"), but now he frequently weaves the abstractions into networks of sensible imagery; and the rhyme and rhythm mostly work unobtrusively to imply what Leslie has to say about the abstractions. Now he is capable of composing even a simple nature sonnet that is a pure lapidary piece: in it the day "slipped out of the web of her fog-wet gown" and lives deeply, looking "through the lucent panes/ of maple leaves". He is capable now of the quick slash of perception, as in "Acquisitiveness":

> How different here in my net, bright one of the shadowed depths!
> How dull and dry your scales,
> how limp your body.
> Oh swift and lithe and glittering!
> Why did I tempt you here?

One of the best poems in the new collection is an exact, caustic little study of "A Certain Liberal", in a loose, five-beat-line sonnet. Leslie carries through with admirable completeness a conceit of a commander who can deal with a hypothetical storm, but who, when faced with the actual, "cries out 'abandon ship!' and fouls the ropes/ and carries tales against the hard-eyed captain." But most of the previously uncollected "New Poems" represent a falling away from the considerable peak of power Leslie attained in *By Stubborn Stars*. It is fitting for Leslie the man, but not so for Leslie the poet, that *The Poems of Kenneth Leslie* should conclude with an endless poem, "O'Malley to the Reds", that attempts to reconcile Christianity with Communism and is too much an essay in rhyme to support the body of his work.

But no single poem can destroy the effect of the volume. Had Leslie not been a singer, farmer, teacher, preacher, taxi driver, and editor, had he not dedicated much of himself to politics — even earning the distinction of being declared an eminent fellow traveller by *Life* magazine in 1949 — he might have been a greater poet; but the humanity that he brought to all those pursuits and that he learned through them is what is most clearly reflected in his poetry and what makes it a pleasure to read. Like the fallen leaves in "The Old Man", which are stirred with a walking stick, there is something elemental and softly human that Leslie's poems stir in a reader, and he knows that: " 'Listen,' he said, 'they are whispering.' "

ALAN R. SHUCARD

AT A DEAD END

STUART MACINNON, *Skydeck*. Oberon, $2.50.
GEORGE MCWHIRTER, *Catalan Poems*. Oberon, $2.50.
TOM MARSHALL, *Magic Water*. Quarry, $2.50.
B.P. NICOL, *ABC*. Oberon, $2.00.

EVERY SERIOUS POET must have hope that his work will give something new to poetry, that his own uniqueness will create in his work that *qualche cosa di speciale* insisted upon by Pound. The alternative is stalemate for the poet and redundancy for his art.

These four poets — all of them capable manipulators of words — appear to be finding such a stalemate almost inescapable. The most distressing plight is that of George McWhirter, who has written in *Catalan Poems* a collection of exquisitely sculptured impersonal lyrics which would have been startling and impressive in the early 1920's. But it is a long time since Pound's "Medallion", since Eliot's Sweeney poems, since the *McGill Fortnightly* or *Canadian Mercury*. The mask has been worn often and well, and much better than here by McWhirter. These poems are no more than deftly crafted anachronisms — stiff, cold, and timeless to the point of utter irrelevance.

With Stuart MacKinnon's *Skydeck* we advance a decade. The only mask here is that of the poet as public speaker committed to "address" his audience. The subject matter is the poet's ideas and experiences, but, as in Spender, Auden, Layton, or Klein of the late thirties and war years, highly edited and organized. Poems like these, with rather ordinary form and conventional viewpoint, depend for their authenticity on freshness of idea. MacKinnon's ideas are neither novel nor exciting, as in "Sun Time":

> Perhaps our dreams are like
> that instant on the sundial,
> a kind of zenith of fulfilment
>
> when the shadow is broken
> and there is no past or future,
> only the calm clear light
> of our own becomingness.

Tom Marshall, unlike McWhirter or MacKinnon, at least appears to know the danger of stalemate and be putting up a struggle. Nevertheless, the bulk of *Magic Water* is pastiche, with undisguised echos of editorial Layton or, as here, impersonal, pattern-making Smith.

> To the right
> a green man from the bush
> grasps a maiden.
>
> To the left,
> contrasted, a boy lightly
> shakes down an apple.
>
> Flora smiles.
> (Her ageless petal-flesh.)
> Green death
>
> reaches from wood
> behind which burns
> dusk, green sky.

The only poem which seems authentic Tom Marshall is the opening fourteen-part sequence, "Politics", where he appears to trust completely his own ideas and perceptions and does not ask them to conform to models of wit, objectivity, or "Poetik" form.

The one poet here who is fully facing up to the problem of overcoming hackneyed and redundant expression is the concretist bp Nichol. He tells us on the first page of *ABC*, "Poetry being at a dead end poetry is dead" — a thesis which the work of McWhirter, MacKinnon, and Marshall only too sadly tends to confirm. Nichol's solution is to give up linguistic expression and with it the entire task of projecting an authentic self. In

ABC he returns to the basic form of written language, the letter, to create concrete poems extended from its shapes. His originality is both in the concept and in the wit of the resulting glyphs.

Ironically, despite this originality, the aesthetic of Nichol's poems is essentially the same as that of George McWhirter's — the creating of static, impersonal form. And it may be just as limited. That is, while Nichol himself may not reach a "dead end", the concrete poem may prove to have no more flexibility than any other specialized aesthetic — whether the imagist, the metaphysical, or the neo-classical. Any aesthetic can become habitual, or as Nichol puts it, "dead end", and require a breaking of its orders for the achieving of significant work.

Nichol's book is by far the most engaging of the four reviewed here, but that fact may be due as much to the other poets' failures as to his success. I seriously doubt that poetry will ever be at a dead end. Poets like McWhirter may be, and sub-forms such as concrete may come to one, but poetry itself has possibilities as infinite as the potentiality of poets who will write it. At least three of these writers should go back and look for theirs.

FRANK DAVEY

SPIDERS AT WORK

ROBERT KROETSCH, JAMES BACQUE and PIERRE GRAVEL, *Creation*. new press, $3.50.

IN THE INTRODUCTION to *creation*, a writers' notebook and manifesto of three embryo artists in the process of gestation, Robert Kroetsch, both editor and contributor, refers to the significance of webs created by gods and men. By examining the quality of the microcosm and macrocosm of literary webs, three writers, Kroetsch, James Bacque and Pierre Gravel, who came together in the "salon terrible" at 671 Spadina in Toronto in the sixties, and three writer-critics, Margaret Laurence, Milton Wilson and J. Raymond Brazeau attempt, in *creation*, to reflect the patterns of a growing Canadian literature.

This geographically and culturally heterogeneous trio (Kroetsch from the west, Bacque from Ontario and Gravel from Quebec) endeavour to find the unity in multiplicity through examining the various aspects of the "dome of many coloured glass that stains the white radiance of eternity." Their contention is that only through looking at our own reflection in the (literary) mirror can we know what we are. The mirror of the work in progress, with all its blemishes and points of beauty glaring on the page, has a valid function so long as it is saved from narcissism and the reader is not left staring in the artists' toilet bowl, afterwards.

creation is rough and varied like the Canadian landscape, and that is its salvation. Some of the pieces are as smooth and polished as river rocks, and some, honestly evaluated in the discussions which follow each of the three sections, are jagged and unformed. There is a refreshing candour in the willingness of the three writers to open up to this kind of examination. The book is alive and growing, and the reader shares the experience of the birth of individual works and of a collective consciousness.

There is a oneness to the web which persists in spite of superficial differences. The quality of voice changes from man to man, language to language, but there is a common compulsion, which comes

from a shared experience in the new (Canadian) eden. The shared myth of the Promised Land, which experience has twisted into bitterness, is central to the disillusionment of Kroetsch's brothers in "That Yellow Prairie Sky", Jack in Bacque's *A Man of Talent*, Yves in *La Corrosion*, and to the prairie politician, who was supposed to embody the properties of the messiah during the Canadian drought and depression, in Kroetsch's "Election Fever". Kroetsch's messiah is an undertaker.

Caught between the historical past and present, most of the characters become either comic or grotesque in the inability to balance the mythic energies of creation and generation. The problem is focused in *A Man of Talent* and *La Corrosion* in political revolution against the *status quo*, and emotional revolution against the male parent who represents an impediment to growth. However, the past is part of the present, "ne rien oublier", and it cannot be expiated by violence.

The result of the failure of reason and violence is a kind of ennui. In *La Corrosion*, we are bored by the paralysis of action, the constancy of snow and the interminable lighting of cigarettes. Nothing changes. "Il était inutile de continuer." In all three writers, the residual legacy of the American frontier is manifested. Violence and sexuality are the ways of the mythic hero, who is ultimately comic and impotent. Mounted and armed with pistol and penis, he wanders, parody of the knight of chivalric romance, through the complexities of the web, only to strangle in it.

The hero and the writer keep on moving, Kroetsch to the United States, Bacque and Gravel, like Henry James before them, to Europe, but they are still part of the web that wove them. In his discussion with Margaret Laurence, Kroetsch acknowledges the dry prairie soil that is the medium for his creativity. There is a preoccupation with landscape, with dirt bitter and fertile, in all the works of fiction in *creation*. " . . . j'aimerais aller planter ma verge dans un trou de terre molle et y déposer mon germe."

The new celluloid myth is juxtaposed in the stories and poems with traditional values. The media of the new technology, best utilized in Leonard Cohen's *Beautiful Losers*, are reflected in philosophy and style, or voice. In "the truth shall make you free", from Bacque's *A Man of Talent*, Jack articulates a common problem:

> it's all a giant TVscreen and we're on it
> we are not even the shadows on the cavewall anymore, but a million times more remote, the electrons dance for us, and soon we shall dance for them

There is a preoccupation with the film, illusion or reality, as mirror and as literary device. Kroetsch and Laurence discuss the delicate balance between dream and nightmare in "the fiction that makes us real". It is a grave responsibility to shape the fiction that is the reality. *creation* is about the morality of that responsibility. The anxiety of choice that confronted Hamlet confronts the contemporary artist. What is to be saved and what is to be thrown away? Kroetsch's "Stone Hammer Poem" is the quintessence of the problem.

> The poem
> is the stone
> until it is shaped
> like the stone
> hammer, the maul

LINDA ROGERS

NI SOCIOLOGUE NI CRITIQUE

AXEL MAUGEY, *Poésie et société au Québec (1937-1970)*. Les Presses de L'Université Laval, coll. "Vie des Lettres canadiennes".

MALGRE LES HAUTS patronages dont elle s'honore (Jean Cassou, Edgar Morin, Georges Friedmann, Jacques Berque), la thèse d'Axel Maugey, qui en eut l'idée lors d'un premier séjour ici, en 1964, risque de décevoir et les sociologues et les littéraires, et l'hexagone français et l'Hexagone québécois. La sympathie de l'auteur est évidente. Malheureusement, sa connaissance du milieu et de l'époque demeure partielle, superficielle.

La documentation est souvent de deuxième ou de troisième main; les erreurs fourmillent, des dates aux tableaux, des notes et références à la bibliographie. Le sigle F.L.Q. devrait renvoyer au Front de libération du Québec, pas seulement à la Fédération des libéraux du Québec; la F.T.Q. n'est pas affiliée à la (défunte) C.T.C.C., mais au C.T.C. *Projections liberantes* ne fut pas rédigé "par un groupe de jeunes poètes" (p. 2 et 89), mais par Borduas seul. Paul-Marie Lapointe n'est nullement "en quête d'un monde vierge" (p. 88) dans son premier recueil. Il est bizarre de classer Maurice Lebel, Julia Richer et Jean Hamelin parmi les critiques jeunes ou qui "se sont fait récemment connaître" (p. 74); de voir "la fraction 'laïque' de la classe dirigeante" s'exprimer dans *L'Action nationale* (p. 23). Les poètes de *Parti pris* — auxquels l'auteur veut bien accorder "leurs moments de lucidité" — n'étaient pas tous "membres du Parti socialiste" (lequel ?), ni tous "des épigones qui plagient le génial Maïakowski" (p. 106-108). Il n'est pas prouvé que *Liberté* regroupe "peu d'intellectuels de gauche" (p. 44), que *Révolution québécoise* soit allée "plus loin" que *Parti pris*, etc.

La seule nouveauté de *Poésie et société au Québec* réside dans ces interprétations mal fondées et dans des expressions douteuses comme "l'équipe de la solitude" (p. 70) ou "le jansénisme de la pensée ambiante" (p. 77), ou encore tel paragraphe où la tautologie succède à la contradiction: "Il appartiendra au mouvement de L'Hexagone de structurer avec plus de cohérence le milieu des poètes en accueillant des poètes de toutes tendances. En effet, on peut imputer l'échec du *Refus global* aux difficultés que rencontrèrent les membres du mouvement automatiste dans leur entreprise" (p. 90). Par ailleurs, ce qui paraît juste et intéressant n'est pas neuf: au chapitre des idéologies, mieux vaut lire Rioux, Falardeau ou Dumont; au chapitre des théories et méthodes littéraires, mieux vaut lire *Les Chemins actuels de la critique* (Plon), ou même son appendice, la bibliographie commentée de Dominique Noguez (cité ici comme auteur du livre!).

Restent deux chapitres, les plus considérables de chaque volet de ce diptyque socio-critique. Dans le premier, l'auteur enquête sur le milieu d'origine, les influences, le budget, etc., de 77 poètes québécois qu'il répartit en "21 femmes — soit 26, 3%; 56 hommes — soit 72, 7%", laissant sans doute 1% à l'Androgyne. On compte un bouddhiste, un panthéiste et un socialiste (comme religion), à côté de 14 catholiques pratiquants (dont 7 femmes), parmi nos poètes contemporains. 22 ont eu une enfance difficile. "Il appert que la grande majorité des poètes est convenablement

rémunérée", conclut-on avec optimisme (p. 69) du fait que ceux qui sont professeurs ou journalistes reçoivent un traitement de $8,000 à $15,000 (mais ce sont surtout le psychiatre et le directeur de la Bibliothèque nationale d'Ottawa qui font ici pencher la balance). Il me semble que le sociologue aurait dû étudier de plus près les problèmes d'édition et de diffusion (ses "Précisions sur le public" ne sont guère précises), la lecture, la critique et l'enseignement de la poésie, la différence entre les poètes de Québec et ceux de Montréal (cf. là-dessus Michel van Schendel dans *Livres et auteurs canadiens 1965*, p. 15).

Le dernier chapitre se présente comme une "étude thématique" de l'oeuvre de dix poètes importants. Il s'agit en fait de tableaux descriptifs (poème par poème) et récapitulatifs (recueil par recueil) devant "permettre aux chercheurs une formulation objective et efficace de la problématique en poésie québécoise de 1947 à 1967" (p. 231). M. Maugey est bien bon. Les "chercheurs" lui sauront gré d'apprendre, par exemple, qu'il est question dans *Le Soleil sous la mort* de "vie, paix par opposition à la mort, guerre, recherche d'une parole nouvelle, menace atomique, présence de Dieu" (p. 233). Voudront-ils plus de précision? Vie, amour, mort, "vie agonisante", "vie par opposition à la mort" (p. 221-222), leur énumérera l'imperturbable analyste-synthétiseur, qui dira d'ailleurs à peu près la même chose de Brault ou de Chamberland, Préfontaine ayant droit pour sa part cinq fois à "vie agonique" (il vient après Miron). Bref, un beau sujet gâché par de mauvaises méthodes. Une publication inutile.

LAURENT MAILHOT

KWAKIUTL WORLD

Guests Never Leave Hungry — The Autobiography of James Sewid, a Kwakiutl Indian. McGill-Queen's University Press, $3.95.

THIS BOOK, first published by Yale University Press in 1969, has now been put out in a paperback edition by a Canadian university. Another instance of Canadian academic initiative.

James Sewid is a village leader (Alert Bay, British Columbia), a prominent member of the Native Brotherhood, and a one-time associate editor of *The Native Voice*. His autobiography, superficially another story of a self-made man, is more interesting than most novels. Mr. Sewid, at the urging of an anthropologist named Spradley, talked his life story into a tape recorder. Mr. Spradley then boiled it down to publishable length and corrected some grammatical errors.

One should be grateful for this necessary editing job, I suppose, but Spradley has made us pay for our pleasure by forcing on us a thirty-page appendix in which Mr. Sewid is treated as a case of "cultural adaptation". It reads like the report of a prison psychiatrist and is one of the most appalling examples of Yankee effrontery I have yet come across. It is interesting and instructive to see how a human being (Mr. Sewid is a warm, easy and accessible person and an important figure in British Columbian local politics) can be turned into a laboratory specimen. "In recent research on the achievement motive, a projective test was developed that has been used cross-culturally to quantify different degrees of the achievement motive. The procedure, which was developed by David McClelland and his coworkers (McClelland et al. 1953, Atkin-

son, 1958) was used with James Sewid. The set of pictures chosen . . . " Mr. Spradley also tested Mr. Sewid's intelligence. All marvellously lunatic and Laputan, but then one realizes with growing dismay that people like Mr. Spradley have a great deal of power these days. Today the reserve; tomorrow the world.

Not that there is anything wrong in generalizing about modern Kwakiutl life on the basis of this book. Mr. Sewid considers himself a representative man: "I realize that I have gone through many things in my life and I think lots of my people can learn from my experiences." What stood out for me was the manner in which traditional Kwakiutl oral literature has influenced Mr. Sewid's manner of looking at his own life; it is this which makes his book an offshoot of ancient British Columbian literary forms. He began life as a boy of high potential rank at Village Island, but later, in Alert Bay, he found himself a scorned outsider. "Alert Bay was a Nimpkish village and I was half-Kwiksutainuk and half-Mamalilikulla". It is a constant theme in the traditional stories of the coast. He spent much of his boyhood with his grandmother Lucy, who was "a very religious woman, Anglican". "The most important thing that she told me from the Bible was that I should be faithful to my elders". The emphasis is perfectly traditional: Mr. Spradley glances at this fact, but rejects "elders" for the carefully inhuman phrase "authority figures" and refers to "submission" rather than "faithfulness", an example of the brutalizing effect of anthropological jargon. "She told me many of the Bible stories and my favourite ones were about Joseph being sold by his brothers and the story of the flood." These are the Bible stories which are among those closest to themes in the native tradition. The way in which James Sewid recounts his rise to a position of high respect among the native peoples shows a profoundly traditional mode of thought. Even his pride in his achievements has a certain formal quality and is not offensive. Life is a journey towards wisdom and maturity, each step celebrated by a ritual. Is this why Mr. Sewid's book, which is no work of art, seems to have more "form" than most contemporary novels?

The book ends with Mr. Sewid's lay sermon, which he preached "in 1966 on Harvest Thanksgiving Sunday at Christ Church in Alert Bay". He describes a trip across Canada in rather conventional terms, thus showing himself to be a travelled man, at peace with the white world, and a patriotic Canadian. But his real homeland is that country within the country we know, a Canada whose outlines are too shadowy for most of us to see, a country which is divided among the tribes in the old way. He visits Ottawa and the Parliament Buildings where "they had carved everything that is in Canada, animals, fish, birds, flowers and trees"; but the real capital of his world is Alert Bay, and when he is there his sense of distance changes and his world shrinks: "Some of your children come from afar off from Alert Bay, places like Bella Bella and Bella Coola". This sermon is a true *apologia* and a summation of his life; it and the book end with a prayer.

His autobiography is moving, not because he possesses literary gifts but because he has led a useful life, which he describes simply. It is difficult for us to see how useful it has been, because we see Kwakiutl territory as a very tiny part of

our world, whereas it is in fact a small world of its own. This book shows how rich and full a world, in spite of all the well-known horrors and despairs, it can be.

NORMAN NEWTON

EXILED IN AN EXILED LAND

JACQUES FERRON, *Tales From The Uncertain Country*. Anansi, $2.85 paper, $6.50 cloth.

THE NEW REVOLUTIONARY is a capitalist-in-reverse, possessed by a metaphysical avarice which blinds him to the spiritual well-being of others and himself. He is also a Puritan, one of the elect of the new dispensation, guided by an inner light, and an antinomian. The world he inhabits, like that of his disavowed ancestors, is corrupt, barren, distractive: only an apocalypse can save it.

This one gathers from Dr. Ferron's stories. Take Jeremiah, inhabited not by the invisible God but by the world around him: having become the landscape, the landscape becomes him: he and the Cosmos are one. Friends compliment him. "Not a bad shower that," or "Turned out well, that wind of yours." But base humanity intrudes: "acceptance by his family had made him an exile to himself." Lacking his loved isolation, he drowns. After fog, the landscape reappears. "This was the landscape Jeremiah had painted day after day, season after season, for years, leaving behind him enough to last forever." The translator tells us Dr. Ferron depicts "very real situations", while "establishing a new order, a new reality".

The new reality is that of the Symbolists a hundred years ago: both man and the external world are their "glorious lie", subjective creations by means of an art that has become magic. In many of Dr. Ferron's stories the enemy is love: cupid leads only to cupidity. A young man makes up for seducing a girl by paying her; in a lumber camp he purchases gonorrhoea, pays over ten dollars a visit for treatment, is given a potion by a disciple of the occult and emerges after a psychomimetic experience of death-and-rebirth to become wealthy under an assumed name, return home, unrecognized, buy the family mansion, burn it, exiled.

The next stage is to reverse relationships. Let a doctor suffer from lack of opium, care for no one. "Without opium you cannot give religion to the people." His moment of inverted revelation comes at the sight of a terrified horse. "He did not heal me, he saved me. When I managed to find a little opium, it is as though I were injecting it into the poor animal ... The horse is encompassed by all the wickedness of the world. I must comfort him.... From now on *he* is the drug addict." Thus the doctor gives his religion to the people — or to a horse that is unchanged except in the doctor's mind, where his altered consciousness *is* the new dispensation.

Let us next apotheosize cupidity. For years a widow waits for her dead son to return from a war. She saves for him: "the longer he stayed away, the more handsome her present would be." One night his apparition appears and demands the money. As she gives it to him she dies. "Their long wait had been their Purgatory. Together they went to Heaven, so true it is that love will heal all ills!" Is it avaricious love and the love of avarice

(which can make a Hell of earth) that are mocked? To find out, consider love.

An American soldier meets a girl in Louvain. "They stopped side by side and love focussed [sic] its camera on them." Is this not saying that love is but a phenomenon, which like the camera does not know what it sees or does? As sometimes the author does not know what he writes: for the couple settles in Montreal, neither speaking the other's language, but when she tells the doctor (in French) that her husband is dotty, the husband answers her in English. And the author answers both: they are not two persons whose lives matter, but the conquest of Europe by America. Power is the ultimate reality.

What, then, is *humanitas?* Cut off the tail of a calf, dress it in a frock coat, and immediately it will begin to metamorphose into a man. Within a year it will be a lawyer-poet. "There was a time when I hoped to free myself by writing, but the poems I wrote then did not render my cry." Back on the farm, a bull now, "he is able to utter his poet's cry, a bellow such as to drive all the cows in the county mad." The bull is natural, man (as he pretends to be) a self-deceived subterfuge.

The human condition likewise exacerbated Flaubert, whose style (as much as one can judge from translation) Dr. Ferron often echoes. In all the stories existence is an oppression, and one does not free oneself or it by writing. The fantasies are not those of the fairy-tale: fairy-tales (witness Tolkien) are the mirroring of an abiding morality in an alien setting. For Dr. Ferron all is alien: the dream condemns the actual, which must be burnt to the ground, altered by consciousness, reduced to sexual potency, or become one's own creation. If, like the archangel in one story, distinctions between good and evil are found to be distasteful, after the apocalypse on what will justice be based so that the earth will again be inhabitable? Drugs? Or, like Rose in the witness box, will we all be superior to the laws of men? Miss Bednarski, the translator, is right: "A great deal of what Ferron says can apply to us."

JOHN REID

QUI LIT GROULX?

LIONEL GROULX, *Mes Mémoires,* I (1878-1920), V. II (1920-1928), Fides.

QUI LIT GROULX? Comme le carillon sonnant tous les quarts d'heure, pendant trois quarts de siècle, qui l'entend encore? Rabâchant, dépassé, rebutant, ressassé, obsédant. Il a si bien épousé son pays à défaut de son siècle, qu'il reste, comme celui-ci, forclos, paralysé, prisonnier, témoin exemplaire de la condition canadienne française même. Sa mort en 1967 à l'âge de 89 ans dont près de 70 sur la brèche, donna l'occasion, mieux que les agiographies esquissées par les journaux, d'un premier bilan général. L'oeuvre représente une somme d'écrits concurrençant Balzac.

Le petit paysan frêle devenu jeune prêtre sera d'abord l'apôtre éducateur du collège de Valleyfield qui se sent la mission de ranimer le feu sacré sur les autels de la patrie par l'action catholique et nationale chez les jeunes. Au point de passer, aux yeux des bons bourgeois de Québec, y compris le clergé, pour un révolutionnaire empiétant de façon désordonnée sur le politique. Car il entend

secouer l'inertie, l'apathie, la routine des méthodes scolaires en intégrant la formation civique et nationale au curriculum trop classique. La foi nationale doit se vivre comme la foi religieuse, ce qui lui vaudra l'opposition sourde de son évêque bien disposé à l'égard d'Ottawa. Pour ce, il se fera historien de sa race. *Une croisade d'adolescents* (1912), représente à ce titre ses premiers Mémoires. Sur les traces de Bourassa qu'il salue comme un maître, et de la première équipe du *Devoir* (1905-1910), qui comprit un instant Asselin et Fournier, premier professeur d'histoire du Canada de l'université de Montréal en 1915, il devient, après la première guerre, l'âme de "l'Action française", tribun du peuple par ses conférences innombrables, directeur de conscience de l'élite; il livre en fait, malgré ses sorties multipliées, un combat d'arrière-garde contre l'encerclement.

Il avait bien compris dès 1920 — et à cet égard René Lévesque ne fait que reprendre ses directives — qu'il fallait s'emparer des leviers de commande économiques et politiques; malheureusement, au tournant des années trente, après la condamnation de l'Action française par Rome et la débâcle économique, alors qu'il va prendre la place de Bourassa qui s'efface, il ne trouve à offrir à la nouvelle génération (celle de Laurendeau), dans son impatience d'agir, pour pallier à l'impuissance de son peuple, que la tentation du fascisme. On lui reprochera assez son éloge de Mussolini, restaurateur de la fierté italienne et de la grandeur romaine. S'il avait réussi, Groulx aurait-il promu au Québec l'instauration d'un "Opus Dei"?

Ce fils spirituel du 19ème siècle français catholique, autant que du 17ème, ce romantique impénitent, d'autant plus bâtard qu'il renie de bonne foi ce même romantisme; croisement monstrueux de Lammenais et de Maistre, qui aurait dû être un Savonarole, ne sera ni un Lammenais, ni même un Lacordaire. Il sautera de Veuillot à Maurras et à Massis. Imperméable à Péguy et à Bernanos qu'il a pourtant lus, qu'il cite à ses meilleures heures, sa croissance intellectuelle sera bloquée dès 1930. Victime d'une situation? Question de tempérament? Les deux, certainement. Il est reparti en guerre après la 2ème guerre et le jour de sa mort, il devait lancer son livre "Constantes de vie". Doctrinaire rigide et moraliste myope, intellectuellement, il s'est survécu un demi-siècle au nom de la fidélité à la race et au passé.

Le prix des *Mémoires* est, sous les cendres d'une idée fixe, de nous restituer l'homme; et c'est sans doute pourquoi ces premières oeuvres posthumes sont certainement son chef d'oeuvre littéraire comparées à ses piètres et mièvres tentatives dans le domain de la fiction. A 76 ans, c'est beau!

Les premières pages en particulier sur sa famille et son enfance contiennent de véritables morceaux d'anthologie:

> Je suis né d'une famille terrienne . . . Mon père . . . ma mère . . . avaient connu, l'un et l'autre, sinon l'école de la misère, du moins celle de la pauvreté et du rude travail. Mon père était un pauvre enfant donné à l'âge de cinq ans, à une famille d'étrangers. Son père avait bu son patrimoine; il en fut réduit à donner ses enfants; il les distribua à gauche et à droite.

La mort le cotoya tout durant sa petite enfance. Son père fut emporté à trente huit ans par la petite vérole.

> Cet homme, "donné" à l'âge de cinq ans et qui avait passé sa jeunesse dans les chantiers, avait, à sa mort presque entièrement payé sa terre.

La mère, à vingt six ans, se remarie un an après, "pour sauver la terre". Il a trois ans, quand la diphtérie emporte trois enfants sur cinq! Au seuil du siècle, Groulx a connu les "anciens canadiens" aux vertus bibliques. A ses yeux, la grandeur, la noblesse d'un tel peuple devaient lui suffire, le rendre immortel, sans que rien ne change, ne dusse changer au pays de Maria Chapdelaine. L'abbé raconte l'arrachement que lui causa le départ pour le collège à l'âge de 13 ans. Il est particulièrement sans indulgence pour ses maîtres à qui il ne pardonne pas l'esprit militaire de leur discipline, leur manque de compétence, d'imagination, leur encrassement dans la routine. Il évoque sa quête d'une vocation, ses ambitions: il sera avocat, politicien, prêtre ou bien cultivateur. Il sera, en fait, un composé original de tout cela. Tenter de résumer est trahir le sujet.

Le premier tome donne une idée de ce que fut ce printemps canadien français de 1900 à 1914, les hommes qui l'animèrent et d'où devait sortir l'équipe de l'Action française. Il y a là un document historique: profil de Laurier, carrure de Bourassa. Le deuxième tome se concentre autour de *Dix ans d'Action française* qui représente une synthèse remarquable des domaines qui au Canada français peut-être plus qu'ailleurs s'interpénètrent: l'économique, le politique, le social, le culturel et le religieux. En théorie au moins, la pensée canadienne avait rattrapé son siècle. Le plus grand mérite de Groulx à la fois malgré et à cause de son entêtement, aura été d'être un éveilleur d'âmes. Les nouveaux chefs de file et maîtres à penser des générations suivantes: Laurendeau, Michel Brunet, Ethier-Blais, tous les jeunes nationalistes, même s'ils se sont appliqués à démolir la plupart de ses théories les plus chères, sont tous d'accord pour reconnaître son influence, car s'il n'a pas su faire fructifier l'héritage selon les exigences modernes, il l'a gardé; et même les marxisants saluent l'homme pour sa fierté et le défenseur du pauvre.

Il est regrettable que la suite ne puisse être publiée dès maintenant, même en édition expurgée. Un biographe de Groulx se lèvera-t-il bientôt qui allierait l'objectivité du spécialiste au témoignage d'un homme qui aurait connu personnellement le petit et grand chanoine? Groulx reste très français, de la race des mousquetaires qui font aussi les Don Quichotte, aussi opposés qu'ils fussent les uns aux autres, tels Asselin, Fournier, Vallières . . . , idéalistes, jusqu'auboutistes, utopistes.

ROLAND BONVALET

REPRINTS

THERE IS ALWAYS a touch of satisfied nostalgia when one receives the latest batch of titles from the New Canadian Library; for the most part they recall to us a relatively recent past and how quickly things change in the literary scene of our generation. Here, for instance, in the most recent group of selections, is Rudy Wiebe's *Peace Shall Destroy Many* ($2.35), to remind us how much better a novelist Wiebe has become since this first work appeared a decade ago, and Brian Moore's *The Luck of Ginger Coffey* ($2.35) to remind us that twelve years ago Moore's imagination still played over things Canadian; there is Penny Williams's excellent translation of Hubert Aquin's *Prochain Episode* ($1.75) to remind us that novels about terrorists are no longer the mode in Quebec, as they were in the late sixties, and Thomas H. Raddall's *Roger Sudden* ($2.95) to remind us that, for all our full and vivid share of history, we have never been very good at historical novels.

Finally, there is Robertson Davies's *A Voice from the Attic*, a collection of light literary pieces by an omnivorous reader, which was

published in 1960 but reflects back to the author's much earlier connection with *Saturday Night*. It is the ambivalent kind of writing at which Davies is so adept; the look of the creature is somewhat antique, but its bite is strictly contemporary. But things change indeed; Robertson Davies is now dispensing his urbane wit at Massey College, and Robert Fulford is directing a very different but equally interesting *Saturday Night*.

Meanwhile, Coles Canadiana Series carries on as vigorously as ever a task that might be regarded as discovery rather than rediscovery; a kind of literary archaeology that draws long forgotten works into the light.

Half a dozen such books have reached my desk during the past month or so. Most are of interest less as works in their own right than for the odd details of information by which they fill out one's picture of the Canadian past. They vary from the more or less straight history of *In the Days of the Canada Company* ($5.95) by Robina and Kathleen Macfarlane Lizars (1896) and *The Canadian Rebellion of 1837-38* ($2.50) by Orring Edward Tiffany (1905), to the documentary matter of *The Narratives of the Fugitive Slaves in Canada* ($4.95) collected by Benjamin Drew (1856), the contemporary reportage of *Vancouver Island and British Columbia* ($6.95) by Matthew MacFie (1865) and the mingled curiosa of *The Emigrant and Sportman of Canada* ($4.95) by John J. Rowan (1876). The last, which is further described as "some experiences of an Old Country Settler, with sketches of Canadian life, sporting adventures and observations of the forests and fauna," is certainly the most interesting of these volumes, for it is full of sharply observed minutiae of Canadian rural and wilderness life, mainly in New Brunswick, just after Confederation. It also projects a clearly outlined and engaging personality in its writer, but, alas, we know almost nothing more about him than the book itself contains. Indeed, one of the defects of Coles' otherwise admirable collection is that, unlike the New Canadian Library, they offer no introductory material to set the works in context or to give even the briefest biographical information about the author. They are reprints and no more.

One among the batch of Coles Canadiana reprints which has a special literary interest is *Canadian Wild Flowers* ($6.95). Originally published in 1868, the text was written by Catherine Parr Traill to illustrate a series of lithographs of Canadian wild flowers made from drawings by Agnes FitzGibbon. They are not the best of drawings, and the colours of the reproductions are excessively harsh, but Mrs. Traill lives up to her name as a good woman of letters and produces a competent and even elegant commentary. There is a strangely contemporary note in one sentence of her Preface: "With a patriotic pride in her native land, Mrs. F. was desirous that the book should be entirely of Canadian production, without any foreign aid, and thus far her design has been carried out; whether successfully or not, remains for the public to decide."

Other welcome reprints, both from the University of Toronto Press, are *The Canadian Identity* by W. L. Morton ($2.95) and William E. Mann's study — essential to an understanding of the mental background of prairie writing — *Sect, Cult and Church in Alberta* ($3.50).

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ANNE WOODSWORTH of the University of Toronto library justifies the title of her checklist, *The 'Alternative' Press in Canada* (University of Toronto Press, $3.50), with the remark — in her introduction — that: "With few exceptions, what are commonly known as 'underground' newspapers should more properly be labelled 'alternative'."

The correction to the usual definition is clearly justified, since most such papers are published freely and openly, and that alone tells us a great deal about the culture in whose shadow the counter-culture they represent has grown up. Having taken up in 1945 in England the editorship of a *real* underground journal, three out of four of whose original editors had just disappeared into prison on quite long sentences, the present reviewer is able to relish this distinction. The perils he has seen the editors of so-called 'underground' journals risking in the Canada of the 1970's have been minuscle in comparison with what, if luck had not held, he might have endured a quarter of a century ago.

But if *underground* has been mainly mere bravado, *alternative* does have a meaning, in terms of style, theme and content, and one hopes that before too long the careful listing of nearly 400 titles of "newspapers" (perhaps it would be better to call most of them *very occasional* periodicals) which appears in Mrs. Woodsworth's checklist will be fleshed out by a study that goes beyond the bibliographical skeleton to consider the significance of the fact that so many unorthodox journals — 400 in about seven years — can emerge among a population so small and so straight as ours.

G.W.