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LOVERS AND LOSERS

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editorial

TRAPPING THE BIRD OF LOVE

"IT'S LOVE that makes the world go round," sings Papageno in *The Magic Flute*, and even if Mozart and his librettist were concerned mainly with masonic esoterica relating to the ultimate cause of being, the phrase describes the conclusion one is tempted to reach, speaking in the narrower sense of love between human beings, if one spends a great part of time in the world of literature. Love has been the mainstay of most of our fiction and drama, of much of our poetry, of a great deal of our biography. It has dominated the stage, the cinema screen, television; it provides the emotional force behind most opera; it is the eternal standby of popular song. Anthologies of any period would be notably thinner without the love lyrics; so would the profits of record companies.

The reason is simple enough. It is hard to imagine any human relationship that does not contain some element of love (or inverted love called hate), even though the sexual element may be disguised. The psychoanalysts long ago demonstrated that parental and filial love project incestuous overtones. In its emotional content the most humdrum friendship is the poor relation of the most passionate love affair, or it is no friendship. And unfortunate is the man or woman who has not experienced that passionate sharing of work with some member of the opposite or at times of the same sex, in which unspoken feelings and desires build to a fine edge of peril that by sublimation becomes a summit of creativity. We need love as a fish needs water, and desiccate without it.

All this means that there is, among readers and writers and all who speculate on the endless ambiguities of human relationships, an apparently insatiable curiosity about the nature of love as distinct from merely physical or neurological

sexuality. Why was Helen's "the face that launched a thousand ships"? What generated Petrarch's morbid but creative obsession with Laura or Dante's with Beatrice? What made Turgenev the slave of a woman like Pauline Viardot? And how did these exalted and presumably unfulfilled passions differ from the manic urges that drove Rochester and Byron from bed to hated bed? And where, among high romance and low libertinism, fit the average loves of most mankind? Or are there average loves?

Certainly writers over the ages have been fascinated by these problems and often led to treat them outside their imaginative writings, in treatises or essays, as Lawrence did, and Ovid, and Ortega y Gasset, and Denis de Rougement, and Hazlitt (an ill-starred lover if ever there was one) in the *Liber Amoris*, and Stendhal in *De l'amour*. All these writers tended to mingle literature and experience, some of them using their essays on love to work out — or to explain — amorous themes in their fiction or poetry.

It was time, given the tendency of Canadian poets and novelists during the past decade to write with an unaccustomed zest and frankness on love, its varieties and aberrations, that a treatise on love as seen in our time and place should find its way into print among us. It now appears as *Colours of Love: An Exploration of the Ways of Loving*, by John Alan Lee (new press, $9.95).

Lee is not a poet or a novelist; he is not even a psychologist. He is a sociologist, formerly employed as a trade union official, now teaching at Scarborough College, and author of books on faith healing and the educational use of television. Cythera, of course, is every man's country if he chooses to make it so, but I mention Mr. Lee's background for its suggestion that he is not the kind of man to go on high romantic levitations. And, indeed, his treatise is conducted with exemplary restraint, its only real flutter being the business about the "colours" of love, which reduces itself to the fact that in order to illustrate to his students his typology of ways of loving he made a colour chart based on the colours of the prism; but that adds nothing to his argument, though it provides a good title, and it need trouble us no further.

Colours of Love is based on interviews and questionnaires by which Lee gathered information from lovers of both sexes, heterosexual and homosexual, and covering as wide a span of approach as he could discover. The samples of actual statements he presents suggest that many of his subjects were not especially articulate or self-analytical, and often he must have had to rely on what seemed to be implied rather than what was said. I have the impression that he deliberately avoided especially articulate people, writers and artists, and in general those

inclined to live largely in the world of the imagination, for it is precisely in the loves of such people that his samples seem to be lacking. He is presenting, one feels, *l'homme moyen* if not necessarily *sensuel.*

Thus his typology has its limitations. His manic love, for example, might well include Stendhal; it would certainly not include Petrarch. Indeed, I find no place at all in his typology for that obsessive and usually unfulfilled passion for *la princesse lointaine* ("I did but see her passing by,/And yet I love her till I die . . . ") which may be morbid but which has shaped so much of our literature and has existed so often in real life. Does this mean that love is, as Mr. Lee suggests, a largely cultural matter, liable to change its forms as society changes, and to vary according to class and background even within a single time and culture? To a great extent, I think, this is true. But cultural matters are not merely the products of man's life in any given spot in social history; they have deep roots in the psyche, and here I suggest lies the major limitations in Lee's approach. He is dealing with love in terms of behaviour principally. His attempt to create a typology without even mentioning the most important of all psychological typologists, C. G. Jung, is evidence of his failure to penetrate far below the surface of statement and action. A typology of love cannot be complete if it fails to take into account the great psychoanalytical discoveries.

Still, as an attempt to assess what loving means in our age, *Colours of Love* is a good preliminary study, and a fascinating book to read for what it does say, even if it does not say enough. Any reader with love in his thoughts is likely to study Mr. Lee's types in a frame of mind rather like that of Jerome K. Jerome's character who consults a medical dictionary in an attempt at self-diagnosis and ends up finding he suffers from every sickness in the book but housemaid's knee. Are you manic, erotic, ludic, storgic, pragmatic or agapic? None, I suspect, in any pure form; and this Mr. Lee seems willing to admit. He is talking of inclinations rather than absolutes, and taken in this pragmatic way his typology is useful.

What — one hopes — it will lead to is a thorough study of ways of loving, by Mr. Lee or someone else, as portrayed in Canadian writing, which might tell us as much about the authors as about their characters, and perhaps more about Canadian mores than about either. Mr. Lee actually stayed far from home in his chapter on "Love in the Arts". And wisely perhaps. For the writer must be prepared for pitfalls who attempts — say — a comparative study of ways of loving in Richler, Cohen and Atwood. Or a thesis on Manic Passion in MacLennan! Or Grove on Love!! I doubt if Mr. Lee's simple typology would be adequate there.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

THE PERQUISITES OF LOVE

Jeannette Urbas

THE WORD "love" appears in the titles of two of Ethel Wilson's books: *The Equations of Love* and *Love and Salt Water*. Combined, these suggest the complexity and multiple ramifications of this human sentiment, its somewhat fragile equilibrium, as well as its propensity to be associated with tears. Love is also a major element of her other novels: *Hetty Dorval*, *The Innocent Traveller* and *Swamp Angel*, and of many of her short stories. It is presented as a many-faceted experience, perceived in the main from the woman's point of view. So fundamental is the theme of love that through it we are brought into contact with the basic assumptions of Mrs. Wilson's work and are better able to appreciate her attitudes towards life and human relationships.

Ethel Wilson's first novel, *Hetty Dorval*, which shows two very different responses to love, deals with the question of responsibility. The experiences and emotions of Hetty Dorval and Mrs. Burnaby are developed against the background of a young girl's growth into self-awareness and maturity, which prepare her for participation in a love-relationship of her own.

The novel contains the only detailed study in Ethel Wilson's work of "a woman of no reputation". As is to be expected, Hetty is very beautiful. It is stressed throughout that her beauty is of the angelic variety and not, for example, the "odalisque" type which is attributed to Laura in the short story "Truth and Mrs. Forrester". The sensuous side of Hetty's nature is concealed by the angelic aspect, which is first apparent. This is symbolized by the different reactions provoked in Frankie by Hetty's profile and Hetty seen full-face. Of her profile in repose Frankie says: "I can only describe it by saying that it was very pure. Pure is perhaps the best word, or spiritual, shall I say . . . " The full face, however, seems to be at variance with the profile: "Ordinarily, Mrs. Dorval's full face was calm and somewhat indolent. The purity was not there, but there was

what I later came to regard as a rather pleasing yet disturbing sensual look . . . "

These contrasting views and interpretations of one and the same person are linked with a basic preoccupation of Ethel Wilson: the gap between illusion and reality, which makes the search for truth and its ultimate revelation extremely difficult.

Hetty's sensuality is clearly indicated but never explored in its own right in the novel. There are no flaming love scenes. When Frankie "eavesdrops", what she sees is described with relative restraint: Hetty and the supposed Mr. Dorval could be any happily married couple spending a quiet evening of reunion at home. This may be explained by considerations of a practical and technical nature: the story is told through the eyes of an innocent and sensitive young girl, whose contact with Hetty would have terminated abruptly under the stress of exposure to strong physical passion.

It may also result from the fact that Ethel Wilson is primarily interested in Hetty's impact on other people. Hetty is a destructive force in their lives, breaking up marriages and marriages-in-the-making. She has no scruples and is concerned only with her own immediate comfort and security. The dominant traits of her character lie not in the pursuit of sensual gratification but in her passivity and egoism.

This passive quality is brought out more than once. When Hetty sings, it is always not loudly but very sweetly. On board ship Frankie notices that "she engaged the attention of too many men without seeming to try to do so . . . Her very activities were passive, not active . . . " Her utter passivity prevents Hetty from assuming huge proportions of wickedness; she does not consciously scheme to wreck and ruin lives for her own advancement or for personal gain. Hers is a force of evil that operates in a somewhat negative fashion only when her own comfort is threatened.

Hetty's concentration on self-indulgence requires her to eliminate other people as individuals who might have feelings and desires commensurate with her own. They are not really people but more like objects that periodically intrude upon her vision. Frankie sums up the implications of this attitude:

> She endeavoured to island herself in her own particular world of comfort and irresponsibility . . . But "No man is an Iland, intire of it selfe"; said Mother's poet three hundred years ago, and Hetty could not island herself, because we impinge on each other, we touch, we glance, we press, we touch again, we cannot escape. "No man is an Iland."

Hetty's lack of commitment to the responsibility that love should engender,

suggests that she is a freak of some kind, an anomaly of nature. With unconscious irony Frankie, who at the moment is adoring Hetty, says:

> It flashed through my mind that here I was, all alone, looking at the beautiful Mrs. Dorval, while at the other end of Lytton hundreds of people were paying money to gaze upon Torquil the Lobster Boy. They should have paid money to see Mrs. Dorval.

Hetty Dorval is really a study of self-love. She is the only woman to whom the author attaches an obvious label of immortality. Other women created by Ethel Wilson engage in activities that can hardly be considered moral, e.g. Lilly in *The Equations of Love*, yet Lilly is never judged "a woman of no reputation", for the mainsprings of her behaviour are different. The immorality seems to reside, not in promiscuity but in imperviousness to the existence of other human beings, in attempting to be an island unto oneself.

To complement and possibly offset the image of Hetty Dorval, the novel deals with a type of relationship that is to recur in the work of Mrs. Wilson and that is treated here at greater length than in other novels. This is the perfect love that exists in a truly happy marriage, perfect to be accepted here without ironic overtones. Such a relationship is exemplified by Mr. and Mrs. Burnaby, Frankie's parents.

True love is a source of strength in the recipient who is also the giver and it is imperishable. Death does not alter its reality or its validity. Sister Marie-Cecile wrote to Frankie:

> . . . just before your father ceased to live he said to her "Dear, our happy, happy life together" . . . Your mother did not break down, she is very strong and she is good, and I want you to be aware, Frances, that your parents have between them the perfection of human love.

Note the present tense: even after Father's physical passing "your parents have between them the perfection of human love."

Frankie perpetuates this meaning into a vision of her own: "As I read I saw my mother leaning over my father in the immortal attitude of love." The great lovers that Ethel Wilson celebrates "in the immortal attitude of love" are not the romantic tragedy-stalked figures of Tristan and Ysolde or Romeo and Juliet. Her poetic vision is concentrated on Mr. and Mrs. Burnaby, an ordinary couple who have suffered and worked hard, whose love burns with an everlasting flame in the midst of every-day activities. Her heroes and heroines are drawn from the mainstream of Canadian life.

Where this perfect love comes from, how it is created and maintained, is never

revealed or discussed. If the relationship is there, it usually exists full-blown and is presented as such to the reader. In so many instances where it does occur, the husband is dead and the wife is left with memories. There is Maggie Lloyd who had it with Tom and does not have it with Eddie in *Swamp Angel.* Which explains why Tom, though dead and not to be seen, is her reality rather than Eddie who is so irritatingly alive. Mrs. Severance and Philip had it and its aura persists even after Philip's death.

It is suggested but never stated that involved in the creation of this perfect love is a compatibility of tastes or temperament or both. Is it accidental also that these three women — Mrs. Burnaby, Maggie and Mrs. Severance — are strong, well-developed personalities in their own right? Did they bring a certain maturity to marriage with them or is this maturity a result of a happy marriage? Perhaps Mrs. Wilson outlines these relationships rather than exploring them because she believes with Mrs. Severance that "No one can write about perfect love because it cannot be committed to words even by those who know about it."

Not all couples can attain perfect love but there are varying degrees of it which can suffice to make a happy marriage. Mrs. Severance writes to Maggie about Hilda and Albert: "They will not have perfect love but I foresee a nice kind of happiness and am thankful." One is inclined to feel that Mr. and Mrs. Cuppy had this moderately perfect yet happy love relationship in *Love and Salt Water.*

Love is accompanied by and stimulates self-discovery. Love for Richard makes Frankie grow up and comfort Hetty as a woman struggling for the happiness she desires. There are indications that the Richard-Frankie relationship will be modelled on the pattern of that of Mr. and Mrs. Burnaby. Not only does love persist after death but it perpetuates itself in repetitions with variations from generation to generation.

The Innocent Traveller adds some interesting commentary to the subject of love. It has already been suggested that Ethel Wilson is a realist in her approach. Father Edgeworth's choice of a second wife is strongly motivated by practical reasons: "his need for a house partner who would maintain the standards by which he wished his children to grow up, and could run smoothly and easily his pleasant home and keep it happy." Eventually a love relationship does grow out of this need, modulated and framed by the exhausting demands of a large family.

In Ethel Wilson's work, love spans all age levels, from the young Frankie to

the very elderly Great-Grandfather Edgeworth who, at the age of ninety, proposes in quick succession to Maria Grimwade, who is eighty-seven, and to her "little" sister, Sarah Raphael, who is seventy-nine. But while love is a matter of intense seriousness to Frankie, it has lost its urgency for Great-Grandfather and, as an emotion or sensation, its edges are blurred into other emotions and sensations equally or even more insistent: "Great-Grandfather Edgeworth ceased speaking. He had said what he wanted to say, and to tell the truth he did not much mind what Miss Raphael decided, but he would abide by her decision and he was feeling a bit hungry."

Ethel Wilson skilfully indicates with a few deft strokes a whole relationship, sometimes extending over a period of years. As a result, certain minor episodes stand out with remarkable vividness. An example of this is the love affair between Edward Shaw and Mary. How clearly two sentences reveal their situation at the time they are reunited in India: "He overflowed with tenderness, compassion and his desire. Mary broke into weeping which she could not restrain, sprang forward and cast herself, more in homesickness than love, upon Edward's beard." Another example is the relationship between Mr. and Mrs. Porter, the academic beauty married to the man who finds it hard to live with "one of your damned Greek statues".

Topaz' unrequited passion for William Sandbach, a tragic widower of about thirty-five, is an important contribution to the theme of love. When she is rejected by him, her reactions are understandably violent: "She had spent seven years of her life in the preoccupation of love, and there was no return but this emptiness. The placid, bearded figure passed and repassed smiling before her eyes and she whispered: 'I hate him'." Her stepmother, standing hesitantly outside Topaz' door, hears the fearful words: "Curse him! I call Heaven to witness that I curse William Sandbach!"

This is the period of greatest suffering in Topaz' life. But time is a great healer and she recovers to the point where, years later, "She who had wept so much could not now evoke even a spurious sigh. 'How could he have made me so unhappy?' she asked herself in surprise." Time reverses even the impact that provoked the curse.

In the fictional world created by Ethel Wilson people love and are not loved but life goes on and the wounds inflicted by love are absorbed, as are the joys, in the cumulative process of day-to-day existence. Her characters do not resolve their problems by desperate measures or extreme undertakings. Their way is the not-so-spectacular solution that life itself provides in most instances: a gradual

adjustment to or partial compromise with the situation. In the novels only one person tries suicide, Vera Gunnarsen, and she is unsuccessful because she is unable to summon up enough courage to go through with it.

Topaz does not marry after her initial disappointment. She is a woman without of a private life of her own, unaware of the "human relationships which compose the complicated fabric of living. The limitless treasure and absorbing motions of a continuous hidden life had neither enriched nor depleted her."

Topaz remains an innocent traveller, but the ability to skim the emotional surface of life is not necessarily characteristic of the woman who never marries, as the depiction of the "reserved Rachel" indicates. Rachel had apparently had offers of marriage before coming to Canada but she turned them down. The implication is that some strong bond between herself and her mother motivated her choice. None the less she submerges herself in family living.

> She was the daughter, the maiden. Never having known the lights and music of marriage, never having known the joy and care of being a mother, she was yet the wife and mother of her household. She was to this home as the good bread upon the table, as the steadfast light upon the stair.

This poetic tribute to Rachel suggests that there are other ways of fulfilment for a woman than marriage, other forms of love satisfying under certain conditions.

Rachel is a far cry from Victoria May Tritt in *The Equations of Love*, whose solitary state is an expression of unutterable loneliness, sheltered only by the protective framework of routine. Victoria May is a nonentity, conveniently anonymous, afraid of life and of herself. The contrast between these two spinsters reveals that it is not the fact of being married or not married that counts, but what a woman brings to life and what she does with it. Rachel may have sacrificed a part of herself for her mother but she remains intact as a personality, contributing to and planning for others, a source of quiet strength. Victoria May was always on the fringe of human relations, bound up in her fear of both men and women.

Yet it is Victoria May Tritt who nudges the elbow of harsh reality and succeeds in transforming the image of Mort, the drunken betrayer, into that of a hero. In the two stories that compose *The Equations of Love* the theme is everywhere interwoven with the interplay of illusion and reality. As is the case with Hetty Dorval seen full-face and in profile, the revelation of truth continually falters and wavers in response to fluctuating visions of events and people.

Myrt's love for Mort lends itself to a series of kaleidoscopic patterns because of the kind of person she is and because it is essentially self-love. "Of all people,

Myrt loved herself in whatever guise she saw herself." She loved Mort in her own way which would always be a limited way. After the news of his death "when the policemen had gone, and Myrtle was alone, she laid her head on her arms upon the table, and wept — not for Morty her husband, but for herself who would now be exposed to the pity of Irma Flask . . . " Similarly, later on "she became proud of Morty, but prouder of herself for being the widow of a hero."

"Tuesday and Wednesday" adds another interesting portrait to the gallery of women in Ethel Wilson's books, that of Mrs. Emblem whose label might easily be "Two sad cases and one divorce". "Mrs. Emblem is not lonely — exactly. But she has enjoyed long and varied male companionship; that is what she is formed for, and that is what she — less ardently now — craves. And yet something holds her back." She is highly feminine but it is an immature, sensuous feminity and in her pink and blue bedroom she is "like a beautiful old baby".

In "Lilly's Story" the problem of the approach to truth becomes a game of hide-and-seek. We are confronted with the invention of a person who never existed, Mr. Hughes, to justify the disappearance of one whose existence has become undesirable. Lilly is exposed to two passions based on strong physical attraction, that of the sinister Yow and her own desire for Paddy Wilkes. Lilly almost yields to Yow because he satisfies her craving for possessions. She is saved from Paddy Wilkes by the warning thought of Eleanor and by the strength of her ambitions for this child who, since birth, "had guarded her mother and made her the blameless and silent woman she had become." We not only catch a glimpse of what Lilly might have become without Eleanor; we see the limitations of Lilly's ability to love anyone except her child. Lilly herself is shaken by this perception years later when she becomes aware of the feeling that binds Eleanor and Paul: "She had lived for fifty years, and she had never seen this thing before. So this was love, each for each, and she had never know it. And this secret life of love went on in this house and she had never seen it before. She was outside it."

Swamp Angel shows that being alone is preferable to certain types of marriage. Left with no one to care for after the death of her father, her husband and her daughter, Maggie married Edward Thompson Vardoe out of compassion. Alberto makes a fitting comment on this motivation: "Compassion! Compassion is to sympathize and carry the suitcase and give a drink of brandy but not to marry." The relationship becomes intolerable and Maggie runs away.

The personality of Eddie Vardoe is expressed in terms of his spaniel eyes, at least as far as his relationships with women are concerned. The spaniel eyes

suggest submission but in actual fact Eddie's stupidity and narrowness dominate Maggie and make her feel degraded. It is not until she leaves him and he takes up with Ireen that he meets his match and for his "eyes like a dog" he gets "a dog's wages". A personality as limited as that of Eddie Vardoe is incapable of love. After Maggie's flight, Mrs. Severance observes wisely: "It's self-pity, not love, that hurts him."

Swamp Angel introduces one aspect of love that does not appear anywhere else in the works of Ethel Wilson, jealousy. Vera Gunnarsen is a complex mixture of love and hate, both directed at Maggie. Vera feels threatened by two rivals: the lake and with it the lodge, and Maggie. They are closely connected for the rôle of Maggie is integrated with the functioning of the lodge on the lake.

JEALOUSY is based on insecurity and this is plainly visible in Vera: "Vera in her frequent moods of self-pity said to herself I never had a break, did I, my mother never loved me . . . and now . . . look! no, I never had a break. She carried her childhood on her back, and could not — or would not — set it down." Vera develops an image of herself as poor Vera and reinforces it by living up to it.

Jealousy is an emotion that feeds on itself and the individual who harbours it. Vera fills Haldar with a sense of guilt and robs him of his confidence and this leads to a deterioration of the marriage relationship and love. That Haldar himself is not entirely blameless only contributes to the tension that has grown between them.

Vera's shortcomings may be assessed as purely individual weakness but Mrs. Wilson extends them into the broader framework of human relationships. As Mrs. Severance puts it: "Poor Vera. Poor people." This links up with an earlier thought of Maggie's: "Human relations . . . how they defeat us." Mrs. Severance speaks of "the miraculous interweaving of creation . . . the everlasting web" and adds " 'No man is an Iland, I am involved in Mankinde', and we have no immunity and we may as well realize it."

Love emerges as an important part of this basic fabric of life and those who love are not exempt from hardship and suffering. Love demands the full commitment of the self in order to exist. Hilda yielded only slowly to love "because she was self-protecting, mistrustful of herself and others" and therefore reluctant to become involved. Egoism, whether it is the obtuse Vardoe type or the tortured Vera variety, destroys the foundations of love. True love is its own tie that binds,

witness Philip who did not approve of the bonds of matrimony but was faithful to his wife all their "married" life together.

In *Love and Salt Water* the problems and joys of love are once again seen within the larger perspective of human relationships. The complexity of understanding and evaluating is expressed in terms of an image. As Ellen lies in bed, trying to reach a decision regarding Huw, she watches the shifting play of light and shadow on the ceiling:

> She did not at that moment think that there was somewhere some parallel of light and darkness, of illumination and blotting-out, and perhaps our whole existence, one with another, is a trick of light. That may be somewhere near the truth, which is often hard to determine because of the presence of the lights and shadows of look, word, thought which touch, glide, pass or remain.

Ellen's joyous response to the knowledge of her love for George Gordon, slowly arrived at, shows how love permeates and colours her whole existence with its magic: "... the radiance of the fact that she loved George and was not afraid any more to marry him, spread around and forward and backward, illuminating areas of her life which had nothing whatever to do with the matter; and this is one of the perquisites of love."

Morgan is one of the most interesting and sympathetic of Ethel Wilson's characters and surprisingly so, for at first sight our impression is likely to be negative. He is nineteen years older than his wife Nora, a ponderous, heavily-built M.P. who typically calls his wife "dolling". This conventional exterior hides, or rather does not reveal the true sensitivity that lies underneath. The peak of this revelation is in the visits with his idiot son, both in his behaviour at the time and his realization of his wife's absence: "Because he loved her, he spared her, and thought he had reason enough; he excused her also on account of her youth, not noticing that she was no longer young."

In the marriage relationship it is Morgan who loves and Nora who gives what she is capable of giving in return. She responds to his devotion with a reasonable fondness, devoid of passion, which is beyond her range of feeling. The essential coldness of Nora is picked up in the description of her with curlers in her hair: "she looked like a modified goddess of Liberty — meet to be admired but not to be fondled."

Spoiled and protected by Morgan, Nora's deficiencies are in no danger of threatening their marriage. Her immaturity and the incompleteness of her personality emerge when she must assert herself and take some responsibility as, for example, with Johnny.

OUR ANALYSIS of Ethel Wilson's work points to a continuity in her thinking throughout. In her first novel, *Hetty Dorval*, her basic attitudes towards love and life are already revealed in terms of a particular story and characters. The novels that follow add new dimensions to these ideas, amplify and extend them with fresh illustrations of events and personages, but do not modify them fundamentally.

Love is part of the "everlasting web" of human relationships and, as such, partakes of its complexity and variety. "No man is an Iland, intire of it selfe"; his contacts with others depend on the depth and sensitivity of his own nature, but contact there must always be. The highest achievement of human interaction is perfect love, reserved for those who possess "that third dimension that includes perception and awareness of other people". There are other degrees of love, as well, that make for happiness and the joy of sharing, that illuminate and transform all areas of existence.

Love implies responsibility and commitment, the giving of oneself. Individuals who are solely preoccupied with their own wishes and desires, lack the capacity to love fully. If they marry, the relationship becomes a reflection of their own self-love. This can have disastrous effects, as in the case of Eddie Vardoe, or moderately amusing ones, as with Myrt and Mort. Pushed to the extreme, egoism can be dangerous and verges on immorality because it is contrary to the laws of nature.

Love is a manifestation of the interweaving of human relationships; it is also linked with the illusive nature of truth. "But what are doormen like? What is anybody like?" asks Ethel Wilson in her short story "The Corner of X and Y Streets". "One never knows." In a sense Wilson's literary production may be summed up as a constantly renewed quest to find out what anybody is like. As the image of flickering light and dark in *Love and Salt Water* intimates, our whole existence is perhaps a succession of "illumination and blotting-out", "a trick of light".

These three inter-relating themes: love, the complexity of human relationships and the subtlety of truth, are the pegs on which Ethel Wilson hangs her fictional world. Some of her characters are completely oblivious to the existence of these forces that impinge on them; others are supremely conscious of their impact and importance. All move in the aura of a world in flux, where actions and reactions are continually modified by "the presence of the lights and shadows of look, word, thought which touch, glide, pass or remain."

A PROBLEM OF MEANING

Louis Dudek

BEFORE EVEN LOOKING AT the plays of James Reaney it might be good to remind ourselves that there is something drastically wrong with modern drama in general, and that this "something wrong" goes very deep into history.

I have a personal theory about this, a sort of ingrown idea that I have lived with for many years, and which I have never discussed with anyone, so that I don't know whether it would be taken as a quirky over-simplification or a reasonable description of the facts. It runs something like this: drama, philosophy and literature are intimately related in their historical development; drama and philosophy have their great moment following a historical decline in religion; the major period of drama then comes in the first century of this development, while a great age of philosophy accompanies and follows it for a century or so after the drama itself has declined. Philosophy is an analysis, essentially, of the religious problems, an attempt to retrench and to bolster up the declining religious order, to form a reconciliation between the old and the new — an effort in which the new inevitably triumphs. Drama is a demonstration of this same conflict in terms of human action, an attempt to define action successfully in terms of the historic tension — and this also fails. It follows from this theory that modern drama comes long after the great period of drama and philosophy; but then, this is something everyone knows.

At any rate, the pattern can be easily observed in the development of Greek philosophy and drama, and in the development in the Renaissance and the modern period. Greek philosophy from Parmenides to Epicurus covers roughly two centuries (500-300 B.C.), and it is related to a decline and a re-thinking in religious belief; Greek drama covers the first of these two centuries, from Aeschylus to Aristophanes. The great period of modern philosophy stretches from

Descartes to Hegel, also a period of about 200 years; and it follows the Reformation, the wars of religion, and the general disturbance of belief beginning with the Renaissance. The great period of drama falls in the first half of this period, at the turn of the seventeenth century in England and Spain, and in the middle part of that century in France.

It's as though the imagination, and then the mind, were stirred following a great shake-up in the deeper levels of belief. Greek drama was involved with the religious ritual manifestations of the divine in the actual, as all Greek art is the manifestation of the divine in human form; the stage was "a *theatron*, a show place for divine onlookers". The tragedies were "sacred plays, in which man raises himself to the level of the gods, plays too which bring the gods down from their heights." The progress of drama — if it can be called a progress, where the gods leak out — is toward secularization and a descent to naturalism from Aeschylus to Euripides. Greek philosophy, meanwhile, makes the divine, at first *bios* and then *nous*, less and less attainable; makes it eventually unknowable. And cerebration about how this transcendent "reality" can still be validated is the great problem. "In place of the world touched by the radiance of the divine," writes C. Kerenyi, "there remained for the philosophers of the post-classical period, of whom Socrates was the first, a world merely visible. A world which was known and radiant, the Homeric and early classical world, had turned into one which was merely *seen*. It may have been full of beauty, but it was also full of impermanence."

The culmination of all this is found in "the sceptical turn finally taken by the Platonic school. The deity now could be formless, without contours, and without the intensity of a special event in which to show itself." Thus we foresee the end of major drama and the end of tragic "awe" as dramatic experience.[1]

I believe that modern drama has gone through a very similar development. It began with all the presuppositions and beliefs of ritual Christianity behind it; it began as sacred re-enactment; and it has culminated in the secularism and naturalism of contemporary drama, with the moral and intellectual chaos that this involves. Counter-efforts to revive the drama, when they are radical enough, try to bring in the noumenal and the magical through vague backdoor strategies of so-called symbolism; but unfortunately the body of ideas and beliefs simply does not exist, as shared social experience, to make such theatre work. It has an air of absurdity. And this is where we come to James Reaney, our Canadian playwright, born in an evil time and in an ill country for dramatic productions or for the creation of a genuine dramatic literature.

CANADA HAS BEEN poverty-stricken in regard to dramatic productivity, much more so than in the novel and in poetry, because our religion, in the nineteenth century and since, has been a hand-me-down watered Protestantism, weaker even in its kind than the watered-down poetry and fiction of the colonial period have been (see, for example, the picture of old-time religion in Reaney's play *The Sun and The Moon*). And the philosophy or thought that might accompany any religion-in-transition has been almost entirely lacking. Even in this century, when the religious and philosophical questions are central to literature, whether in the plays of T. S. Eliot or Sartre, or Beckett, the typical Canadian farm boys of the literary community recoil from any direct contact with ideas and are resentful of any attempt to bring such questions into poetry or drama.

And yet, such vitality as there has been in the drama has come on a solidly-prepared ground of ideas. The plays of James Reaney and of Robertson Davies — as we can now see after *Fifth Business* and *The Manticore* — have a background of religious and philosophical concern behind them. The survey of philosophy in Reaney's "September Eclogue," in *A Suit of Nettles*, ends significantly with Heidegger and with games of magic taken from *The Golden Bough*; and Reaney's plays in general are shot through with a kind of religious-philosophical excitement that tells us there is much going on privately in that area. But he is a solitary exile in an empty land, almost unique in being troubled deeply and seriously with such questions; therefore his plays have a peculiar dislocation and feeling of unreality in the context of Canadian society, whether staged on the CBC or in the theatre.

Late as we are, the revival of drama which came in Europe at the end of the nineteenth century, with Ibsen and Shaw, then Maeterlinck and Yeats, provides the background for the intellectual content of Reaney's plays. Romanticism was a kind of doubtful religious reconstruction, and the Victorian order at the core was a sentimental, willed effort to hold on to old pieties and beliefs. The collapse of that order, as recorded in the *fin-de-siècle* and the modern movement, is like a miniature re-enactment of the great movements of religion and art described above — even when sand castles fall there is some dramatic impact — so that a minor resurrection of theatre accompanies the fall of the Romantic-Victorian world. The Canadian counterpart of this "happy fall", as a renewal of drama, has come way outside the time-frame, because we really had no religion or morality to speak of, in the first place, and if a few hearts and minds

have been stirred to feeling and thought, at long last, by the seismic movements of the twentieth century, it has taken nearly a century of time for the colonial Giant of the North to be so stirred.

This proposition that James Reaney's charming theatre is somehow a distant relation to, first, Bernard Shaw and, second, W. B. Yeats, may sound far-fetched, but I think it can help us to understand what is going on in the plays. In most of these plays of Reaney, as in the early plays and novels of Robertson Davies, Canada has at last come in for sharp social satire. It was naturally made for it, from the beginning, we suspect, but no playwright would have dared to undertake a full-scale satirical view of Canadian life before World War II. The soul has to be moved to satire by revulsion, and there must be a solid stone somewhere, on which the foot can lean while shaking off the muck. Reaney may be said to possess both these requirements: a major "criticism of life", and a strong intellectual conviction personally achieved. The satirical strain, however, is the lesser part of his purpose — I was going to say "lesser half", but it isn't anything like half — and the other part branches out rather discordantly from the first. This satirical part, however, is dramatically most reliable, and has the most dependable precedents, so that it tends to be theatrically more successful. The first act of several of his plays, as in *The Killdeer*, *The Sun and the Moon*, and *Three Desks* — the part of the play which is closest to social satire — comes off very well; both audience and critics are well pleased, and we seem to have the promise of a successful play. So R. B. Parker of the University of Toronto can write, a bit oddly, that Act I of *The Killdeer* — merely Act I — is "still Reaney's most successful drama".

But the second and third acts of a Reaney play take a radical turn into strange territory. As Alvin A. Lee notes in his analysis of *The Killdeer*, "With Act II the tone changes abruptly . . . the play moves into something close to dark conceit or allegory." In short, the play turns to the great romantic tradition, of transcendence, of magic, or religious implication, and here we are in the country of W. B. Yeats, Maurice Maeterlinck, J. M. Barrie and other visionaries of the "eternal return".

The satire itself springs from a very close personal response to provincial life: one has the impression of a very superior-minded young man cast by fate into a pathetic small-town environment and undergoing all the irritations of being forever trapped in a hen-house or a parsonage. "Oh Millbank, my poor silly little village — silly goosebrained ladies in white aprons. Millbank. Millbank."[2] All life is ultimately conceived in terms of this uncomfortable sense of misplace-

ment. One can trace this from the poem "The Upper-Canadian" in *The Red Heart*, to phrases like "the abyss we live in" in the production notes for *Listen to the Wind* and "I curse this street where it's increasingly difficult to find a green leaf," in *Colours in the Dark*.

The strange infantilism of Reaney's poetry and plays is somehow related to this sense of the absurdity of life. The unkindest interpretation of this aspect of Reaney is that the painful prison of provincialism pressing on the mind of the gifted poet has produced a kind of "arrested development", in which the language and the fantasy-world of childhood remains the only imaginative and vital reality for him and the one to which he perpetually returns. A more sympathetic literary account would relate this infantile strain to Blake's theory of innocence and the general romantic idyllic myth of childhood.

William Blake was perhaps the first poet in history to offer infantile inanity and childish doggerel as serious poetry, and this to the eternal confusion of literature, since in his work abominable poetry is bound up with the most profound and far-reaching ideas. To some extent I hold it against Northrop Frye that he has never pointed out the absurd rhetoric and horribly clotted verbiage in Blake's poetry, and he has praised this poetry as though it could be read on the same level of art as Milton, Spenser, or John Donne. It simply cannot, and never has been read with admiration as poetry.

> He kissed the child & by the hand led
> And to his mother brought,
> Who in sorrow pale, thro' the lonely dale,
> Her little boy weeping sought. . . .
>
> Little lamb
> Here I am;
> Come and lick
> My white neck;
> Let me pull
> Your soft wool;
> Let me kiss
> Your soft face. . . .

The delusion that this sort of thing is high poetry because it suggests an apocalyptic vision of the lost Eden has led James Reaney to write pages of similar nonsense: it has provoked Michael Tait's remark that "No one else has [Reaney's] capacity to write for the stage at once so badly and so well." Thus Reaney:

I must go away to abroad:
When I returned uptown
I met you and you knew me not,
Your hair like flax tow . . .
(*One-man Masque*)

I wish that I could change my name,
The surname is so very lame.
I would change my name to George
And work all day at a forge . . .
(*Night-blooming Cereus*)

Who knows, some of this bathos in Reaney may derive from hymn-book quatrains, the bane of so much English poetry, even as Blake's namby-pamby style derived from the same source; I understand that Reaney's family belonged to a minor fundamentalist sect of evangelical Protestantism.

Our Lord has prepared for us
Houses in Heaven.
How many rooms have they?
They number seven . . ."

"In the woodshed you'll notice
Trees chopped up ready
And fine dry split kindling
For fires all so steady.
(*Night-blooming Cereus*)

This seems to echo such church hymns as Charles Wesley's "Gentle Jesus, meek and mild/Look upon a little child . . ." and the mediocre rhyming and metrics of his hymns:

How wretched are the boys at school
Who wickedly delight
To mock, and call each other fool,
And with each other fight.

If so, it is to take the Gospel teaching "Except ye become as little children . . ." much too literally. Also, it is one thing to write *for* children, as Edward Lear and Lewis Carroll have done — and as Reaney has in his specifically children's books — but quite another to be childish or stylistically insipid in a work written for adults. Such a performance can become quite embarrassing. To account for it, I would say that faced with an audience of mindless biddies and croquet intellects, such as we may have in Canada in the outlands, the poet has taken drastic

means to simplify. His philosophical outlook and his audience-relationship have combined to create a childish theatre. In this strange mixture lies the dilemma and the paradox of Reaney's career as a dramatist.

After all, one cannot put Reaney down as an idiot boy. The naive childlike style and childlike attitudes which are so recurrent in his plays are an affectation, perhaps with a secret self-indulgence, but nevertheless a conscious design aiming to simplify and to reach an indiscriminate audience. The plays could hardly occur on the stage in Paris or New York, though they might conceivably get there. They could only originate in a country like Canada, a hinterland as far as drama is concerned, where an audience in church basements and high schools must be gently prodded to participate in dramatics. The plays are conceived for a small parochial community — there is an aura of amateur theatre about the whole thing — and the audience, one imagines, is composed of children, nice pleasant provincial ladies, and placid hen-pecked husbands. The author naturally tries to involve such an audience and acting group in his enterprise with the greatest possible economy of means. He himself is a complete anomaly in that society — an abnormally gifted swan among the geese — and yet he is possessed of a democratic impulse (or is it an evangelical call?) to make his plays work for everyone, and to involve everyone who comes along in the creative performance. There is little or no theatrical machinery; having no theatre, and no props, we will do it with toothpicks and playing cards, and we will use amateurs and children as actors.

THE ULTIMATE AIM of this simplified kind of play, a collage of children's games (*Colours in the Dark*), or a fairy tale for adults (*Night-blooming Cereus*), or a pastime for a sick boy (*Listen to the Wind*), is anything but trivial and simple. By means of would-be unpretentious play, purporting to gratify the very simplest audience, Reaney intends to achieve the widest possible scope of meaning, interpreting all life from birth to death, all human history, and touching on the major questions of religion and philosophy. His aim, in other words, is epic, and his intentions are those of a major poet, although this is concealed in the trappings of the nursery and of childhood imagination. At one point the stage directions read, characteristically: "The centre panel changes to Durer's Adam & Eve. Dimly we realize that not only are we going through the hero's life and stories he heard as a child, but we are going through Canada's story — glacier and forest, also the world's story." (*Colours in the Dark.*)

At times one is reminded of James Joyce, as in the symbolism relating to transmigration of souls in *Colours in the Dark*; or again of T. S. Eliot, as in the conjunction of Jesus and Buddha in the same play —

> Who was the Tiger? Christ.
> Who was the Balloon? Buddha.

Much of the *One-man Masque* and *Colours in the Dark* reads like all the gists of *Finnegans Wake*, *Ulysses* and *The Waste Land* rolled into a ball. The vast ambition of this philosophical conception, as it stares through the child's play of the surface, seems at odds with the quirky simplicity of the means adopted.

A little higher on the scale than the nursery or child's play I would place Reaney's regressive attachment to melodrama and the plot-patterns of the Victorian romance. Here at least, we might say, we have a breakthrough — from infancy to adolescence! *Listen to the Wind*, for example, makes use of Rider Haggard, an early enthusiasm of Reaney's, as a counterpoint to the "contemporary" setting of the play. So that we can have our cake and eat it, so to speak, as we enjoy a parodistic re-enactment of a Victorian melodrama while at the same time we remain realistically in touch with contemporary truth. Oddly enough, the contrast of worlds does give a heightened dimension to present-day reality, even though the Lucia-di-Lammermoor-like story is really a shoddy piece of soap-opera fantasy. Reaney in actual fact believes that the Rider Haggard story is "very powerful because of the patterns in it"; and Alvin Lee would probably say more specifically that it is "archetypal". "It guides you out of the abyss we live in," says Reaney — or at least it is supposed to.

The question, however, remains whether the melodrama is really worth its salt, whether it's good enough as a "pattern" of any deep meaning. It is, after all, a wild romance about perfidy, ideal love, greed, and the victory of purity and goodness over evil. A Victorian nightmare. Owen's "real life" situation in the play, in which he tries to reconcile his separated parents, represents an appeal for love to overcome the evil of his imminent death. The ambiguity of the alternative endings, sad and happy, is to leave open the possibility of either, as human choice — to refuse love and to cause death, or to love, forgive, and live in eternity. I feel that the parent-son relationship in the play is charged with deep feeling, but there is a comic-parodistic effect in the counterpoint of the Victorian novel and actual life — unless Reaney is more sentimental and melodramatic in earnest than we are able to be, and unless he believes that Ryder Haggard as a

counterpoint is equivalent to the *Odyssey* in James Joyce or *Tristan und Isolde* in T. S. Eliot.

In other words, the counterpoint of the epic and the trivial (Joyce and Eliot) is one thing; the counterpoint of the melodramatic or sentimental and the real is another. (So too, the combination of the high-philosophical and the infantile, in *Colours in the Dark*, presents a special problem.) Rider Haggard is a third-rate popular writer whose only real *raison d'être* here is that Reaney once read him as a boy. Since Reaney is interested in Yeats, Blake and Jacob Boehme, it is probably the false "psychic" and "supernaturalistic" aura of Rider Haggard's books that has fascinated him. There is no doubt some kind of elective affinity here, since Robert Louis Stevenson once described Rider Haggard as "a fine weird imagination," and no phrase could be more apt for Reaney himself.

Rider Haggard, however, is a spurious mystic or visionary of the psychic depths. In his lifetime he had nothing to do with mysticism, except for two occasions: he experienced some kind of hallucination during a mediumistic seance in his youth, and decided to have nothing more to do with these mysteries; and later in life, in a dream, he had a parapsychological communication from his dog. Apart from this, Haggard had no real interest in the supernatural; his religion was of a conventional kind. And the voodoo in his novels is merely the standard stuff of popular romance, as he himself described this kind of fiction:

> The love interest, at least among English-speaking peoples, must be limited and restrained in tone, must follow the accepted lines of thought and what is defined as morality. Indeed it may even be omitted, sometimes with advantage. The really needful things are adventure — how impossible it matters not at all, provided it is made to appear possible — and imagination, together with a clever use of coincidence and an ordered development of the plot, which should, if possible, have a happy ending, since few folk like to be saddened by what they read.[3]

This is no better than some of our own Canadian Anglo-phonies of the nineteenth century, and as a good nationalist Reaney might just as well have taken one of those — *The Golden Dog*, or *Wacousta*. That Reaney should have been enthralled by Haggard, and should have made him the source of one of his most ambitious plays, must be attributed to a youthful literary fixation — like his love for the Brontë circle; in studying Reaney we must therefore be aware that we are pursuing private imaginative locales, of his childhood and youth, as poetic touchstones, rather than objective dramatic contexts. This fact accounts for a great deal of the eccentricity of his plays.

In other words, I see James Reaney's plays as essentially poetic or lyrical drama. The form of *One-man Masque*, which amounts to little more than a stage setting for a reading of Reaney poems — as does also a good deal of *Colours in the Dark* — reveals the strong lyrical bent of this drama. The interpretation of the plays should be directed to the poetic subjectivity of their method, and they should be studied in conjunction with Reaney's poetry, as Alvin Lee does in his somewhat too-mythopoeic study,[4] although the ultimate goal will be a body of ideas, or a "vision", that will be objective and significant for itself.

WE'VE SEEN that the first stage of a Reaney play is likely to be in the satiric mode, with a good deal of Canadian attic-furniture and nostalgia for old Mariposa thrown into the plot. A sort of rural Betjeman. The odd thing in Canada is that the small town is likely to be remembered with a mixture of affection and withering scorn, or neurotic spite. And yet, in the end, it comes to represent life in general, for a poet like Reaney, and therefore the mode of satire and wit finally reveals a deep divorce from these realities, a vision of triviality and mediocrity in horrible dissolution.

It would almost seem that the inevitable course of development for a writer of a certain kind of social satire, if he doesn't get arrested at the stage of trivial discontent, is to move toward a deep concern with the "other world", the world beyond appearance. Mysticism, the supernatural, genuine religion or metaphysics begin to dominate in their later years in the work of writers like Wilde, Shaw, Aldous Huxley, Evelyn Waugh, Auden, E. M. Forster, as well as our own Robertson Davies, all of whom were light satirists at the beginning. I think this pattern of development may be useful to interpret the shift of a Reaney play, usually in Act II, from a fairly realistic satirical mode to a rocky fantastic irrational symbolism that sets the audience back on their heels.

Reaney himself describes this shift as hitting the "rapids":

> You go smoothly along in an apparent realistic way, and then there is this big leap — which director, actors and audience have got to take, or is it just bad dramaturgy? and are they going to take it? Let me give an example. At the end of *Easter Egg* one night some one came up to me and said, "But no one ever feels he has to get married just because he killed a bat." The murder in *Desks*, the circle dance in *Killdeer* (well, the whole trial scene), the recovery of the "idiot" boy in *Egg* have all at one time or another produced a feeling of "rapids" with audiences and the occasional muttering actor. I'm still working on this; one

> solution is to declare myself mad — I don't think the way other people do, and what to you seems melodramatic, surreal, arty, etc., etc., to me seems utterly *verismo* and Zola.[5]

Significantly, he adds that "after watching the Peking Opera at the Royal Alex one evening I decided to trying writing a different kind of play altogether. That is, a play where it's all rapids." The result of this decision was *Listen to the Wind.*

We see then how the "magical" ultimately takes over from the realistic and the satirical. The meaning of this magic element in modern theatre is not far to seek. It is the tradition of Symbolism. What was "grey truth" to W. B. Yeats, and the distrust of rationality and science, also the justification for mediumistic experiments and theories of the supernatural, is set aside to make way for a kind of vague charlatanism on the stage, confusing shifts, mysterious implications, gnomic expressions without context or connection. Madame Blavatsky is still instructing, though this is a church basement, a high school auditorium, or a college stage.

"I curse the discovery of fire. I curse Prometheus," sings the improvised chorus in *Colours in the Dark.* And in lieu of positive science, we have "angels on the bridge in the golden dray."

The impact of science on the imagination — and the whole business of Two Cultures — may be recognized in Reaney's opening editorial in his magazine *Alphabet*, No. 1, September, 1960:

> I can remember about twelve years ago at Toronto feeling the final clutch of the so-called scientific world. Metaphors seemed lies. Poetry seemed to have no use at all. The moon looked enchanting through the trees on Charles Street, but the enchantment was really nothing but an illusion of clouds and fantasy covering up a hide-out pock-marked spherical desert." [6]

It was Blake who pulled him out of this sterile desert of scientific (or so-called scientific) reality: Blake for whom "The Atoms of Democritus/And Newton's Particles of light/Are sands upon the Red sea shore,/Where Israel's tents do shine so bright."

That the consequence of this recoil from science should be an extravagant absorption in symbols, myths, "the iconography of the imagination", without clear reference now as to the specific meanings conveyed by this language of icons and symbols, is characteristic of the entire Symbolist school from the nineteenth century on. Its theology is extremely vague, since the ruined theology which it attempts to replace cannot be sustained, at least not in the old way, and the new one has not yet been formulated. It would take a certain forthrightness of

thought, and a boldness with ideas, which, not being Greeks, we utterly lack. The last ditch stand is that witches' brew, an all-inclusive mythology, all-mythology-at-once as a key to existence. Northrop Frye's magnificent system rests on the premise simply that Total Mythology reveals something solid and permanent, the so-called "structures of the imagination". Ultimately, of course, Frye's systematization — his Key to all Mythologies[7] — leads to a very definite meaning and application, namely a revolutionary Christianity, a radical humanism, and a reassertion of Christian values. These are not things one would want to oppose, but I think it is a somewhat dishonest argument to base such beliefs on "the nature of the mind", or on the presumed permanent "structures of the imagination", however they got there. In the past every kind of dogma and belief was at one time or another supported by that argument, but it has never stood the test of time.

Reaney's plays, like the mother lode itself, rather shyly gravitate toward a Christian affirmation, despite the complex and contradictory symbolism of his irrational play and fantasy:

> A messenger of Hope, comes every night to me,
> And offers for short life, eternal liberty.
> (*Listen to the Wind*)

> Leave the burning city
> Leave this burning town
> Destruction cometh — a sucking cloud
> Your towers will tumble down . . .
> (*Colours in the Dark*)

> "Tonight — I'll begin the New Testament. I have the strength at last to write of Jesus." (*Ibid.*)

These passages are like the fine declarative final speech of Mopsus in the November Eclogue, central no doubt to Reaney's poetry:

> A sun, a moon, a crowd of stars,
> A calendar nor clock is he
> By whom I start my year.
> He is most like a sun for he
> Makes his beholders into suns,
> Shadowless and timeless.
> At the winter sunstill some say
> He dared be born; on darkest day
> A babe of seven hours

> He crushed the four proud and great directions
> Into the four corners of his small cradle.
> He made it what time of year he pleased, changed
> Snow into grass and gave to all such powers.[8]

WELL, IT SEEMS after all that this is not really "all mythologies". All mythologies are being read as one mythology, the key we already had — a neat trick if you can work it. Yet this explicit interpretation read into Reaney's plays would stiffen into a hard and fast creed what is still fluid and potential in his free imagination. He rides a Blakean horse that is not so easily stabled: it is the horse named "Boehme" in *A Suit of Nettles*:

> What a pretty snow white horse tattooed with
> stars, mountains meadows real sheep moving on them it
> seems & fiery comets & ships in a harbour & little
> horses dancing in a barnyard. This horse's eyes — oh
> the angelic aurora wonder of its gold red mane. Every
> once in a while this horse's colour completely changes.
> People shy away then I can tell you! Storms break out
> in the tattoed skies and a fiery fire burns in the eyes
> However, it bubbles over — a light comes into his eyes
> and the world changes back again.

And so it is. The plays are a strange and wonderful experience — though often an irritation — and they are a powerful contribution to the possibility of theatre in Canada. Much as I may disagree, having my own way of searching through the creation, I want to stand up to applaud a fine achievement. For my own taste, among the plays, I probably could do without *The Killdeer*, *The Sun and the Moon*, the *Three Desks*, and *The Easter Egg* — much as there may be interesting things in all of them — and I believe the best of Reaney's theatre, pure Symbolism in the romantic vein of Maeterlinck and Yeats, is to be found in *Night-blooming Cereus*, *One-man Masque*, and the moving and impressive later plays, *Colours in the Dark* and *Listen to the Wind*. It is here that he suggests vast meanings and haunting other-worldly dimensions through the simplest verbal and theatrical techniques, namely through the symbolic interplay of action and the incantation of poetry. The experience he wants to arouse is given in the serious-humorous description of the flower in the stage directions to *Night-blooming Cereus*:

> Above the village appears a vision of the Night-blooming Cereus opening in slow beach crashing swarming splendour and glory, a blossom larger than airplanes or zeppelins, four times really the size of the village, three times the size of Toronto, twice the size of Bethlehem and once the size of Eden. Then it fades as time comes back.

The difficulty of the plays remains. It is a difficulty which is both intellectual and sociological — hated words! — in that the problem of these plays is to discover, with precision and in detail (not always possible in such a case) what they want to say, and at the same time to reach an audience which is neither prepared for nor capable of any mental exertion. And it all goes back to "vision" — the Greek *theoria* — in which the divine was revealed in the epiphany of the theatre: except that we today are not quite sure of what we mean by the divine. In the meantime, the play — or "play" — is the thing, if only as a childlike way to keep things going. Reaney's emphasis is definitely on the play.

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Colours in the Dark (Macmillan, Toronto, 1971).
Listen to the Wind (Talonbooks, Vancouver, 1972).
There are several plays for children also in print, and a collection entitled *School Plays* projected by Talonbooks, but I have not yet seen this last. A chronology of his work and a full bibliography is provided in the book *Masks of Childhood* and also in the detailed study by Alvin A. Lee, *James Reaney* (Twayne Publishers, New York, 1968).

NOTES

[1] Quotations in the above paragraphs are taken from C. Kerenyi, *The Religion of the Greeks and Romans* (London, 1962), pp. 153, 28, 158, 146, 159.
[2] *The Sun and the Moon*, Act II.
[3] H. Rider Haggard, *The Days of My Life* (London, 1926), II, 90.
[4] Alvin A. Lee, *James Reaney* (Twayne Publishers, New York, 1968).
[5] James Reaney, "Ten Years at Play," in *Canadian Literature*, No. 41 (Summer, 1969), p. 59.
[6] Editorial reprinted in Louis Dudek and Michael Gnarowski, *The Making of Modern Poetry in Canada* (Ryerson Press, Toronto, 1967), p. 197.
[7] "Mr. Casaubon, as might be expected, spent a great deal of his time at the Grange in these weeks, and the hindrance which courtship occasioned to the progress of his great work — the Key to all Mythologies — naturally made him look forward the more eagerly to the happy termination of his courtship." George Eliot, *Middlemarch*, Chapt. VII.
[8] James Reaney, *A Suit of Nettles* (Macmillan, Toronto, 1958), p. 51.

THE FIRST EXILE

Pierre Cloutier

R. P. BLACKMUR SAID that the hero of the most ambitious art of our time was the artist himself. And the novel of the artist is one of the fundamental indices in an assessment of a given culture's maturity, self-consciousness and sophistication, because it is a work of the imagination, whose subject is the imagination. In Canada, the genre has come into its own in the work of Hugh Hood and Mordecai Richler, much of which deals with artist protagonists like Alexander MacDonald, Rose Leclair, Jake Hersh, or Norman Price. And it was inaugurated in the nineteenth century novel of Sara Jeannette Duncan, *A Daughter of Today*, whose story of the development of a young, sensitive, artistic imagination exiled abroad began the tradition.

At the outset, Elfrida Bell, the artist heroine, returns to Sparta, her small, drab Ontario hometown, after one year of art courses in Philadelphia. Her basic training in the arts has been undergone outside Canada. She has exiled herself to the United States before continuing the process in Europe as most Canadian artist heroes will, and there she sets a trend.

Her intellectual allegiances are instinctively European. As an artist and an intellect, S. J. Duncan's heroine has gained access to the universe lying beyond Sparta, a small entropic semi-urban microcosm like those which are the setting of Stephen Leacock's and Robertson Davies' novels and stories; her dream is the great dream of the Canadian intelligentsia, the preservation of vital lifelines to the "mother" countries of France and England during the long-drawn absence of an indigenous cultural life.

When she quits her home town, the girl undergoes a change not of degree, but of kind. The idiom of behaviour, the system of values she adopts, is unintelligible to a home environment which really has neither and which lives in the inertia of acquired habit. Exile for her is an initiation into a world which has a sense of manners:

> . . . manners in the slightly extended sense of the gestures and modes of behaviour established by a society for the expression of moral attitudes.[1]

The declining nineteenth century was the golden age of the artist as magnificent egotist, entrenched in Bohemia which, according to Alphonse de Callonne, was bordered on the north by need, on the south by misery, on the east by illusion and on the west by the infirmary. Elfrida will become an initiate of the Decadence, whose manners and conventions have become *mantras*, rituals for inducing the creative state, like the rotten apples of Schiller's work desk.

But before she leaves her native society the provincial's egotism still bears the stamp of the order against which it would rebel. It lacks scope, because it never defies institutions or the corporate egos of social class or native country, and it lacks the radical articulateness which is the earmark of the true rebel. At home, Elfrida Bell is a domesticated rebel in a domestic environment which lives on mood rather than principle and seldom deals with anything but the petty quarrels of petty minds. She keeps a relatively low profile, since language, in Sparta, has not evolved beyond the bare immediacy of daily fact. The artist's native environment is only the background against which her self-conscious coquettishness stands out, a mirror in which she can fawn on her own image.

> Her actual and her ideal self, her most mysterious and interesting self, had originated in the air and the opportunities of Sparta. Sparta had even done her the service of showing her that she was unusual by contrast, and Elfrida felt that she ought to be thankful to somebody or something for being unusual as she was.

When she adopts the code of the Bohemian, Elfrida does so with a complacent exaltation which may or may not be shared by the writer, whose use of tone is surprisingly uncertain.

> She entered the new world [of the Quartier Latin] with proud recognition of its unwritten laws, its unsanctified morale, its rictious overflowing ideals; and she was instant in gathering that to see, to comprehend these was to be thrice blessed, as not to see, not to comprehend them was to dwell in outer darkness with the bourgeois and the 'sandpaper' artists and others who are without hope.

Of course the passage is absurd overstatement.

As Gerald Jay Goldberg noted in his unpublished study of the artist hero in English fiction:

> If one were to evaluate degrees of estrangement, residence in Bohemia, in spite of its extravagance, . . . is often but a phase in the artist's development, and in the

instances in which success is achieved, the Bohemian is reabsorbed into the social structure.[2]

For Elfrida, success is not achieved and she leads a resolutely marginal and half delinquent existence, perhaps because, as James said, the artist hero can only be the failed artist whose misfortunes lend themselves to dramatization more readily than the largely intractable process of outstanding artistic creation. Provincial bondage still governs her existence through the Dickensian menace of ruin at home and the cutting off of allowances to those who would leave their little outpost of empire. When S. J. Duncan shows Elfrida's parents living on a reduced income so that Elfrida must drop her painting and go job hunting as an inexperienced journalist, she is being very Canadian. Robertson Davies builds his macabre comedy of the expatriate on the dialectics of money and the artist. In Hugh Hood's *White Figure, White Ground* the hero's father undergoes near ruin. In Morley Callaghan's *A Passion in Rome*, Sam Raymond may or may not be paid while on an assignment in Rome as a journalist. The economic fortunes of home and family always affect the life of the vagrant artist. Money, a stable medium of exchange, seems to strike his imagination. He feels scruples over having too much of it in Robertson Davies' *A Mixture of Frailties*, he hates the tentacular presence of usury in Scott Symons' *Place d'Armes*. He is never deeply indifferent to it as Joyce Cary's vintage hobo Gulley Jimson is, although he pays lip service to the economics of irreverence and the conventions of garret life. Extrinsic criteria, the necessities of survival, influence his choice of a medium more directly than his particular brand of aesthetic sensibility which is more often than not undefined and purely potential.

Elfrida evolves into more of a radical libertarian, though less of an artist, than most of her successors. Her career as a writer is initiated by her parents' economic difficulties, and although she has been an indifferent painter, she makes it a point to pause in awkward reverence on the threshold of a new life. A daughter of the age, she would no doubt agree with Wilde speaking to André Gide in Blidah and confiding that "il faut toujours vouloir ce qui est le plus tragique." She insists on being risqué and very much the aesthete while writing unprintable articles on "the nemesis of romanticism", which are universally rejected. She prefers theory to craftsmanship. When the artist Kendal draws a satirical sketch of her paying her respects to George Jasper, novelist, and kissing Jasper's hand, he puts the mirror up to nature, thanks to the techniques which Elfrida didn't care to master. The irony is in the subject of the sketch, but also in the medium

used by the painter. The artist's capacity to satirize, to act upon a value judgement by producing an image, helps him settle his accounts with the outside world and resume his relationship with the men and things about him.

> ... Kendal felt free to make the most of his opportunities of seeing Elfrida — his irritation with her subsided, her blunder had been settled to his satisfaction. He had an obscure idea of giving the incident form and colour upon canvas, in arresting its true *motif* with a pictorial tongue.

Yet through it he remains self-critical:

> It was his conception of the girl that he punished and he let his fascinated speculation go out to her afterward at a redoubled rate.

Kendal's affinities to the artistic thought and practice of the 1890's are not very well defined. He is a competent young trained technician over whom academicians are atwitter in corporate distress. He produces intelligible formal signs, especially portraits, and gives shape to the continuous flow of the real. Proper handling of his medium requires at least the altruism of the craftsman who must achieve control.

On the other hand the dandyism which is Elfrida's private morality distorts her relationship with those surrounding her since she considers herself her own artistic medium and tends to indulge in gesture for gesture's sake. Her scrupulous concern over her own sensibility makes her blind to those of others. She selects sensations as a painter would select pigments

> She was so freshly impressed with the new lifelights, curious, tawdry, fascinating, revolting, above all sharp and undisguised, of the world she had felt, that she saw them already projected with a verisimilitude which, if she had possessed the art of it, would have made her indeed famous. Her own power of realisation assured her on this point — nobody could see, not divine but *see*, as she did, without being able to reproduce; the one implied the other ... and up from the bag came a scent that made her shut her eyes and laugh with its power to bring her experiences back to her.

From such a point of view, the artistic temperament is endowed with a more lively sensibility than is supposed to be common among mankind. The artist also grants himself the right to use the beings who serve as models for his own private purposes, robbing them of their identity by making them into the public images which are the product of his art. Callaghan in *A Passion in Rome* suggests that Michelangelo sees his contemporaries not as individuals but "as something for form and colour". Hypersensitivity and egotism are very commonplace generali-

inescapable. Murger, who had few illusions on things Bohemian and saw starving in garrets as a silly thing to do, thought the names of Gilbert, Malfilatre, Chatterton and Moreau had been bandied about too often, to the point where the cult addressed to them had simply become what he called "the martyrology of the mediocre".[4] A reader who shares this opinion will wonder whether S. J. Duncan's novel is merely derivative or whether it should be dealt with on its own terms.

The aesthetic of the dandy gives the artist himself the purposeful purposelessness of the artifact because his life *is* his art, which is quite a sophisticated proposition for an author like S. J. Duncan who still belonged to a semi-pioneer society to use in building a novel. The character who operates on this premise performs more than he exists, he abstracts himself from nature and society and stages his existence like a Gidian Lafcadio whose acts have no cause, no usefulness, are done out of pure pleasure. The book in which he is portrayed inevitably acquires a cerebral argumentative quality since it must provide an apology for its hero's motive. It becomes discontinuous because it portrays the spontaneity of gratuitous impulse, the methodical and immediate satisfaction of unreasoned whim. Like its hero, it must carefully and overtly remain untainted with the vulgarity of mere existence. The likes and dislikes of such a hero, his affirmations of belief or his acts, including suicide, also lose the transparency which motivation must have in order to remain intelligible to all. Ultimately, the oracular ambiguity of his words, the complacent grace of his gestures contradict the literary medium of the novel, language. Like the perfect crime, such a being must remain unknown by definition, and therefore cannot exist, or can only exist for himself, a barren divinity.

One could say that Sara Jeanette Duncan's novel of the artist attempted to bring the Canadian literary sensibility from barbarism into decadence single-handedly, somehow bypassing civilization. It was inevitable that subsequent works should push back the clock and not travel through such strange seas of thought en masse. Canada is a country young enough to gamble on that next century which will be, perennially, its very own. It is also a country young enough to share the pre-Romantic faith that

> . . . art, however great, must be subordinate to the greater art of living. It was the faith that persuaded Milton to drop his epic ambitions for politics and Congreve to abandon authorship when he felt it to compromise his integrity as a gentleman; and it is allied to the faith in the social obligation of the artist, whose duty was to serve his public.[5]

NOTES

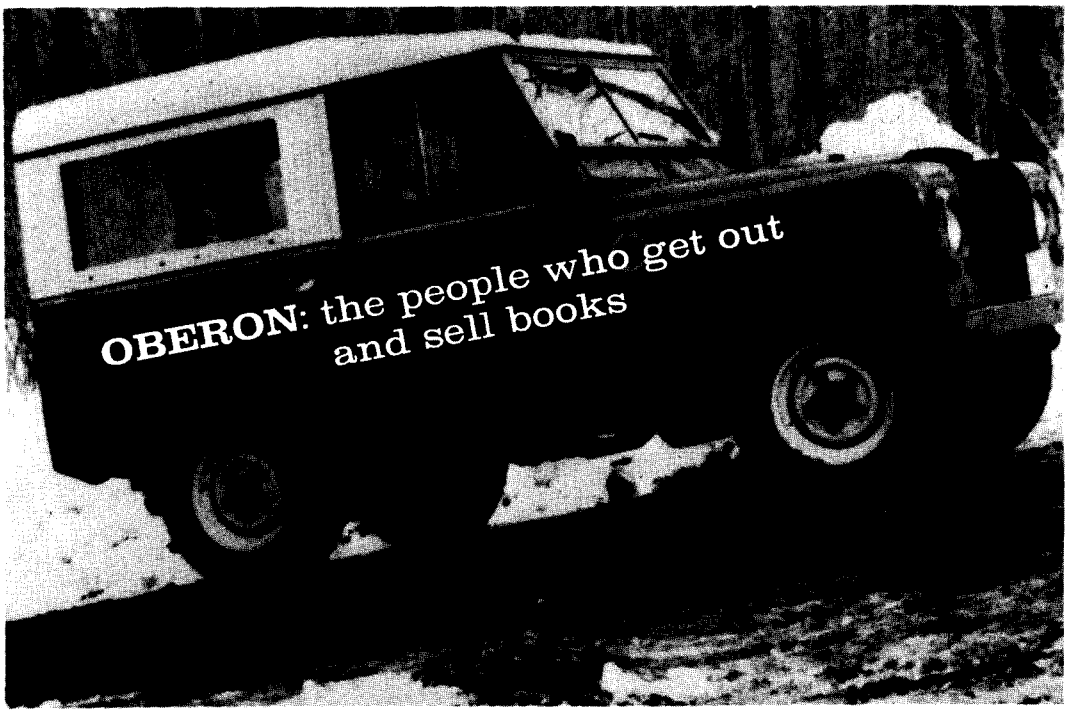
[1] Dick Harrison, "The American Adam and the Canadian Christ", *Twentieth Century Literature*, Vol. 16, No. 3 (Los Angeles, Calif.: July 1970), p. 161.

[2] Gerald Jay Goldberg, "The Artist Hero in British Fiction", unpublished Ph.D. dissertation, University of Minnesota, 1958, p. 221.

[3] Robertson Davies, *A Mixture of Frailties*, p. 137.

[4] Joanna Richardson, "Romantic Bohemia", in *History Today*, July 1969.

[5] E. M. W. Tillyard, *The Epic Strain in the English Novel* (New Jersey: Essential Books Inc., 1958), p. 71.



POEMS FOR KLEIN

Irving Layton

REQUIEM FOR A. M. KLEIN

I remember your cigaret-stained fingers
The rimless glasses that glinted with your wit
And the bowtie protruding
Under your chin like a spotted tongue

Your scholar's mind neat as your hair
And the jaunty self-loving complacencies
That made me think of plump pumpkin seeds
Falling from your mouth, the epigrams

I finally gave up counting
Scattering like the pigeons on St. Mark's square
When a piston ring suddenly explodes.
I still wonder at your psychological obtuseness

And the sentimentality each clever Jew
Misconstrues for sensitivity:
Fool's gold which you, O alchemist,
Changed into precious metal, solid and true

Warm-hearted egotist, my dear unforgettable Abe,
You were a medieval troubadour
Who somehow wandered into a lawyer's office
And could not find your way back again

Though the reverent adolescent
Like the Virgil which fee-less you taught him
Would have taken your hand and led you out
Muttering the learned hexameters like a charm

Now grey-haired I diet, quarrel with my son,
Watch a young girl make love to herself,
Occasionally speak to God and for your sake
Resolve to listen without irony to young poets

But still muse on your bronzed tits of Justice.
Yes, here where every island has its immortal bard
I think of you with grateful tears and affection
And give them your fresh imperishable name

Molibos, Greece

EPIGRAM FOR A. M. KLEIN

They say you keep the devils laughing by your wit
And all the furnaces stilled that they may hear it.

FOR A. M. KLEIN

Seymour Mayne

So you made the N.Y. Times
with your death — a column,
mimic of your poetic mine,
the richness of your vision —
And rising behind Montreal's gothic
french and english, *Yerushalayim*
with her gates, with her orifices
and one destined for the catatonic
master of madness.
Your city
rose to the north, and green
like Safed the hills lay at your feet
to be sung into the carpets
upon which your Adam first tripped.

Unlike the first Patriarch
you did not return to your Canaan
flowing with the gilt honey
and gleaming canvas milk
that poured and mixed
for your ad-libs
and libations.
And in the blankness
of our north you finally stared
as if blind — the motes were cold
and flakey, and suddenly symmetrical
brittle hands, five-fingered prongs,
mercurial, piercing and dipping
into every outraged sense, and silencing

you with the deepest suffering —
the gagged tongue
limp and mute
unable to call itself back.

What due had you then you thought —
a knot of poems, a scheherazade
of a thousand witless dervish rockings,
stale-linen turbans *davening*
under the aureate arcs?
And near
where you tried to live again,
beneath the bridge of Outremont Park
where I came with cutting skates in my youth,
a second troll haunted
his princely self and stopped up
his dusky mouth with fear
in the mathematical snowy nights.

Now we know why all your equations
were equivocal — a pundit's brilliance,
yet disguising the grand with the puny —
of double voices speaking, gasping,
apostrophizing from the round zero of the mouth
rings to the empty ear's circle
and woven labyrinthine laurels
over the vacuous glycerine of the sunken eye.

BEAUTIFUL LOSERS

All the Polarities

Linda Hutcheon

BEAUTIFUL LOSERS has been called everything from obscene and revolting to gorgeous and brave. For a Canadian work it has received considerable international attention, yet few literary critics have dared take it seriously. Along with *The Energy of Slaves*, which shares its themes and imagery, this novel stands as a culminating point in Cohen's development. It may also be the most challenging and perceptive novel about Canada and her people yet written.

Cohen plays with the novel structure but the essential unity of the work lies outside the temporal and spatial confines of plot and character, in the integrity of the images. The first book, "The History of Them All," is the tortured confession of a nameless historian-narrator whose prose is as diarrhetic as his body is constipated. "A Long Letter from F.," written from an asylum for the criminally insane by the brilliant, erratic revolutionary-tyrant, presents us with the narrator's teacher and his "system," seen from the perspective of failure. The final fantasy of F.'s escape leads into "Beautiful Losers: an epilogue in the third person". In formal novelistic terms this is the most traditional part, yet even here characters and temporal sequences merge and we are finally addressed by yet another narrative voice.

Whatever plot there is here, its interest is minimal. If the characters enlist our attention at all it is due to their articulate natures. There is little doubt that, if not obscene — whatever that word might mean — the language of this novel is sexual and sensual. Michael Ondaatje claims: "To write *Beautiful Losers* in a safe formal style would have been to castrate its powerful ideas and its vulgar sanctity."[1] "There are no dirty words — ever,"[2] adds Cohen. Yet there does

seem to be a specific thematic reason for using the language of often vulgar sexuality in the way in which Cohen does. As in his entire *œuvre*, it is as if he is trying to force the reader to face his sexuality: "Undress, undress, I want to cry out, let's look at each other. Let's have education." The language may well be a deliberately constructed obstacle to be dealt with before the seriousness of the novel can be perceived. At the separatist rally, for instance, the narrator rivets our attention on the female hand caressing his genitals, while the crucial theme of the English domination of French Canada is being presented in the background in the words of the speaker.

This theory does not, however, account for the pop music and comic book talk: "Smack! Wham! Pow!" Nor does it explain the disintegration of language that takes place in Book One. No doubt part of this is deliberate "con," for Cohen admits he is never totally devoid of that. Yet, as a novel dealing ironically with identity in its private and public dimensions, it also presents the modern vision of alienation in the nameless narrator, the character who most painfully suffers from disintegrating verbal structures. Neither his ideas nor his language ever takes shape firmly, despite his academic roots in the past.

As a folklorist he can draw his imagery from many mythologies — Amerindian, Egyptian, Greek. Mostly he tends to systematize a modern mythos gleaned from comics, radio and movies. His temple is the System Theatre and Gavin Gate rules: "You are the king of some slum block and you have handed down Laws." Despite its being steeped in "Canadiana", the novel, like the rest of Cohen's work, is also biblical in its imagery and structure. Like the Bible, *Beautiful Losers* is both social and individual in scope. However, as in most modern ironic literature, the poles are no longer moral ones of good and evil, but existential ones of identity and alienation. Both works are epics of a people and a man, and despite their historical skeletons, the essential unity of each is organic rather than linear.

Indeed the novel often seems an ironic or demonic parody of the Bible. Faith is replaced by magic. The continuous creation — the "begats" — loses out to an entire cast of orphans. The Bride and Bridegroom, presented traditionally in Kateri and Christ, are parodied in Edith and the Danish Vibrator (the D.V.!). The temporal dimension of the Bible is essentially a present — it happens as it is being read; F. insists that he will show the narrator "how it is happening" in his letter. In the novel the apocalyptic imagery of the Eucharist becomes real cannibalism, among other things, in a demonic tale of torture and mutilation. The redemptive sacrifice of the body and blood, the bread and wine, is presented

in Catherine, the "lily out of the soil watered by the Gardener with blood of martyrs." This white/red imagery is picked up ironically in the basic conflict of the novel — between White Man and Red Man. Catherine even converts to the white race after her death. The Indian Edith wants to be someone else too, so plans an unappreciated surprise for her husband, who tells us: "she was waiting for me all covered in red grease and I was thinking of my white shirt." Not long after this she is a bloody corpse at the bottom of an elevator shaft.

Perhaps the most important use of this imagery comes at the French dinner party at which Catherine spills her wine. The red stain spreads over the white table cloth, the guests, and even "drifts of spring snow darkened into shades of spilled wine, and the moon itself absorbed the imperial hue." The narrator begins the next section with: "It is my impression that the above is apocalyptic," perhaps referring to Revelation 6:12 where the full moon becomes like blood. He then explains the Greek origins of "apocalyptic." A hundred pages later this is picked up in the final word of Edith's Isis speech: *'αηεκαλυΨεν* —apekalypsen. These two passages and women are again linked by the narrator's definition of the apocalyptic: it "describes that which is revealed when a woman's veil is lifted."[3] "What have I done," moans the narrator, "what have I not done, to lift your veil, to get under your blanket, Kateri Tekakwitha?"

The final scenes of the novel seem to be a deliberately literal parody of the biblical apocalyptic vision. In Revelation 22:14: "Blessed are those who wash their robes that they may have the right to the tree of life and that they may enter the city by the gates." The filthy old man descends from the treehouse and, between the naked legs of a woman, enters Montréal. Echoing Revelation 1:7 ("Behold, he is coming with the clouds, and every eye will see him"), the man transforms into a movie in the sky, a movie of a blind negro singer in sunglasses: "his head and his hair were white as white wool, white as snow; his eyes were like a flame of fire" (Revelation 1:14).

This process of ironic reversal of images is constant throughout the novel. Just as the tongues of fire drive the disciples out of their room to teach Christ's message, so the firecrackers drive the narrator out of his apartment to the treehouse to become F.'s teachings incarnate. In the Bible the sea leviathan is the enemy of the Messiah, destined to be destroyed by Him. Fallen man is born, lives and dies *within* his belly. The Danish Vibrator is also a source of social sterility, but in the pansexuality of the novel it satisfies the frustrated Edith, working over the entire *surface* of her body, before crashing through the window and crawling back to the sea.

THIS NOVEL OF IDENTITY also presents a frightening picture of the possible tragedies of alienation facing Canada and the isolated hero. Like the Bible, it associates the fate of the individual with that of the nation. "You've turned Canada into a vast analyst's couch from which we dream and redream nightmares of identity," the narrator accuses F. As he delves into his own consciousness, the nameless man stumbles upon the truth about Canada. This truth is closely linked with his taste for victims, for, like the novel, Canada's past is coloured by the blood of her defeated peoples.

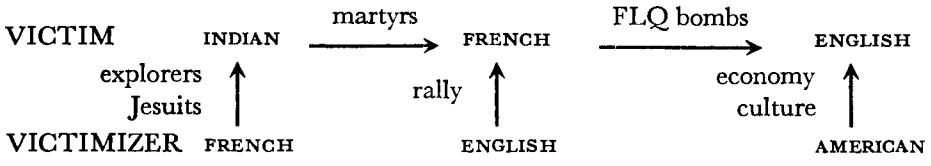
The epigraph of the novel begins: "Somebody said lift that bale," introducing the victim/victimizer theme which is then underlined by the continuation which identifies the lines as Ray Charles singing "Ol' Man River". Although there is no logical sense in mentioning who is singing these written words, the link with the final vision of the novel would suggest that to become a Ray Charles movie is not liberation for the narrator, but perhaps a symbolic capitulation to the victimizing forces.

In "The Genius," Cohen writes:

> For you
> I will be a Dachau jew
> and lie down in lime
> with twisted limbs
> and bloated pain
> no mind can understand.

This vision of Nazi torture also pervades *Beautiful Losers*: meat-eating humans are "dietary Nazis" with their Dachau farmyards. The novel is laced with incidental but constant references to the Jews, often concerning their role as a victimized race. F. says that each generation must thank its Jews and its Indians for making progress possible — by their victimization. Canadian literature is full of images of a lonely, desolate wilderness, indifferent to human values. Here we are in an increasingly urban society where man is progressively brutalized by the city, becoming, himself, indifferent to human values. The identity of the nation is thus inextricably bound to that of the man. The narrator unwillingly is forced to speak for Canada: "O Tongue of the Nation! Why don't you speak for yourself?"

In the broader social scope of the novel, Canadian history is patterned on the process of victimizer turned victim:



The Indian world here is not just the pastoral one of Pauline Johnson; it is also the massacre and agony of "Brébeuf and his Brethren." What remains of the former is destroyed by the French explorers and the Jesuits: "the old people gathered at the priest's hem shivered with a new kind of loneliness. They could not hear the raspberries breaking into domes." To destroy the link with nature is to deny the source of mythology. After his defeat in the shadow wrestling with the priest, Catherine's uncle laments: "Our heaven is dying. From every hill, a spirit cries out in pain, for it is being forgotten." The French even give the Iroquois their name. The Hodenosaunee (the People of the Long House) are redefined in terms of a phatic expression (*hiro* — like I said) plus a cry of joy or distress (*koué*), befitting their new victim role (*hiro-koué* — Iroquois). This same pattern is repeated:

INDIAN	Hodenosaunee	Uncle's shadow	Kateri in camp	Edith
	↑	↑	↑	↑
FRENCH	Iroquois	Lamberville	Catherine in fort	French rape

Catherine's uncle loses his fight for her, but wisely refuses "life-giving" baptism for himself. Indeed, one week after Edith injects water from Lourdes and Tekakwitha's Spring into her veins, she is found under the elevator, a "suicide." As a child she is raped by the French townsmen who ironically call her an Indian "heathen" as she prays to Mary and Kateri. The narrator feels he should rescue Catherine at least from the French Jesuits, from the "Sinister Church." When, at her death, Catherine's skin turns white, the Jesuit interpretation is that "Dieu favorisait les sauvages pour leur faire goûter la foi." This racist chauvinism disgusts F.: "Let the mundane Church serve the White race with a change of colour."

However, it is not long before the victimizing French fall prey to the English. F. realizes that the modern French must not make the mistake the Indians made. The separatist rally speaker says: "The English have stolen our History! . . . History decreed that in the battle for a continent the Indian should lose to the Frenchman. In 1760 History decreed that the Frenchman should lose to the

Englishman! . . . In 1964 History decrees, no, History commands that the English surrender this land which they have loved so imperfectly, surrender it to us!" Yet, can the direction of the cycle be so easily reversed? F. is the main Québecois voice; echoing the speaker's rhetoric, he longs for thick national boundaries because "without independence we will be nothing but a Louisiana of the north, a few good restaurants and a Latin Quarter the only relics of our blood."

The conquering English, however, are in turn being made the victims of their American neighbours: it is 1776 revisited. As a Frenchman, F. claims "the English did to us what we did to the Indians, and the Americans did to the English what the English did to us." Today's attack is far more insidious, though: it is economic[4] and cultural. In the novel the TV ads are from Madison Avenue, the comics are American, as is Charles Axis. Hollywood provides modern saints. When the narrator unpacked the firecrackers from Sioux Falls, South Dakota, he said: "I wept for the American boyhood I never had, for my invisible New England parents, for a long green lawn and an iron deer, for college romance with Zelda." The modern American dream is to be an immigrant sailing into New York armed with obsolete machine guns to astound and conquer the Indians; it is to be "Jesuit in the cities of the Iroquois".

This same victimization theme is present in the histories of the individual characters in the novel. The story of Catherine is full of personal torture and Sault St. Louis looks like a "Nazi medical experiment". In his own agony the narrator perceives their common bond of pain: "F. Suffered Horribly In His Last Days. Catherine Was Mangled Every Hour In Mysterious Machinery. Edith Cried Out In Pain." He has a taste for victims, be they fictional or real, likely because *he* is the chief victim figure of the novel. F. envies him this status, yet it is he who tortures the narrator as a boy, slicing off his wart amid screams of sadistic approval from the other orphans. Later the narrator's hands are burned by F.'s firecrackers. No doubt we are meant to recall F.'s lost thumb and Jogue's thumb-torture by the Iroquois.

OF THE THREE MAIN CHARACTERS in the present (or recent past) of the novel, one is an A—, one a French Canadian, Roman Catholic, M.P. and revolutionary, and one is a nameless English Canadian, raised in a Montréal Jesuit orphanage. Although these three, plus Catherine, are the main foci of attention as individuals, we are never allowed to forget their background

and the symbolic weight they bear. Desmond Pacey sees the novel as the testimony of a "voluntary loss of self for some higher cause."[5] But just what is this higher cause? The loss of self in the novel is indeed voluntary — although in an ironic way — but it certainly gives way to nothing positive on a private or public level. Pacey seems to miss the ironic tone of the novel and neglects the message of failure in F.'s letter. Each character lives an isolated existence that ends in some form of destruction. Sex is not even a meeting of bodies: F. excludes the eager narrator, only to be, in turn, excluded by Edith in Argentina. The major sex scenes in the novel are either oral or masturbatory.

The narrator loses his "self" through attempting to avoid acknowledging that his salvation can only be found in solitude and from within. Instead he looks to F., Edith, and finally Catherine. In his constipation he prays to his bowels to make him empty so he can receive, without realizing that one's identity is not *received*. "I am the sealed, dead, impervious museum of my appetite," he whines. This imprisonment imagery is connected to his physical environment, a totally "introverted", windowless basement apartment. It resembles, however, the "dark tunnel" where Catherine watches the sexual embraces of others and finds her virginal identity. At one point in his cellar torment, the narrator seems to reach some epiphanic realization of *his* identity: "I care more about my red watery throbbing thumb than your whole foul universe of orphans. I salute my monsterhood." Yet he stops short of total self-acceptance and escapes the place of descent into the self, entering the "cold ordinary world" to call the Early Morning Record Gal. It is F.'s final trick to prevent the narrator's full realization of his separate identity: the teacher still needs him for his own second chance.

In the person of F., Cohen also presents an ironic version of the isolated tragic hero. He is the vulgar, mad revolutionary, the saint of perversity, the Moses who leads his friend to the Promised Land, but cannot enter himself. He is a John the Baptist, yearning to be Christ — teaching in parables and enigmatic saws, reversing conventional meanings in a parody of Christ's own reversals (Love thine enemies). The narrator is his faithful disciple who will carry on his essence in a rather startling literal manner. However, we must keep in mind that F. does sing "The Great Pretender."

He is constantly conscious of being the narrator's teacher. Sometimes the student deliberately wishes to emulate the master, but at other times he has no choice. "His style is colonizing me," he cries, "do I have to be your monument?" He senses that he has been trained for something, but is not sure just what. A born teacher, F. manages to extend his instruction over the wide gulf of death,

planning the firecracker ordeal. At his death he passes the torch to his student, demanding a further effort: "interpret me, go beyond me. . . . Go forth, teach the world what I meant to be." He freely admits his ultimate failure with both Edith and her husband.

He perceives the cause of this breakdown as lying in his "system," in the limitations of his created, ordered vision of unity. "New systems are forced on the world by men who simply cannot bear the pain of living with what is," realizes the narrator. "Creators care nothing for their systems except that they be unique. . . . Jesus probably designed his system so that it would fail in the hands of other men." It is F. who creates Edith's beauty with his system. Like Breavman in *The Favourite Game*, he wants to be a magician. However, he admits: "I did not suspect the pettiness of my dream. I believed that I had conceived the vastest dream of my generation. I wanted to be a magician. That was my idea of glory. Here is a plea based on my whole experience: do not be a magician, be magic." He would like to renounce the power for the essence of creation.

Yet the narrator has not learned from F.'s errors: he too seeks a system, an ordered vision. His mind is a needle that sews the world together into "a beautiful knowledge of unity". F. tries to warn him to "connect nothing," but the student follows his practice rather than his words. The narrator sees everything as "part of a necklace of incomparable beauty and unmeaning". The same bonding image reappears in the Telephone Dance, in which Edith's long red fingernails connect her to F., who then tunes in to "ordinary eternal machinery". The Jesuit forces the old Indians to unplug their ears by painting a picture of a demon twisting corkscrews of fire into one woman's ears. In the first use of the image, the metaphor allows a connection with the mechanical universe; in the second, the link with nature is severed forever. Ultimately destruction results from both connections.

IN THE NOVEL two opposite systems are presented: the religions of the spirit and of the flesh. In their extreme forms both demand a denial of individual identity, in favour of some vaster, more inhuman, but not higher purpose. F. wants to free the body from genital tyranny. His star pupil, Edith, agrees that all body parts are erotogenic — until none of hers co-operates, forcing her to resort to mechanical means of satisfaction. The final undercutting of the religion of the flesh is the post-Vibrator entry of Hitler and his sadistic victimiza-

tion of F. and Edith. On the other hand we have Catherine Tekakwitha, the Iroquois virgin. As a child she instinctively rejects her marriage and her asexuality is sanctified after her conversion. When confronted by her second intended, she realizes that she has a woman's body, but declaims ownership of her flesh, giving it to Christ. Five times in this scene a symbolic fish hovers "in a halo of blond mist, a fish that longed for nets and capture and many eaters at the feast, a smiling luminous fish."

This religion is also undercut in the novel, for it too represents an extreme system: "Even The World Has A Body." Catherine's mangled body manages to satisfy the sadistic voyeurism of the two Jesuits. Refusing marriage a third time, she looks at the beauty of nature and laments: "O Master of Life, must our bodies depend on these things?" Her new religion has destroyed her link with nature and with her heritage — she has already broken her vow to her uncle. The first step towards her colour change has been taken, paving the way to her reduction to a technicolour postcard and a plastic dashboard ornament. At the end of the novel (rented to the Jesuits) she even falls victim to the political power plays of Church and State.

However, just as he was once caught between two loves, the narrator is caught between these two systems. He is nameless because he is the archetypal Canadian, the beautiful loser: "O Reader, do you know that a man is writing this? A man like you who longed for a hero's heart." He tries to deny the spirit, his Jesuit orphanage heritage. He would like to deny the flesh too and be Plastic Man. The result? F. tells him: "what a hunchback History and the Past have made of your body." Instead of sexual fulfilment, he gets voyeuristic thrills from history and Edith's drawers. Instead of spiritual assistance, he gets F.'s cryptic letter and the fireworks ordeal. The low point of his life (which, paradoxically, is a potentially positive height) is his descent into the basement apartment and into his consciousness. Here he is baptized by "fire, shit, history, love, and loss," but evades the threatening freedom that the descent offers, escaping to the alienating heights of the solitary treehouse. At the end of the novel he is empty, no longer obsessed by time and his body. An orphan, he comes from nowhere and returns to nowhere, dissolving into a movie image.

He is aware, as is F., that "there is something arrogant and warlike in the notion of a man setting the universe in order. It is a kind of balance that is his glory." He had seen Catherine victimized by a totally spiritual system, mechanized by the Jesuits into their political and plastic pawn. Edith has fallen prey to the totality of the flesh and she too can only be satisfied by mechanical means. The

narrator transfers his lust to Catherine after his wife's death. He sees, thanks to F., that the key to balance is "to fuck a saint." In order to imaginatively bring about his "fuck cure," the narrator begins to merge the identities of his two women: they are both Indian orphans who die at twenty-four; both refuse food; both once had bad complexions until a system magically transformed them; and both are uncanonized saints of their respective religions. F. played the narrator's connecting game once too, sucking Edith's toes just as the priest had sucked Catherine's, and ultimately ruining her just as the Jesuits destroyed Kateri.

This metamorphosis is completed by the addition of a beautiful blond girl in a car in Book Three. Like Catherine she refuses the concept of marriage. Earlier when the dead Kateri appeared in a vision, the lower half of her body was invisible in a dazzling glow, and F. had asked the narrator: "Had she lent her other parts to you?" Here such would indeed seem to be the case, since the girl is naked below the armrest. Yet she is also a sexual Edith figure: she too claims: Ισις εγω. She wears moccasins, although she is white. It is as if the transfigured saint and Edith had merged the two extreme systems so that the old man-narrator could achieve some sort of balance. When one of the priests was not granted any visions of the dead saint, F. asked: "Where were his movies? . . . It is he whom I most resemble." Indeed it is the narrator, not F., who enters the realm of movies, the Promised Land.

F. is the tyrant controller and magician. He knows his power and writes to his student: "Somewhere you are dressed in hideous rags and wondering who I was." His fantasy escape is to the forests beyond Montréal, to the treehouse hermitage of the narrator. The student has learned his lessons well. When he warns the little boy to keep his thigh muscles always engaged, there is a direct verbal echo of F.'s earlier advice to him. However, as a result, the narrator has become "a thing without a name which changed and changed itself over and over." When he appears at the Main Shooting and Game Alley, there is some confusion as to his identity. Everyone looks at his hand:

— It's all burnt!
— He's got no thumb.
— Isn't he the Terrorist Leader that escaped tonight?
— Looks more like the pervert they showed on T.V. they're combing the country for.
— Get him out!
— He stays! He's a Patriot.

The confused temporal sequence further accentuates the merging identities.

When the boy calls the old man "Uncle," yet another triad of characters is formed. Catherine's uncle dies defeated but unbaptized, loyal to his race. F. dies imprisoned by the English, but still wanting to be President of the Republic of French Canada. The narrator's fate is similarly equivocal.

This ambivalence seems central to Cohen's concept of the saint. His poetry is full of imagery of "the twisted life of saints." In the novel it is F. who has "saintly pretensions", seeing himself as Brébeuf's successor, a martyr whose blood will water a mighty revolution. Ironically he only loses a thumb while blowing up a statue of Queen Victoria. After his body-building success he takes over the Christ role, previously assigned to Charles Axis who is "all compassion, he's our sacrifice." F. always believes in systems, his own or others': "God is Alive, Magic is Afoot."

The female characters in the novel emulate Catherine's sainthood. Edith and the blond girl claim to be Isis. Edith, like Mary Voolnd, is the "perfect nurse," healing men as did Catherine. According to Frazer, Isis is "the many-named," and here she does indeed have many identities which all merge into an ironic parody of the Universal Mother. Catherine is a virgin, Mary and the girl have no normal sexual intercourse with the two men, and Edith dies with no issue. Irony seems to be the essence of Cohen's concept of the modern saint: "Alexander Trocchi, Public Junkie, Priez pour nous." For the narrator, it is Hollywood that is the new haven for holiness.

But even this sainthood is not the glory, the ideal presented in the novel. A real saint is someone who achieves a "remote human possibility," who is paradoxically *not* systematized, but a "balancing monster of love." He does not control or order or conform to any rigid system, as Catherine, Edith, and F. do. As Cohen says in "The priest says goodbye": "Abelard proved how bright could be/the bed between the hermitage and nunnery." Because of the systems of society, such a balance is precarious, and Abelard becomes a beautiful loser. The true saint is the magic of balance itself: "*mind* itself is Magic coursing through *flesh*." For this reason the narrator must "fuck a saint" and "be magic."

THIS LOVE of "coin faces of problem" is the source of much of Cohen's irony. His characters live in the modern world of Huxley's *Tomorrow and Tomorrow and Tomorrow* where "Applied Science is a conjuror, whose bottomless hat yields impartially the softest of Angora rabbits and the most

petrifying of Medusas." F. sees that science, like a conquering race, chooses to disregard the particular, beginning with "coarse naming". The Spenglerian decline of art into technology creates its own mythology. The telephone becomes the agent of some "benign electronic deity" and the Telephone Dance is born.

F. is at home in this world of machinery and systems. His mind plays naturally with mechanical imagery, and he passes on this ability, although his student associates machines primarily with pain: "Catherine Was Mangled Every Hour In Mysterious Machinery." Their world has become tainted, willing to accept plastic birchbark, broken Photomats, and "out of order" signs: "our little planet embraces its fragile destiny, tuned in the secular mind like a dying engine." Even the body is seen as a machine, "Is my body going to work?" asks the constipated narrator. "Has the machine turned the food brown?" He learns that he must "abandon all systems" in order to humanize his body. The saints, though, remain mechanized like F. Edith has "leathery electrodes" for nipples, and Catherine sees sex as "the assault of human machinery".

The mechanized city of the novel victimizes the natural world. The narrator and F. masturbate as they did when they were boys "in what is now downtown but was once the woods." The culmination of the usurping vision of the machine is the Danish Vibrator. It transforms F. from a solicitous mentor into a lustful glutton, leaping past Edith for "those delicious electric oscillations." It finally learns to feed itself, assaulting Edith and dehumanizing her into a "buffet of juice, flesh, excrement, muscle to serve its appetite." Most of the other forms of "entertainment" in the novel are similarly mechanized. While in his basement inferno the narrator's only contact with the world outside is his radio. Ironically this is only a one-way communication medium, despite his abortive attempts to call the Early Morning Record Gal. At the end of F.'s letter, the radio assumes the form of print and takes over, as the D.V. had. The "Revenge of Radio" prefigures the final revenge of movie in Book Three.

In both *The Favourite Game* and *Beautiful Losers* the movie is seen as a means of expansion by vicarious experience: the narrator knows pain because he has been "inside newsreel Belsen." Yet the wary reader becomes suspicious, since Hollywood has its saints and movies are shown in the "severe limits" and "black confinement" of the *System* Theatre. There is also a suggestion of superficiality, as F.'s scant knowledge of Indians comes from a thousand Hollywood westerns.

Given this background, it is hard to see the final transformation of the narrator into a movie as the triumph that the critics would have it. The essence of this scene lies in its ambivalence — another word, perhaps, for balance. The narrator

initiates the revolution of all second chancers: "professional actors, all *performing artists*, including *magicians*." He enters the System Theatre but finds there is no need to enter the system now: he *is* it. He could not see the movie, for "it was automatic and so was he!" At this, he totally relaxes, giving up all remaining claim to his own identity, and disappears. He merges identities with F. and the mechanical world of system that he represents.

The narrator's performance on the street echoes and reverses F.'s fears of what would happen if the newsreel escaped into the feature. F. invites the newsreel into the plot; the narrator invites the feature into the street, *becoming* the newsreel, and the same feared "miasmal mixture" begins to "imperialize existence by means of its sole quality of total corrosion." We are told that "he enlarged the screen, degree by degree, like a documentary on the Industry. The moon occupied one lens of his sunglasses, and he laid out his piano keys across a shelf of the sky, and he leaned over him as though they were truly the row of giant fishes to feed a hungry multitude. A fleet of jet planes dragged his voice over us who were holding hands." This ironic transfiguration image does not come as a total surprise. In the early comic strip ad of Joe and Charles Axis: "Four thick black words appear in the sky and they radiate spears of light . . . HERO OF THE BEACH." In F.'s Invocation to History in the Old Style, we find:

> I see an Orphan, lawless and serene,
> standing in a corner of the sky,
> body something like bodies that have been,
> but not the flaw of naming in his eye.

We recall that when F. died, his face turned black. He always did feel that to think oneself a negro was "the best feeling a man can have in this century."

Has the student quite literally become what the teacher desired to be? Has he entered the Promised Land? Is the Ray Charles movie an image of the final conqueror, the American mechanical cultural victimizer of Canada, *or* is it — as the epigraph would suggest — a symbol of the ultimate victim, the black and blind American, used for entertainment value? We cannot trust the admiring judgment of the New Jew who, labouring happily on the lever of the *broken* Strength Test, "loses his mind gracefully. . . . The New Jew is the founder of Magic Canada, Magic French Québec, and Magic America. . . . He dissolves history and ritual by accepting unconditionally the complete heritage. . . . Sometimes he is Jewish but always he is American, and now and then Québecois."

The response of the New Jew to the transfiguration is contrasted to that of the crowd: "Just sit back and enjoy it, I guess. Thank God it's only a movie." Both reactions are ironic in the context of the movie imagery and the gradual alienation and brutalization of society. The reader is left to decide if the second chance does succeed, in the light of F.'s remark that "unless it is wrenched from fate, the second chance loses its vitality, and it creates not criminals but nuisances, amateur pickpockets rather than Prometheans."

The very end of the novel does not resolve this problem. It is "rented" to the Jesuits for use as a document requesting Catherine's formal recognition as a saint. Is the "noble heap" transformed into a black saint, yet another victim of yet another system? Has he become magic, or is he merely another magician-performer? The final printed paragraph is separated from the rest of the novel and the narrative voice is hard to distinguish. Is it another, perhaps authorial voice that says: "Welcome to you who read me today?" F. becomes a deity, referred to by a capitalized pronoun. Like the narrator, this persona is alone with his radio, pleading from "electrical tower". Yet the last line echoes F.'s tone and language: "Welcome to you, darling and friend, who miss me forever in your trip to the end." Is this final ambiguity the ultimate balancing that is glory in Cohen's vision? It is as if he is deliberately trying to prevent the reader from creating a system of interpretation, leaving him caught between unresolved dualities:

the serious	the con
poetry	obscenity
balance	system
identity	alienation
spirit	flesh
nature	the machine
revolutionary	tyrant
saint	sinner
victim	victimizer
magic	magician

The reader at times feels strangled by this "necklace of incomparable beauty and unmeaning," and like the New Jew, "loses his mind gracefully." Is the reader the ultimate beautiful loser?

NOTES

[1] *Leonard Cohen* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1970), p. 49.

[2] N.F.B. film "Ladies and Gentlemen, Mr. Leonard Cohen."

[3] Edith's speech translated reads: "I am Isis, who gives birth to all, and no mortal has lifted my veil."

[4] Edith was raped in a stone quarry, or "someplace very mineral and hard, owned indirectly by U.S. interests." The narrator also remarks that "the Forests of Québec are mutilated and sold to America." In the Main Shooting and Game Alley, there is a DeLuxe Polar Hunt with "two bearded, quilted American explorers. The flag of their nationality is planted in a drift."

[5] "The Phenomenon of Leonard Cohen," *Canadian Literature*, 34 (Autumn, 1967), p. 18.

GROVE'S SEARCH FOR AMERICA

W. J. Keith

"I WANT TO STATE with all due emphasis that this is the story of an individual, and that I do not mean to put it down as typical except in certain attitudes towards phenomena of American life."[1] Although this statement of intention is set down clearly and prominently at the end of the first chapter of *A Search for America*, Grove's book has generally been discussed as if it were primarily a "sociological" exploration of the American consciousness. While it has been recognized as fiction (rather surprisingly, in view of the tendency until a few years ago to accept Grove's apparently biographical statements at face-value), the narrative structure has too often been seen merely as a convenient framework for the all-important presentation of his vision of America. The second half of my initial quotation has therefore been stressed at the expense of the first. Thematically, of course, this is understandable; Grove's chief concern in the book *is*, unquestionably, to test the American ideal against the American experience, to accentuate the vision by a demonstration of its vulnerability and the ease with which it can be betrayed. But we shall not appreciate the full extent of Grove's achievement until we recognize the subtlety of his artistry as well as the importance of his theme. If we wish to focus upon the literary quality of the book, we cannot do better than to take up Grove's hint and examine this "story of an individual" more closely.

The two opening chapters provide not only a biographical digest of Phil Branden's pre-American experience but a number of useful clues for our interpretation of his story. Branden, we soon learn, is a highly complex spokesman. Most obviously, he represents the opposite pole to the American norm. As a smart, aristocratic, well-spoken, socially-conceited European, he is in archetypal contrast to the modestly-dressed, colloquial, democratic American worker personified by Bennett, the Simpson's foreman whom Branden meets on the train to

Toronto. This confrontation is, in fact, so perfect in its appropriateness (within a few moments, the social distinctions have been reversed, Bennett calling Branden "me boy" in answer to his own unprecedented "sir," and Branden realistically accepting Bennett's "superior status") that only a careless reading could mistake it for accurate reporting of experience and fail to recognize its carefully-planned artistry in which every remark, every gesture, every thought contribute to the literary effect.

In fact, Branden's self-presentation is extraordinarily complex. When, for example, he tells us at the end of the first paragraph that he had sometimes "connived at being taken for an Englishman," and goes on to remark, "if I could meet myself as then I was, I should consider my former self as an insufferable snob and coxcomb", we are not only invited to observe the young man with detachment, but are warned that discrimination of fact and fiction, of truth and falsehood, is likely to prove a delicate exercise. The whole situation is framed with uncertainty. The "Author's Note to the Fourth Edition" further complicates the issue by raising the "truth or falsehood" controversy only to blur the distinction. "Every work of so-called imaginative literature," Grove tells us, "good or bad, is necessarily at once both fact and fiction." A later conversation between Phil and Frank raises the question of the legality of "assuming a false name". The present-day reader, aware of the mystery of Grove's own identity, is in a good position to appreciate the complex web in which he has enmeshed us. Frederick Philip Grove (a name that can now be confidently described as an *alias*) has created the character of Philip Branden (the common given-name is not, of course, coincidental) who admits to a past involving significant if harmless impersonation and openly acknowledges a training that taught him "to keep his mask intact". The layers of intricacy are unending; we become acutely conscious that we are confronted with something much more elaborate than a philosophical inquiry into the condition of America. We have encountered a work in which art and artifice are central and predominant.

Once alerted to the elaborate effects that Grove creates in these early chapters, we shall find numerous phrases and allusions that take on additional significance. When, in describing his life in Europe, Branden observes that "the exact localities are irrelevant", we may recognize an indirect hint concerning the reliability of Grove's own autobiographical details; more important, however, we may extrapolate the remark and treat the later scenes in the book as symbolic reconstructions rather than literal transcripts of reality or representative incidents to be judged by the usual criteria of "realism". Again, the emphasis on literature in the open-

ing pages prevents us from forgetting that *A Search for America* is itself a work of imaginative creation. Branden specifies his literary tastes: "I was all taken up with that particular brand of literature which was then becoming fashionable, filled with contempt for the practical man, and deeply ensconced in artificial poses." Not only does this exacerbate his shock in encountering practical men in America, but it encourages us to recognize the "artificial poses" and so, by extension, Grove's inventive genius. Thus Professor Spettigue's recent discoveries, suggesting that Grove did not emigrate to this continent until 1909 and therefore that *A Search for America* has even less of a factual basis than has generally been assumed,[2] need not seriously qualify our literary response to his work. Grove had given us due warning in the text itself.

It is clear that viewpoint is all-important in this book, and that Grove is careful to exploit the possibilities of variation. At the opening of the second chapter, Branden has just landed in Montreal. "I felt incongruous and out of place," he tells us, and by a curious process of temporal and spatial extension, the viewpoint shifts to an outside position:

> I cannot but smile, I cannot but pity the slim youth in his immaculate clothes, the mere boy I was.
>
> I shall try to describe how I must have looked.

The first sentence offers the judgment of an older and wiser Phil Branden on the "mere boy" of his past in much the same way that Dickens makes David Copperfield and Pip tell the stories of their earlier years at a time when they are established, middle-aged men. (Again, welcome though they are, we should not have needed Professor Spettigue's investigations to doubt Grove's statements concerning the composition of the book; even if early drafts existed, the book as we have it could only date from a period many years after the events which it ostensibly chronicles.) In the second sentence, Branden deliberately renounces his own viewpoint to attempt an external description, and in the succeeding paragraphs we encounter a curious "double-view" effect in which first- and third-person intermix, and Branden can present himself as both the personal "I" and the objective "young man."

This is a stylistic mannerism widespread in Grove's work and peculiarly appropriate to his creative purpose. An interesting parallel is to be found in *Over Prairie Trails*, where Grove describes "the feeling of estrangement . . . — as if I were not myself, but looking as from the outside at the adventures of somebody who yet was I."[3] And here is a revealing, if syntactically confusing, example

from the older Grove: "It may interest some of my young critics to hear that, after years on this continent, during which he wrote and published the dozen books or so which have earned him what reputation he enjoys as a Canadian writer, he had . . . " etc.[4] This effect is obviously related to Grove's habitual process of creating spokesmen and personae who are partly self-portraits and partly fictional inventions — half "I" and half "he". In the "Author's Preface" here (where the blending of first and third person appears yet again), he paradoxically explains his choice of a pseudonym in "Phil Branden" by observing that "it gives him . . . an opportunity to be even more personal than . . . it would be either safe or comfortable to be were he speaking in the first person, unmasked." As it is, the relations between Grove and Branden, and those between the younger and older Branden, become so intricate by the end of the two opening chapters, that Grove is henceforth in a position to present his "hero" from whatever angle or viewpoint seems most appropriate in any given situation.

THE FOREGOING ANALYSIS will have shown, I hope, that *A Search for America* is a literary work that eludes the normal genre-categories. The terms "novel" and "epic" have both been applied to it, but these are no less inaccurate than "autobiography." Indeed, the difficulty of assessing the book critically lies primarily in its unclassifiable status. I have been able to discover only one work that closely resembles it — George Borrow's *Lavengro* (1851) — and this too is a book that has been misunderstood and critically undervalued for the same reason. A brief comparison between the two books will prove useful at this point, though I wish to stress that I am not arguing in terms of influence. There is, so far as I am aware, no evidence that Grove had read Borrow (though the probability seems to me strong); all I wish to do here is to consider the books as mutually-revealing analogues in an attempt to throw light on the kind of book I believe *A Search for America* to be, and to indicate a rewarding way in which to approach it.

In *Lavengro*, Borrow presents us with an exploration of the highways and byways of early nineteenth-century England, a picaresque account of adventures with gypsies, tinkers and road-girls, told in the first person by a speaker (Lavengro) who resembles the author but is none the less distinct from him. We find, therefore, the same relation between the philosophical exploration of a country and the deliberate creation of a persona that marks *A Search for America.*

Indeed, Borrow offers a definition of autobiography — "a picture of the man himself — his character, his soul" as opposed to "the mere record of the incidents of a man's life"[5] — which sounds startlingly relevant to *In Search of Myself* and the book under present discussion. Like Grove, Borrow carefully provides in the opening chapters a subtle but elusive portrait of Lavengro which gives the alert reader the necessary means by which to interpret the rest of the narrative. In particular, he prepares us to see the ensuing adventures not merely as a succession of disconnected experiences, but as carefully selected and juxtaposed incidents that make up a coherent portrait both of the country in question (the genuine England for Borrow, an authentic America for Grove) and of the many-faceted observer whose qualities have led him to attain to insight.

One of the characteristic features of Borrow's work throws interesting light on the literary technique of *A Search for America.* In the course of his adventures, Lavengro is continually meeting people who in certain respects bear a noticeable resemblance to himself, and such meetings often develop into curious, almost surrealistic conversations between Lavengro and an *alter ego.* The process is less conspicuous in Grove, but it helps to explain the function of two figures frequently praised by Grove's commentators but not, I think, generally understood. These are the old worker in the Yonge Street restaurant and the silent hermit whom Branden saves from the river. The scenes in which these two appear are commonly praised for their vividness and "realism," but such appreciation is insufficient and on one level misleading. It should be noted, first, that both are nameless; the one is invariably referred to as "Whiskers;" the other is merely "the man." In the second case, of course, there is no way in which a name could credibly be conveyed, but there is, I believe, a more compelling reason for the anonymity; in terms of the overall structure of the book, the two are significant not as individuals but as possible projections of what Branden might become. "Whiskers" is a living reminder of the futility of life as bus-boy in a restaurant. His hopes of rising to the position of waiter are never realized, and Branden himself is promoted above him within a few days. He represents, in almost medieval fashion, a helpless old age, a monitory figure of whom Branden might well say, "There but by my own exertions go I." While "Whiskers" suffers loneliness in the midst of a city, the hermit has lost all connection with mankind so that he has nothing to say to Branden and is presumed to be deaf-and-dumb. Branden has already noted how, after days of silence, his own voice "sounded husky to [him], unfamiliar like that of a stranger", and the hermit, carrying this to an extreme, has virtually lost the capacity for speech — which implies the

possibility of human contact. Again, Branden can see what he might become if he remained in "the Depths."

A Search for America needs to be read, then, not in terms of fiction or non-fiction, but as deliberately-moulded carefully-patterned experience. Grove selects the adventures of his spokesman so that he is aware at first-hand of a complete cross-section of American life. Even Branden's occupations have a symbolic function. As waiter in the restaurant, he is serving his fellow-men in the most literal way possible; as book-agent he is selling either knowledge (to the poor) or art (to the rich), and his situation offers a richly ambiguous paradigm of commercial education (its designation as "missionary-work" suggesting an additional subtlety) that contrasts increasingly with the genuine role of teacher which, having served a practical apprenticeship, he takes up on the last page of the book. Similarly, after his interlude "in the wilderness", he works as factory-hand (significantly in a veneer-factory — and Grove must surely have known Dickens' embodiment of the image in *Our Mutual Friend*) and as itinerant-labourer on the farm. This is no simplistic distinction between agricultural and industrial, since the factory is located in a small rural town and the farm is mechanized and organized as a full-scale industry. None the less, Branden's search is progressive, and his experience as a farm-worker, an occupation which Grove's urbanized readers might consider humble and undignified, is clearly offered, despite its drawbacks and imperfections, as his closest encounter with the true America.

The whole of the section on the Mackenzie farm, indeed, contains a symbolic dimension that does not seem to have been noted. Superficially, it is a setting for Grove's presentation of the life, working-conditions and general philosophy of the hobo or itinerant labourer, but a fuller reading reveals a much broader level of meaning. On a farm whose enormous extent is emphasized, the owner, Mackenzie, lives in what is known as "the White House", and this combination of the Presidential residence with a famous Canadian political name can hardly be fortuitous. It is worth noting that Mackenzie King was Prime Minister at the time of the book's first publication, and that Mackenzie is specifically described as "an incipient king" during a discussion of royalty and rule. This contrived but none the less effective episode is the intellectual climax of the book. In a scene that could only be condemned as incredible if the book were judged solely in terms of realistic convention, Branden discusses the broad political questions with his millionaire employer. If, however, we read the book in the way I have been suggesting, this discussion between the sometime European aristocrat turned hobo and the American agricultural capitalist is rich in irony, and its "meaning"

extends far beyond the inevitably inconclusive debate. At this point Branden has become self-appointed spokesman of the real America for which he has been searching throughout the book, and he is able to lecture Mackenzie, the man in power, on the discrepancy between what America is and what she might be. Needless to say, this does not lead to any immediate practical reforms, but these final chapters provide a fitting resolution within the logic of the book itself. In articulating his position, Branden has achieved his quest; he has discovered not only America but his true self.

If it seems strange that this important (and hardly recondite) aspect of *A Search for America* has remained unnoticed, I can only suggest that Grove's own curiously ambivalent reaction to the book has discouraged deeper scrutiny. Whereas he was always ready to sing the praises of his other works, his response to *A Search for America* was unusually guarded. Indeed, in *In Search of Myself* he indulges in some rare self-criticism while discussing it. "I still believed — and I believe today — that, artistically, this was my weakest book. . . . It seemed very juvenile to me, full of garrulity and even presumption."[6] Unless my demonstration of the artistry involved is hopelessly void, some explanation for Grove's undervaluing of the book seems required.

There are, I believe, two explanations. The first is clearly presented in Grove's own discussion. After describing it as his "weakest book" he goes on, with typical sarcasm, to forecast that "it would, therefore, have the best chance with the public."[7] This is all part of Grove's persona of the unrecognized, unappreciated artist. While it would be both inaccurate and improper to question the undoubted neglect that Grove suffered through most of his life, it is none the less fair to observe that he moulded and adapted this circumstance for his own artistic purpose in his habitual manner. His account, for example, of the contemporary response to *Settlers of the Marsh* is highly exaggerated, as even a brief examination of the reviews recently reprinted by Professor Pacey will show.[8] To state, as Grove does, that "reviewers called it 'filthy' "[9] is a gross misrepresentation of the facts, but it fits conveniently into the artistic creation of the "I" of *In Search of Myself*, who is no more to be equated with Grove himself than is Phil Branden. (Interestingly enough, George Borrow described a hostile critical response to *Lavengro* in terms that bear no resemblance to the reality — for similar reasons.)

All this throws light on what might otherwise seem, for a book about America, a singularly inappropriate dedication to Meredith, Swinburne and Hardy. The importance that Grove attached to these three is explained in an essay, "A Neglected Function of a Certain Literary Association," printed in *It Needs to be Said*. Grove lists the same three names as examples of "English writers of the first importance who, regardless of immediate recognition, laboured on in comparative obscurity and poverty, ceaselessly and strictly endeavouring to express just what they had to say — a thing the public, so it seemed, would not hear and yet at last has heard."[10] However inaccurate this may be as literary history, it is a succinct expression of Grove's myth of the great writer. To this company he wished to belong, and the comparative success of *A Search for America* threatened to spoil the pattern.

The second explanation is more complicated. In embarking on his quest, Branden "made up [his] mind to leave Europe and all [his] old associations behind", and although he soon learns "that there were social strata in America as well as in Europe", he none the less pursues the ideal. By the last chapter, he claims to be convinced and converted: "I was reconciled to America. I was convinced that the American ideal was right, that it meant a tremendous advance over anything which before the war could reasonably be called the ideal of Europe". Branden is at first disillusioned by the materialist skulduggery that he finds rampant in America, but, as I have indicated, finds at least a glimpse of the true America in the agricultural West. None the less, the main evidence for the survival of the ideal personified by Lincoln is essentially negative: "What nonsense to search! The Lincolns were living all about me, of course; there were thousands of them, hundreds of thousands, millions! If there were not, what with graft, 'con,' politics and bossdom the country would long since have collasped!"

Although we can say that Branden has completed his quest, it would be unwise to conclude that the search was altogether successful. An illusion of success is precariously maintained within the book itself, but this depends upon two arguments that are in fact contradictory: first, that the search "might not be a geographical search at all"; second, expressed in a well-known and over-quoted footnote, that the ideal "has been abandoned by the U.S.A." and is only to be looked for in Canada. It is obvious that, despite these somewhat frantic gestures, Grove has considerably qualified his position. *It Needs to be Said* was published only two years after *A Search for America*, yet there Grove continually insists on the importance of Canada's maintaining her ties with the spiritual tradition of Europe rather than succumbing to the materialistic tyranny of the

United States, which he openly condemns as "the most intolerant nation on earth."[11] Grove's disillusionment must have been traumatic; it is hardly surprising, under the circumstances, that he should make only guarded references to a book whose thesis (whatever its artistic merits) he was no longer prepared to uphold.

But if the search for America is "not a geographical search at all," where is it to be located? If anywhere, in the individual — in the kindly and unselfish Doctor Goodwin, in Ivan ("the personification of all that is fine and noble in bodily labour"), in the Phil Branden who, tempered by experience, emerges at the close of the book. The ideal embodied in Lincoln can only manifest itself in individuals. I suggest that Grove had come to this conclusion by the time he wrote *A Search for America* as we now have it, and that he deliberately emphasized "the story of an individual" to counter-balance the implications of the title. The sub-title, we should remember, is "The Odyssey of an Immigrant," and this accentuates the individual nature of the quest.

Throughout the narrative, the emphasis is upon Branden's development; in particular, we are never allowed to forget the significance of education. He must cast off the unpractical training he had received in Europe, and complete a required period of apprenticeship before he can find his proper role in America. The training he receives is almost brutally practical but it is also, in Grove's view, ultimately humane. In a passage carefully positioned just before his meeting with Ivan, Branden observes: "I was merely rounding off what I called my education in the 'true humanities' ". In the last hundred pages of the book, he becomes conscious of this development, and recognizes, moreover, "the curious plan that seemed to underlie [his] wanderings". Established on the Mackenzie farm, he remarks: "I marvelled at the plan of my life." This plan is, of course, identical with what I hope to have demonstrated to be the closely-knit structure of the whole book. Grove lays out for us the example of one man's progress towards mature understanding. It is, as he insists, "the story of an individual," but the meaning of "individual" is refined in the course of the book. It is purged of all selfish associations. Branden is no less an individual at the end of his search than he was at the beginning, but his individuality is no longer directed into purely personal channels. Branden himself makes the necessary distinction in the final chapter: "When I came from Europe, I came as an individual; when I settled down in America, at the end of my wanderings, I was a social man." These are the terms in which his quest is achieved.

NOTES

[1] Frederick Philip Grove, *A Search for America* [1927] (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, New Canadian Library, 1971), pp. 13-14. All subsequent references, incorporated into the text, will be to this edition.

[2] See Douglas O. Spettigue, "Frederick Philip Grove," *Queen's Quarterly*, LXXVIII (Winter 1971), 614-615; and "The Grove Enigma Resolved," *Queen's Quarterly*, LXXIX (Spring 1972), 1-2.

[3] *Over Prairie Trails* [1922] (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, New Canadian Library, 1957), p. 86.

[4] "Postscript to *A Search for America*," *Queen's Quarterly*, XLIX (Autumn 1942), 198. In this article the distinction between Branden and Grove is virtually ignored.

[5] George Borrow to Theodore Watts-Dunton, quoted in Herbert Jenkins, *The Life of George Borrow* (London: Murray, 1912), p. 396.

[6] *In Search of Myself* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1946), pp. 378, 391.

[7] *Ibid.*, pp. 378-379.

[8] See Desmond Pacey, ed., *Frederick Philip Grove* (Toronto: Ryerson, Critical Views on Canadian Writers, 1970), pp. 105-117.

[9] *In Search of Myself*, p. 381.

[10] *It Needs to be Said* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1929), p. 12.

[11] *Ibid.*, p. 145n.

GROVE'S LETTERS FROM THE MENNONITE RESERVE

Introduced by Margaret Stobie

THE FIVE LETTERS that follow, written by F. P. Grove in the first months after he had become principal of the four-room intermediate school at Winkler, Manitoba, are the earliest writing of his in Canada that has so far come to light. It is therefore worth noting that the prose of the letters that are written in English is much more obviously that of a foreigner than is the prose of any of Grove's later writing. Even a year later, he had a much firmer grasp of vocabulary, idiom, and indeed grammar in English. In these letters the tentative quality is sometimes in the misuse of a word — "I stand aloft," or "your figures tackle with my own experience" — but more often it appears in idioms transferred from German: "My account foots up to —," "they are pent up in their own ideals," or "slide them along." This quality of the prose raises the question of how long Grove had been on this continent, and seems to indicate recent arrival. However, Douglas Spettigue suggests in "The Grove Enigma Resolved," (*Queen's Quarterly,* April 1972, 1-2) that Grove may have come over as early as 1909.

At any rate, his first known appearance in Manitoba was at the end of 1912 when he presented himself at the office of Robert Fletcher, Deputy Minister of Education, to ask for a teaching job. Fletcher sent him to Andrew Weidenhammer at Morden (the A.W. of the letters) who was the department's inspector for the 75 German-English bilingual public schools of the Mennonite reserve in southern Manitoba. Weidenhammer sent him to fill the vacancy in the one-room school in the village of Haskett, where Grove taught grades 1 to 6 from January to June, 1913.

Weidenhammer, who changed his name to Willows during the war, had been brought out not long before from the Mennonite district around Waterloo, Ontario, to deal with the very touchy educational situation within the reserve

where the church, strongly opposed to the government schools, supported and ran a considerable number of "private" schools. The kind of tension that existed is well illustrated by an item from the *Morden Times*, January 9, 1913, about one man who "has been summoned before the ministers of his church to answer for his conduct in sending his children to a public school. The ministers are trying hard to force him to send his children to their private school and [he] is sensible enough to refuse. He is in a hard position and needs supporters. Let's all help him and encourage him for the stand he is taking." Such a state of affairs helps to explain Grove's anger when the "poor Farmer" who had brought his children to the Winkler school was turned away.

Staffing the bilingual schools was a constant problem, and to ensure at least a modicum of training in his people, Weidenhammer conducted a ten-week summer Normal course in the Morden High School (fee $10), which all those teaching in his schools were required to take. Grove and twenty others made up the class of 1913. Their valedictorian was John Enns, one of the Winkler teachers, who, having also passed his grade 10 examinations that summer, now held a third class teaching certificate. At the closing exercises, as the *Morden Times* reported, Weidenhammer made the usual official announcement of appointments within his inspectorate, and among them was Grove's as principal at Winkler. The salary was $1000.

The Winkler staff afforded a good example of the range of teachers' qualifications in the bilingual schools. Both John Enns and the primary teacher, Miss Wiens, were in their early twenties and had been born on the reserve, but Miss Wiens, not having grade 10 standing, was still teaching on a permit. The second in command, P. H. Neufeld, was about Grove's own age, he had been born and had had part of his schooling in the Mennonite area of southern Russia, and he had been teaching for a number of years, but most of them in church-run schools. He had fairly recently achieved his second class standing (grade 11). On the other hand, the vacancy at Winkler had come about because of the resignation of Grove's correspondent, I. J. Warkentin, a young Mennonite of twenty-six who had a B.A. from the University of Manitoba and who had left for Germany at the end of the summer to do post-graduate work at Leipzig.

As for Grove, his mention of Bonn in the last letter is his only reference to that university where, as Spettigue records, he enrolled in 1898, though he never graduated from it. What the letters do indicate very strongly is that, whatever else he may have been before he arrived in Manitoba, Grove had been a teacher — a trained, experienced teacher — and of course particularly in maths and

science. The evidence is in his comparison of Weidenhammer's course with the rigour of "a really good normal class", in his displays of "Books that every teacher ought to have" and "a model outfit for teaching plant biology", in the way he goes about re-organizing the school and establishing his authority among the other teachers, and in specific remarks: "I come with many things that have been tried out;" "I promised to run this school, and so I do it: do it to the best of my knowledge and ability;" "they trust me and believe that I know what I am doing." The evidence is in Grove's enthusiasm for the new emphasis on practical education and in his opposition to forcing a child. It is also in his sending to Germany for books on teaching methods — books that he must have been familiar with.

Another very strong impression that comes from these letters is a sense of urgency. No doubt part of the reason for the urgency lay in the fact that in mid-November Winkler was to be host to the thirteenth Annual Conference of German-English Bilingual Teachers of Southern Manitoba, and Grove wanted to make a good showing. He had obviously been put in charge of the book exhibit, and from that experience came his näive report that "All the big American publishers came to the front with exhibits of educational literature," as though the text book publishers were doing something unusual. His other contribution to the meetings was a talk, in German, on elementary education in Germany. Preparations for the conference probably account also for the haste in collecting plant and insect specimens, in ordering physics and chemistry equipment, and in re-allocating classes so that, according to the school attendance record, by November Grove had only high school grades in his room. But his efforts went beyond the mid-November event. At the beginning of the term he advertised in the *Morden Times* "a special teachers' course in the evening, comprising the work for full third and second classes (Grades X and XI)" in order, as he says in one of the letters, "to give the reserve a chance to raise the standard of their teachers," and also, of course, to further his drive to get high school status for Winkler. Again, in an attempt to involve the community and to give evidence of the practical value of education, Grove published a notice that the school would test farm and garden seeds at no charge, "under the strict supervision and responsibility of the principal." All of this activity, with its exacting pace that he details in the letters, gives a new glimpse of depth behind Grove's reflection when he was writing *Over Prairie Trails* in 1919: "We live for something — do not merely live. The wage-slave lives for the evening's

liberty, the business man for his wealth, the preacher for his church. I used to live for my school."

Yet there was some special urgency behind the activity in 1913, as Grove hints when he writes in December, "*I have got* to win out." This underlying necessity undoubtedly affected the degree of his chagrin when his efforts did not meet with the gratitude that he expected. There were complaints in the town that Grove was arrogant, presumptuous, officious, that he had offended the school board, and that high school status would mean higher taxes. Within the school, the inevitable clash occurred between Grove and P.H. who was a deeply religious man — and Grove made no secret of the fact that he was not — and who had strong support from the more conservative elements in the community. As Grove's sense of injury grows, the tone of the letters changes. His world is now a small one, depending on small things that have suddenly ballooned to blot out distance, perspective, judgment, proportion. The detailing of the bottles of seeds, the mounting of insects, the cost of postage sounds like the cry of a man who sees a last chance slipping away. He is an outsider and unwanted. To ease his mortification, Grove escapes into the legendary world that he had already devised of the Swedish father and Scotch mother and of himself as a sophisticated man of the world, a scholar, a far-traveller.

In the last, long, whirling, incoherent letter, everything can "go smash." The Byronic note is strong: he will renounce the world; he will become a recluse at Etaples; he will be a spectator of life. He will trust only animals for "their life is the only sincere, the only untainted life." Two sentences after that declaration, the reason for it becomes clear: the young woman to whom he went so eagerly at Christmas, whom he thought he was about to marry, had turned him away. "I did not know my world any longer! It was so changed." The intense, driven, emotional, *young* person that these letters reveal has a very different aspect from the stern face in a high collar that Grove even then publicly assumed.

And then the letters stopped. There were no more. Perhaps Grove had already found a new confidant in the Miss Wiens who was so good with the swing, and whom he married the following summer. Certainly he found companionship with the two teacher-students whom he tutored in their high school subjects at night. As one of them recently said, "John and I loved him. I think it was love." And he was asked back for a second year. By the time that school year began, Grove's correspondent, like many other Canadians in Germany, had been interned in a prisoner-of-war camp, the one that included Ernest Macmillan.

* * *

Winkler, Man
7/IX/13

Lieber Herr Warkentin,

Ich bin so froh, jemanden in Dtschld zu haben der mir vielleicht behilflich sein kann, dass ich Ihnen möglicherweise lästig fallen werde. Vielleicht wird es Ihnen zur Genugtuung gereichen dass Sie ja schliesslich Ihrer Heimat helfen.

Ich habe 3 weitere Büchertitel über die ich gern Auskunft hätte:

Fitzga, Die Leitenden Grundsätze für den Elementarunterricht in Rechnen und Geometrie (Wien 1897)

Knilling, Die Naturgemässe Methode des Rechenunterrichts (München 1899)

Rein Pickel, Volksschulunterricht (Leipzig 1889)

Petersen, Methoden und Theorien für die Lösung geometrischer Konstruktionsprobleme (Kopenhagen 1879)

Wenn Sie noch nicht bankrott ("broke") sind, kaufen Sie mir doch, bitte, den *Rein Pickel*; ich werde Ihnen, sowie ich Nachricht über den Preis erhalte, den Betrag schicken.

Vielen Dank im voraus

Ihr

F. Grove

NB. Wir erregen Aufsehen hier durch die Neuerungen, die ich in Winkler eingeführt habe. Sie werden wohl davon hören. A.W. ist starr und sieht trauernden Auges zu.

[*I am so happy to have someone in Germany who may perhaps help me, that I may possibly become a nuisance to you. Perhaps you will count it a satisfaction that, in the long run, you will be helping your country. I have three more titles of books about which I very much want information:*

Fitzga, Governing Principles for the Teaching of Elementary Arithmetic and Geometry (Veinna 1897)

Knilling, Teaching Arithmetic by the Natural Method (Munich 1899)

Rein Pickel, Elementary School Syllabus (Leipzig 1889)

Petersen, Methods and Theories for the Solving of Geometric Construction Problems (Copenhagen 1879)

If you're not yet broke, please buy the Rein Pickel for me. I'll send you the money as soon as I know the price.

Many thanks in advance. Yours, F. Grove.

N.B. We have had great excitement here over the innovations that I have begun

in Winkler; you will probably hear about it. A.W. is stunned and looks on with sorrowful eyes.]

Winkler, 20/X/13

Dear Mr. Warkentin,

Thanks for your letter. It sounds a little homesick? Now you, too, want money! You'll have to wait till next Saturday. Did I want the 8 vols of Rein Pickel? You bet I did. So slide them along, please, as soon as I send the money.

As far as our innovations go, there is not much to report. The swing works fine. Miss Wiens is a very good teacher, at that and in her room, too. The boys — I had to take them myself. I have given both P.H. and Enns a chance at it. Enns simply cannot manage them. And P.H. fooled away his time: never got started. Enns is glad that *I* start it now. P.H. is mad. He thinks I am the most interfering fellow he has ever met with.

You see, one of the worst troubles here is undue and rash promoting. When a kid does a little good work for once — swish, up he or she goes into the next grade. Nobody really masters the course. P.H. has not the faintest idea of teaching. "Er salbadert," as we used to say in Germany — "er seift." [*He babbles; he blathers.*] If I stay here next year, 14 years will be the age limit for entrance. Why, we have kids of 13 in the 3rd class! Getting permanently hurt by cramming. For what else is it? So far I have the trustees on my side. I had to fight a little. But it seems they trust me and believe that I know what I am doing. — Bench work will be started this week with a class of 6. The rest of the boys do raffia and reed work — basketry, in short.

I think I told you that 2nd class work has started. My teaching day is 9 hrs. long — besides 3 times a week 2 hrs in the evening, (Full matriculation). We need 3 more students for 2nd class, in order to get high school standing. I wrote a letter to your sister — but it seems she does not think it worth her while to answer. Quite apart from the personal affront it is a little disheartening to see *Winkler* students go to Gretna instead of helping their home cause. Unless we get the high school grant we shall not be able to put in the laboratory. Also your brother Peter does not turn up! Nor your brother Cornelius!

As for the exhibition — the govt — as always — was prompt to promise and is slow to act. I have a splendid collection of books, though. All the big American publishers came to the front with exhibits of educational literature. Personally I make an exhibit of "Books that every teacher ought to have" — and "a model outfit for teaching plant biology." — For the library I have bought a flora that costs $15. (Britton-Brown — you may know it.) The Museum grows slowly but

steadily. — Moths and butterflies that do not fly any longer are being hatched in a home made pupa incubator. — The aquarium is transformed into a terrarium — full of caterpillars, beetles, frogs etc.

Now for you: what are you hearing, whom? Let me know some details, please. If I cannot have those things myself, give me a "farbiges Abbild" ("Im farbigen Abbild haben wir *das Leben*," sagt Goethe.)[2] [*We possess life in a coloured image.*] You will probably say: "there speaks old age!" — yes, or experience! (I wish I could get the "Insel-Verlag Taschen-Ausgabe von Goethe's Werken" in soft leather!) I wish I could get a decent critical edition of Homer's Odysseus. The older a man gets the more he wants to be left alone with the 2 or 3 companions that he has found worth while — Goethe's Westöstlicher Diwan, the Odyssey and Shakespeare's 2 Richards, Lear, Timon and Midsummernight's Dream! Give me those and a life-sentence and I will rest content. I tell you I get mighty tired fighting stupidity — Mit der Dummheit kämpfen Götter selbst vergebens — [*Against stupidity the gods themselves contend in vain.*] Well, well — catch me complaining!

Our friend A.W. is my stoutest ally — I knew it. You know he is not a bad fellow. I doubt whether his influence is *all* to the bad. Seeing those young students of his now I sometimes wonder whether a really good normal class — theoretical — would not dislocate their joints, disintegrate their self-sufficiency to such an extent that there would be nothing left except shreds and rags. Of course, the right thing to do would be to drop all the theory completely and give nothing but the practical part. But A.W. sees that himself, and he really likes me. You know I have avoided knocking him — and *he appreciates that.* Fletcher told me that I could not have a better advocate than him, and that his recommendation had been such that I could command any position that I might wish to get next year. I told him if Winkler went along I might wish to stay right there so as to carry through what I had started.

But enough for today,

Cordially

Fred Grove

I have been sick — 4 da in bad; now I am crawling about with very little "vim."

Winkler, Man.
1/XI/13

Dear Mr. Warkentin,

Enclosed please find 17 M. which will cover what you paid out so far. I hope

to send you the balance for the rest of the vols on Dec. 1st so I will then have the complete work (Rein Pickel, I mean). I have very little time at present. We have now 5 2nd class students, 1 full matric. I have bought chem. & phys. outfit to the tune of $300 out of my pocket and we have not yet what we need. Manual outfit also was insufficient, and I had to throw in another $35. (Total cost now $136.65). That sounds pretty, does it not? Well, somebody has got to start things, or they will never get started. I will write more fully soon.

Very cordially yours

F.G.

und dennoch hab' ich harter man die Liebe [*and yet, hardened as I am, I too have experienced love*][3]

Winkler, Man.
6/XII/13

Dear Mr. Warkentin,

Your letter amused me immensely — chiefly because I had expected something of the kind. You American people are funny: preferring the destructive downpour to the slow, penetrating, fruitful drizzle. And when things are not done in a hurry you think they are not being done at all. Those boys who seem old to you have it in them to go far. You live faster, but do you make faster progress? Has not good, staid, old Germany gone to the front, slowly, but surely? Who is beating out the English on the South American market. Whose trade in Canada grows double as fast as that of old Engld? — I was much interested in the report about your curriculum. Only regret: I do not see any of the exact sciences nor the classical languages represented. I am teaching J. R. Wolkof full matric. now. With our friend P.H. it is fight, I am afraid. It looks as if the issue will soon be — he or I. Well, I am ready. I believe, when the question comes up as it is bound to do within a month or so, I can at least say: look what I have done! The fight has sometimes exasperated me, sometimes galled me, but my dander is up, and as long as I can get living wages here I am going to stick it out and to refuse better offers of which I had four since Fletcher gave out his interview about our school — of which you probably have heard. The Dept. anyway is sitting up. But I am bleeding. The things said about me here are sometimes funny, sometimes they hurt because there is a kernel of truth in them. I cannot afford to pay any attention to that. *I have got* to win out. I am remodeling the whole arrangement:

Room I	Grades I & junior II
Room II	" sen.II, III, IV

Room III " V, VI, VIII
Room IV " IX, X, XI

This was my last fight. P.H. opposed me again although I did it because *he* proved incapable of handling the 4 grades. — The open war broke out on this ground. Some people had come to the school to see if we could take outsiders. P.H. caught them and told them: impossible (enrollment 160). For several days I did not hear about it, but when I did I went straight up and asked him whether he was the principal? I made it plain to him that *I* was running this school, not he. That if I assigned pupils to him he had to take them, whether he liked it or not. I went after those people again — poor Farmers whose only chance is with us. And I told the trustees that if they did not think it worth their while to discuss the school affairs with their principal instead of one of the assistants, said principal would not think it worth his while to go on with his work beyond next pay day. Well, I conquered along the whole line. Old man Wiebe stood by me at last. The assistant teachers are my assistants now, not hidden bosses. — I have put in a physical & chemical equipment out of my pocket (cost close to $300) — a botanical outfit (cost close to $200) — manual training (cost $139.65),[4] and we are going to have a flag or banner that will cost $68 in materials alone — and all that has not cost the district one red cent. — I believe I deserve a little credit, if it comes to that, instead of being run down as I am, don't you think so? Besides we have a collection of insects, mounted by yours truly, a large collection of weed-seeds — a nice number of dried plants — a series of microscopical slides (mounted by myself) — a pond vivarium — culture chamber for bacteria — 200 or more glass jars filled with all the farm seeds of Canada — specimens of chief manufactures in all stages of manufacturing — and a large collection of minerals. It is true that for some of these things I got the co-operation of the govt., but who *got* it? Nobody ever even offered to help me write the hundreds of letters. My postage account foots up to $59 at present. — My expressage account shows an expenditure of $63. — If money counts, well, I think, then these figures tell. —

But enough, it goes against my grain to give vent to my indignation.

Will you do me *a big favour*? I would like to get 2 piano selections: the one: Das Preislied aus den Meistersingern von Nürnberg. The other one: "Am stillen Herd, zur Winterszeit . . . " (Stolzing's first song) aus der selben Oper.

If you possible [sic] can slide them along — or if the store can ship C.O.D. (I not knowing the price) — you would oblige me immensely. —

Did I tell you that I am going to get married soon?

Cordially yours

F.G.

Winkler, Man.
10/II/14

Dear Mr. Warkentin,

Thanks for your letter which I received yesterday. I am glad you wrote me a little more fully because I see now where the hitch is. Of course, in many things you are dead right. Also, of course, I hate Germany. I hate America, too, but probably a trifle less, because I am here. Excuse me for saying what I am going to say, but you know, I am quite a trifle older in yrs and maybe still a little older in life. I was anxious for you to get your trouble's worth out of this undertaking. I did not at all want you to like Germany — but I did want you to like the experience you are going through. To every question there are so many sides, and very few people see more than a fraction of their own side. I have very little patience with narrow mindedness. My father was a Swede, my mother a Scotchwoman, I was raised in Germany, I have lived in pretty nearly every country of Europe, in N.A. & Canada, I have travelled in Africa, through Asia, in Australia, I know India and China a little, the Islands south of Asia fairly well — so I believe — speaking merely geographically — I can claim a certain "Manysidedness." Also as far as "education" goes (the " " means that I think very little of what is commonly called education) — I speak English, French, German, Italian and Arabian — and I have a fair knowledge of Latin, Greek, Sanskrit, Spanish and Swedish with their respective literatures; I believe I have imbued myself with the fundamental principles of modern Science, and I do not know of any corner of Mathematics where, f.i., I meet difficulties in reading the latest and most advanced treatises. I have travelled a good deal, *mentally*, too. And what have I got out of it? Nothing, except a certain broadmindedness — and an extreme fastidiousness in matters of art, literature and women (excuse me again!). I have one longing: to leave the world, to retire to the little corner just west of Etaples, south of Boulogne, on the French coast that seems to swing in resonance with the vibrations of my inner tuning fork — to live there is absolute seclusion, write a poem now and then and finish a book that I have been working on between times for 20 yrs. — But there is one thing that I hate: patriotism, which for me is synonym with ignorance and "cornerdom" ("Winkeltum" we called it in Bonn). I never can be a "citizen" — which, after all is merely a translation of "behäbiger Burger." You see, there are things in German: Bier,

Behäbigkeit, "Gemütlichkeit" (!!!!), that smell like a badly aerated room: but do they smell worse than baseball, than divorce scandals of married life, than the abominable religious and moral hypocrisy of America? Take the "sexuelle Frage." I believe that your figures are correct: they tackle with my own experience. *But!* are you aware that things are just as bad in every densely populated district in the world? The nauseating percentages of sexually diseased are to be found in N.Y. City, Chicago, New England, Cape Town, Canton, *England* above all, just as well. Germany has (as France, too) at least the courage to take the bull by the horns. Now let me make an alarming statement: I do not object to sexual intercourse without marriage — but I object to just those consequences. I also object to premature development of sexual instincts. I have suffered immensely myself from that very cause. I think I was 15 yrs old when I was "seduced" by a married woman, the young wife of one of my old professors. If in spite of that I have managed to keep free of sexual infection I owe that to my mother's broadminded advice and to luck, I think (that first experience resulted in a public scandal, as the lady in question went through a divorce suit with me — 16 yrs old — as the witness —). I also believe that, since German civilization is essentially a city civilization, these things partly account for the fact that Germany has no aristocracy of the mind or of achievement. *But*: what kind of aristocracy has America? They *call* it an aristocracy of achievement. It *is* an aristocracy of grocerdom, of mental hollowness, of dollar wisdom.— In America all fortunes are self-made; in Germany all mental achievement is "Parvenutum." There is only one real aristocracy left in the world: that of lamadom in the Thibet. I do not believe that Germany as a power is declining. It is just the infantile diseases of the country that I loathe. I prefer downright decay. I prefer "the golden hues that herald and beautify decay," as somebody, I don't know who, expressed it. — As for the men of science in Germany — Nietzsche said: "Sie sind die Mehlsäche: klopft sie, und heraus fliegt der Staub der Gelehrsamkeit." [*They are like flour sacks; beat them and out flies the dust of academe.*] I love France.

But!: Germany is the one really instructive country where Americans ought to go: just as much in order to learn what to avoid: what they themselves are drifting into, as what to imitate.

Yes, I am afraid, I *am* an American, always was one, sorry to say so. *I* could no longer live in Germany.

Superiority! But do you know that this ridiculous feeling of superiority to the rest of the world is much more prevalent among Americans than Germans? I

believe I have been through every representative part of America with the exception of the extreme Northwest of Canada, and everywhere I found the closed mind: "We are leading the world in everything: we have nothing to learn." As far as making the best of this poor job that we call life is concerned, I think we ought to try what works out best — not hastily or rashly but observantly; in any case we must give things a trial. Now take Winkler — quite true, the people are slow to move, but so am I. Only I come with many things that have been tried out. I tell them you have a bunch of "bad boys" here that *are not* bad. They are being treated wrong. Why is it that I can do *anything* with Willy Neufeld, with Jake Loewen? Even make them work? But the people here condemn me — not because they know anything about my work — nobody has even been in school! But because they see me introducing a few innovations — slowly — carefully — and because they are pent up in their own ideals — because they listen to the talk of a disgruntled man *who belongs to them* and whom I have shaken up from a 10 years' sleep. They do not see that we have 20 pupils more than ever before; they do not see that by working night and day I give the reserve a chance to raise the standard of their teachers. Counting everything I shall send more than 30 candidates into 3rd and 2nd class examinations. And I should not even mention it if people would only leave me alone. In a way I should like to stay here at least another year. I am open for a proposition: but it seems I am not even going to get the chance — judging from what a few adherents tell me. Of course, I do not care. I know I have done what a man could do — I have even waited till the holidays before I lay down to get rid of the fever I had contracted. Even now I still keep working for the High School standing which is practically assured to Winkler for next year. — But that, too, is American, I mean the way I'm treated here. —

Now just a word about Science and the slow German mind. Yes, Germans are slow — yes, as individuals Germans are thoroughly despicable. But even if they do work slowly — they keep at it. The instances you quote have made me impatient thousands of times. But on the other hand, are they not trifles? Let me say this: I am for education for education's sake. I also am for knowledge for knowledge's sake. In the whole of life I do not see any sense. If I want to be truthful I must say that in our individual effort I see only a struggle to get over it in the best possible way. *I* stand apart, aloft, if you want to put it that way. It is a horrible thought to me that I am *acting*, "doing," at all. Whenever you touch life you make a mess of it. When you are young you don't notice it so much. My love for dogs, pups and all kinds of animals rests in the firm conviction that their

life is the only sincere, the only untainted life. On the other extreme stands the contemplative life — the life of the spectator who wants to *know*, not to do. That is my only salvation. (As for my marriage, that has gone to smash: something I have been working for for the last five years. I don't blame the girl — I merely don't understand her. Difference in age was considerable: she was my pupil before she went to college. At Christmas I went down to Arkansas — into the hospital!! And when I came out, after a week of raving fever, I did not know my world any longer! It was so changed. Well, enough of that!) So naturally I value even one tiny little bit of found knowledge immensely much more than all the deeds ever done. You say: "If we had waited for German philosophy to decide . . . where would we be?" But where *are* we!?! Is life one trifling little bit less raw, less cruel to-day than it was 10,000 yrs ago? Only the *robust* thick skinned people ever could endure active life: the rest of them went to the wall or into the wilderness. I am of the latter. I do not see that we have come any nearer to the solution of essential problems. Even Science never explains: it describes; describes more and more minutely — and I enjoy the spectacle. Let the slow, careful German laborers of the mind work for me, and let the whole city of Leipzig go to smash, let traffic be stopped and the fire department lift trolley cars!!

By the way, you misunderstand the Germans there. Again the dense population accounts for it. Why should any body dirty his gloves to drag a horse out of the way when there are people specially appointed to do that? It is none of *their* business!! Here, where men are scarce, everybody does everything. *I* should have bought a horse this fall if I could afford as in Germany to hire a man to keep it in tiptop condition and appearance, but I do not care to curry it myself, or even to draw a strap tighter when that is needed. It would be different if I thought it my business to *teach* how to saddle a horse. I promised to run this school, and so I do it: do it to the best of my knowledge and ability. But do I like it? I believe if I really wanted to stay I could pull that off, too — but is it worth while? I don't think so, not for myself. Fletcher says: "you *must* stay there and finish what you have begun." But why "must" I? I spent the greater part of my salary on this school — that puts me back one year. Instead of being through 1918 I shall have to work on till 1919 before I can retire: but I believe there ought to be a school somewhere that *suits* me. Selkirk has been offered to me. One school in Sask., one in B.C. In each case they are willing to let me pick my assistants — so why should I fight for this position? And yet I'd stay if they wanted me to — because I like to be of help — but they don't.

Well, I believe I have wearied you enough!

Yours cordially

F.G.

NB. — The Meistersinger selections will be heartily welcomed. Thanks ever so much. Give me a chance to "revenge" myself, will you?

NOTES

[1] In the summer of 1970, the late Mr. I. J. Warkentin showed me these letters and gave me his permission to publish them. He then generously donated them to the Grove Collection at the University of Manitoba. Subsequently, the Grove estate also gave me permission to publish them.

[2] Grove here misquotes Goethe's line:
"Am farbigen Abglanz haben wir das Leben."

[3] Grove did not finish the line:
"und dennoch hab' ich harter man die Liebe auch gespürt."

[4] The discrepancy is Grove's, between this sum and the $136.65 of the previous letter.

review articles

GEORGE JOHNSTON

D. G. Jones

GEORGE JOHNSTON, *Happy Enough: Poems 1935-1972*. Oxford University Press.

TRYING TO GET a quick line on George Johnston's poetry, I once said it lies somewhere between John Betjeman and John Berryman. One could also mention Auden and Eliot and Edgar Lear. The title poem of the collected volume *Happy Enough: Poems 1935-1972* sounds a bit like Robert Creeley. But this kind of bench mark is not very helpful. It makes most sense to look at Johnston's work within a Canadian context.

One thing that Johnston shares with most of the poets mentioned is his ironic stance, toward the world around him and toward himself.

Once, when my voice gave out at an academic conference, George Johnston was kind enough to read my paper for me. The paper was partly about Souster's pedestrian muse, his deliberate adoption of a figure more like Snow's Walking Woman than like Milton's Urania, and his chosen persona or role as an *eiron*. Johnston is an *eiron* too.

The self-effacing eiron can be irritating, indeed insufferable. He has a tendency never to stick his neck out so he can be hit, never to climb high enough to fall, to be forever superior because he can say, we honest worms will be around long after you blow-hards are dead and gone. Like Socrates, he only knows that you know nothing. Like Souster, he knows nothing, except what is normal, natural, good and right.

This strikes me as a typical Canadian posture, all the more irritating if you recognize yourself in it. And it occurs to me that Canadians typically play the *eiron* to the American *alazon*, the loudmouth know-it-all or big shot. As Frye suggests, they are basic roles in the structure of much comedy.

Irving Layton makes a dramatic entry on the Canadian scene as an *alazon*. (His friend Neitzsche had no use for Christian meekness or for Socratic irony.) Layton is always sticking out his neck, and other things, and daring you to do something about it. He adopts heroic and melodramatic postures. Irving Layton's "The Bull Calf" and George Johnston's "Happy Enough" centre on roughly the same event, the killing of a bull or heifer. Where Layton ends melodramatically,

identifying with the calf, weeping and thinking of Richard II, Johnston ends identifying with the farmer and his toothache, saying:

Get it fixed Fred it
hurts just knowing how it hurts.

Both Johnston and Souster eschew the heroic pose, adopt the persona of the ordinary man, modest, domestic and suburban, with memories and occasional glimpses of the rural countryside. This is especially true of Johnston for whom the great events of life, like war, are said to lie on the periphery.

Around the battlements go by
Soldier men against the sky,
Violent lovers, husbands, sons,
Guarding my peaceful life with guns.

My pleasures, how discreet they are!
A little booze, a little car,
Two little children and a wife
Living a small suburban life.

The people in Souster's world also lead small, ordinary lives, but they are by contrast often more violent.

Johnston's sense of the eiron's role is quite different from Souster's, in style as well as in substance. A Souster reading is less than a performance, more like a man deciphering an item in the newspaper for the benefit of his wife. There is something there on the page in black and white, a fact that is presumably not to be disturbed by style. Johnston is a man who reads poems through glasses with no glass in them from a book with blank pages. He insists that it is a performance, poetry not reporting, a game with formal conventions. Like Sadie McGonigle's daughter, a poem is "in a state of art from head to foot." Souster likes to give the illusion that his poems are in a state of nature. He avoids obviously poetic diction, syntactical inversions, certain kinds of wit, and rhyme. Johnston indulges them freely.

The grasshopper does not so free
The silly summertime dispense
As Mr. Murple in a tree
Playing upon wind instruments.

Though there is less fantasy in these lines from Johnston's "Pastorale" than in Souster's "Flight of the Roller Coaster," Johnston is more obviously literary. Beside Souster, he may appear academic or simply frivolous. Certainly he is often having more fun, and is often funnier. But this is deliberate and serious. We may hear echoes of the seventeenth century, of Herrick or Cowley or of a later mode of mock-heroic poetry that adjusts the epic and the mythical to the banal and domestic. But says Johnston, let us recognize the fact that that is just what happens in life, which is no less conventional than literature. So we have Mrs. Belaney, unfastened and happy and slightly drunk.

Queens, queens, they smile and go,
  Their loves and deaths are sad;
Duchesses now and again stoop low;
  Mrs. Belaney is bad.

Win a little, lose a little. Mrs. Belaney is not heroic; neither is her fate tragic. But for that very reason she is caught and defined in terms of everyday morality. She is happy, and bad. (The discrimination might escape Layton.) Littleness diminishes both the horror and the glory, as Mrs. McGonigle suggests to the young woman who might find marriage demeaning, frustrating, quite disillusioning:

Don't be nervous, Mary Anne!
  Don't be nervous, dear!
Carry a little water can
  To catch the quiet tear.

Johnston is something of a humorist for whom the little is his chosen field, but for whom a right sense of decorum allows you to see the big in the little and, more striking, perhaps, the ironic shifts in value or in the conventions that apply when you shift from the relatively big to the relatively small, or vice versa — a kind of quantum theory of morality.

In his best poems, Johnston anchors his perspective firmly and precisely in the quotidian, but gradually makes us aware of the whole range of the imagination, of life itself, shading off from that precise centre. For example, "Eating Fish" begins neatly in the home or in the Travellers' Hotel:

> Here is how I eat a fish
> — Boiled, baked or fried —
> Separate him in a dish,
> Put his bones aside.

But the "ancient fishy smell permeating man" leads to a much broader perspective.

> May he be a cannier chap
> Altered into me,
> Eye the squirming hook, and trap,
> Choose the squirming sea.

The ironic distancing is achieved through a nice play of ambiguity, the slightly mannered use of everyday words and images, the sudden shift in meaning of the language or imagery that reveals at least two perspectives at work. "Elaine in a Bikini" begins very close to the vulgar.

> Mrs. McGonigle's boys enjoy the sun
> By gogglesful, and stare along the beach
> Whose innocence is almost all Elaine,
> Almost, but not quite, all.
>
> Felicitously she comes in every eye
> Bending her knees and tender finger nails
> While the incalculable strings gather in
> What's hers to gather in.

There is the fun of "gogglesful" with its suggestion of "ogle" and its echo of "McGonigle." There is the surprise bending of "tender fingernails" which suggests affectation, a calculated grace, or art. There is a whole series of ambiguous suggestions in "innocence", the innocent natural world, the not so innocent flesh, the beach innocent of all but Elaine, innocent of all but her bikini, the incalculable strings.

Elaine's world is closer to Hollywood than Olympus. The narrator is no Paris, any more than Mrs. McGonigle's boys are the elders on the wall of Troy; yet in her effect on them, and more especially on the old sea that "fumbles about the naked afternoon as though in paradise", Elaine may take on just the faintest trace of Helen. And the larger aura grows in the last verse, as the incalculable strings multiply and become the various strings of morality and desire, youth and age, Eros and Thanatos.

> I am felicitous too on the bright shore
> Waiting for darkness with the roving boys
> And all but gathered in myself with strings,
> What's mine to gather in.

All these poems except the first come from *The Cruising Auk*, which makes up the third and last section of the collected *Happy Enough: Poems 1935-1972*. Now *The Cruising Auk* was published in 1959, but if we look at the poems from the point of view of 1935, when Canadian poetry was still dominated by Roberts, Carman, Lampman and Scott, we may be struck by one thing: they are poems about the city and the people who live in the city. More particularly, we might suggest, it is Lampman's city of Ottawa. With the exception of the quite different poet, Klein, no one has cultivated such a particular urban world to such an extent as have Johnston and Souster. Unlike Souster, and again with the possible exception of Klein, unlike any other poet of that generation, to say nothing of Lampman, Johnston cultivates the city with affection. In this perspective, the very title of one of the first poems in *The Cruising Auk* is startling, "Love of the City." We read:

> After a week of wandering through the world
> Eating wherever we could, sleeping, washing ourselves
> Wherever we could, in bars and railway rooms,
> We came to this great city. Nothing
> Will persuade us ever to leave it again.

It is not, as for Lampman, a beautiful facade, within which you find frustration and violence; nor, as for Souster, a cage or trap. Johnston's city appears humane, despite the irony that it is regarded from the point of view of death, and perhaps because it is so viewed.

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

Johnston is almost alone in providing us with an image of the city as a humane community. He has managed to do so by virtue of his own humane acceptance of the ordinary, in himself and in the world around him, by virtue of his ironic view of life as a rather poignant comedy, his nice sense of the working of convention, and his capacity to invent an almost Dickensian cast of characters who reflect a very Canadian middle class world, a world of English, Irish, Scotch and very occasionally French origin: Mr. Murple, Mrs. Belaney, Mrs. McGonigle, Mrs.

McWhirter and Mrs. Beleek, Miss Descharmes, Sadie and Edward and Andrew and Elaine. As becomes especially evident in the longer "Love in High Places" from *Home Free*, dealing with Sadie McGonigle's son Stan, his career in public life and his discovery of his girl friend Gert, these characters reflect particularly the world of Ottawa — Lampman's Ottawa. They do for Ottawa what poems like Klein's "Monsieur Gaston" do for Montreal, and even more thoroughly. They fill a very real lacuna in the imaginative landscape of Canadian poetry. Johnston articulates something that existed. It was not a big world nor a strong world. And when we move into the second generation and explore that world in detail in "Love in High Places", its confusion and drabness, its mediocrity and sham — its lack of any real vision or necessity — makes it simply sad.

Yet it was not just a sentimental world. While small and stable, it had something of the edge and brilliance of its characters.

> Mrs. Beleek, an aunt of ours,
> Lifts her behind among her flowers
> Putting ingenious stuff around
> To baffle bugs and coax the ground.

Mrs. Beleek, so simply and aptly limned, spends her time thinking of how nice it would be to bump off the local children in the same way as she does the bugs. Poor Edward, who owed the narrator twenty dollars, takes his troubles to the bottom of the river. The child Cathleen rages like hell, no matter how helpful others may be. And then there are the friends, friends galore, who smile and will not leave one alone, who "smile to death the prosperous air," and who leave behind a "sulphur kind of smell." That whole little world is gathered up like the speaker in "In It":

> The world is a boat and I'm in it
> Going like hell with the breeze;
> Important people are in its as well
> Going with me and the breeze like hell —

The larger world is full of unweening confidence as it sweeps the speaker (and his little world) into the future. But the last verse shows us that the speaker has a different view of both.

> The world is a pond and I'm in it,
> In it up to my neck;
> Important people are in it too,
> It's deeper than this, if we only knew;
> Under we go any minute —
> A swirl, some bubbles, a fleck.

The world of Mrs. McGonigle and Mrs. Beleek suffers the same fate. It was not strong enough to sustain itself, to sustain George Johnston. Or should we say that Johnston simply does not have the heart to sustain the fine irony that held it together. As we move into *Home Free* and *Happy Enough*, the ironic brilliance fades, the characters become more marginal or fragmentary, their stylized world begins to disintegrate. It gives way before direct satirical comments on Ottawa or a Royal Commission or Remembrance Day; before more straightforward occasional, descriptive and elegiac poems about actual friends and acquaintances. It dissolves in the dark that was an ever present element in the first volume but that grows deeper and, perhaps, more intimate, as in the very first poem of *Happy Enough*. Here this is no sharp irony, but an attractive simplicity.

> Everyone gone away
> feasting but Nora, Mark
> and me. Neither do we
> stay put. It is getting dark . . .

There is an orange moon and bits of fields

somewhere in the haze; the children race ahead:

gleeful, inky leapers
in the warm gloom; I strain
to glimpse their dark capers
by the dusk of the moon.

As the urban world fades it is Lampman's world that emerges more and more strongly, that of Fred's farm, Fred's apple wine or Farmer Elliott's bees, that of the rocky coast or islands in the sea. Once again, it is in the natural world that the writer finds some kind of enduring reality, the "ongoing," the elemental. It is in life's commerce with the earth, as in the case of Elliot's bees. The bee lives four to six weeks; the honey gathers; and earth:

Earth gathers in again her sweet
And wax from its decaying feet
And takes its poison from its sting,
Its secret, sweetest offering
And her most intimate of powers,
The distillation of her flowers
Which it in death gives back to her
With its dead bones and wings and fur.

It is the natural and not the conventional world that Johnston is drawn to, that increasingly claims him, as in "The Creature's Claim":

I brood over the creatureliness of Earth
This gibbous night, fifty years from my birth,
And feel her claim, not on my yielded life
But on my heart, cut out with a stone knife.

The bird in *The Cruising Auk* was a rather far-fetched or bizarre symbol of a freer, larger, more imaginative life, that both mocks and consoles the earth-bound Mr. Murple and the speaker. In the parallel poem from the second volume, "Music in the Air," the auk gives way to the more familiar duck, whose quack in the night is more direct and more disturbing in its impact.

She makes the sky her pond and drowns the street
And drowns me too, homing on fishy feet
To where my doorway sucks its scaly mouth:
Heaven is north, and my drowned home is south,
And here my caverned coal fire covets me
Of the duck's night.

Finally, Johnston does not want the city, its friendly rooms, its great roof of pity, its modest life drowned in conventions. Finally, like Lampman or Scott, it is wilderness he wants; like Layton or Newlove he would lie down with earth. Heaven in north. In "Pied à Terre" he rejects the great urban hotel, the company of men, the fastidiousness and sweetness of women, its comfort, its security, its delight and its art. He has another address:

An island with a cave, burnt-out fires and bones;
No-one can get at me there, it is my own,
No-one lets it to me, I just own it,
And I can be cruel as nature there, and alone.

Johnston's later poems do not, I think, constitute as striking or as original an achievement as those in *The Cruising Auk*. But their direction is reassuring, both to the reader of Canadian poetry and, I think, to Johnston himself, in that they bring us back to a kind of true north in Canadian poetry and Canadian experience, to something that doesn't have to be maintained by a delicate ironic balancing act, to something elemental and indeed fierce.

In their diction, rhythm and overall tone, I find such relatively simple poems as "Outdoors" and "Happy Enough" as satisfying as any George Johnston has produced. And a brief poem like "October" may not be of any great note, but it

connects with the world of Lampman and I suspect with something authentic and ultimate in Canadian life.

Day falters and the fields
lie reconciled. October.
The old man goes and sits

in the sun
under his maple
and feels the splendour on him.

His way into the dark
of dirt and stone:
through the blazing season.

It is here, in this season, from this point of vision, that George Johnston may feel, not only happy enough, but happy.

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W. H. New

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BARRY ARGYLE, *An Introduction to the Australian Novel 1830-1930.* Oxford. £4.00.

WILLIAM WALSH, *Commonwealth Literature.* Oxford.

CANADIAN LITERATURE has been fortunate in its Commonwealth contacts. Writers with the eye and the talent of Birney, Godfrey, Laurence and Page have all made metaphor and vital landscape out of experiences in Asia, Australia, Africa, and the Caribbean. From the Commonwealth, too, come writers like Austin Clarke and Michael Ondaatje, and more recently Lawrence Bantleman and Rienzi Crusz, whose experience of Canada in the contexts of their homeland throws both cultures into new perspectives. Comparative critical overviews of Commonwealth literatures, by contrast, have frequently served literature less well. Muriel Bradbrook's *Literature in Action,* for example, a travelogue masquerading as criticism, does real disservice to the writer's established reputation. A series of essays purporting, in part, to isolate the ways in which various literatures express the character of active societies, it is so littered with factual errors that even its sweeping generalizations will not tidy it. Some indication of the book's depth of analysis and the logic of its argument can be gauged from the following (the only) paragraph on Sheila Watson:

> As the interior journey becomes of greater significance, so the younger generation begins to revolt against creeds and narrow tradition. In *The Double Hook* (1959) which is set in the Rockies, the tale has become more complex and symbolic. The evil, dominating mother is murdered at the beginning of the story. The wild spirit of the hills hovers over the community — the Coyote, whose presence is evoked for revolt. A poet has said "It's only by our lack of ghosts we're haunted" — but there are ghosts in plenty here.

So too with Margaret Laurence's *A Jest of God* which satirizes small town life in the prairies.

Comparable observations in the chapters on Australian and New Zealand literatures are easy to find.

To put them in perspective, one can turn back to the cross-grained but always provocative essays of an earlier book like William Walsh's *A Manifold Voice* (Chatto and Windus, 1970). Though it is limited by its narrow subject and the consistency of its approach — Canada's linguistic dexterity is represented only by Morley Callaghan's work, for example, and Professor Walsh's analysis shifts all too uncertainly from praise to ambivalence — the book has the virtue at least of a point-of-view, and it demonstrates wider reading among Commonwealth literature than does Miss Bradbrook's. If it limits its subject in order to pursue its thesis, it acknowledges to some degree the range of literature from which the specific examples are drawn. Miss Bradbrook's book purports to *introduce* the literatures, to establish *contexts* for MacLennan and Lowry, Mansfield and Frame, Hope and White, and for all its sense of personal discovery, it simply fails to do so.

Much more useful are the several essays on Indian, African, and Commonwealth topics in K. R. Srinivasa Iyengar's *Two Cheers for the Commonwealth;* if they generalize, they also range widely, refer extensively to specific texts, and quote soundly to support the points of view being argued. Ideas such as national identity, the differences between "old" and "new" Commonwealth, and variations in theme across the Commonwealth all receive attention. The literary relations between French and English Canada are seen in the context of multilingual problems in other Commonwealth societies, for example; the external perspective ought usefully to remind us, without altering the local significance of local experience, of the scale of the Canadian problem and of the world — intellectual, emotional, "universal" — to which Canadian literature inevitably relates.

Symposia provide another route to appreciating those relationships. Earlier transcripts of conferences, like John Press's *Commonwealth Literature* and Kenneth Goodwin's *National Identity,* continue to be useful, that is, and recent special issues of *Novel* and *The Literary Half-Yearly* indicate the developing international interest in English literature written outside the U.S. and the U.K. Anna Rutherford's *Commonwealth,* a collection of papers delivered at a Commonwealth literature conference in Denmark in 1971, testifies even to an increasing European interest in the study. Several universities in Denmark, Norway, Sweden, Belgium, France, and Germany now offer courses in Commonwealth literatures, and the high quality of the critical writings of V. Dupont, Hena Maes-Jelinek, Paul Goetsch, and Miss Rutherford herself, among others, promises a challenging model for Canadian critics: a combination of warm literary sensitivity with intelligent objectivity, a sense of the *comparative* that makes studies in comparative literature, at their best, so informatively engaging. Canadian writers to be discussed in these several publications (by Canadian as well as by European and American critics) include Lowry, Richler, Laurence, Avison, and Pratt.

To provide brief introductory essays on most major living Commonwealth, English, and American writers (together with brief biographical and bibliographical notes and, on occasion, credos by the writers themselves), another admirably useful series has been launched, distributed by St. James Press in London and St. Martin's Press in New York. Two of a proposed three massive volumes are now available — *Contemporary Poets of the English Language* (already under revision to expand the coverage) and *Contemporary Novelists* (released at the end of 1972). *Contemporary Dramatists* is promised for release in 1974.

Canadian critics have contributed to this process of international literary exploration. Three recent books, ranging widely in approach and subject, are all substantial discussions of literary texts and problems. Rowland Smith's *Lyric and Polemic*, the first extended account of Roy Campbell's work and a welcome attempt to gauge its quality, pierces through the charges of "colonial mentality" and "fascist" that have hung around Campbell's name in recent years in order to establish the genuine merits and limitations of his verse. Particularly good on Campbell's early work, establishing a context for the *Voorslag* journalism and the satires of Georgian poetry, Dr. Smith locates the manifestations of Campbell's defensive attitudes, traces the intellectual relationships between his political stands and his religious affiliation, and explores the ways in which his literary imitations succeed and fail. The lyrics, empowered by the dynamism of his own personality, acquire a life of their own, full of strong images and imaginative lines; the polemics, no more doctrinaire than those of Auden or Spender (though opposed in sentiment), more frequently founder in dogma.

The moments of passionate intensity which mark him at his best, and the free-wheeling narrative bursts which first earned him his name, used to inspire Canadian critics to liken Campbell to E. J. Pratt, but there is little in Dr. Smith's book to support such a comparison. The greater likeness is perhaps with Robert Service, to whom Campbell wrote in an early unpublished poem:

> I have roved the hush of the soundless snows
> In the spell of thy magic lines;
> I have heard the rune of the lonely loon
> And the moan of the arctic pines....
> Oh! it's there I would have you cast me loose
> And give me my ancient gun....
> There in the silence undefiled
> Let me fight to the bitter end,
> Grip to grip with the naked Wild,
> 'The Wild that would crush and rend.'

Campbell's mature allegiance was soon transferred from the Arctic to the Mediterranean sun, but Service's poetry attracted him by its energy and its down-to-earth romance. In such a guise lyric sensitivity became "masculine" and acceptable. That it was apparently necessary to assume stances in order to make it so describes part of the personality Dr. Smith attempts to elucidate. It is not a biography he writes, however; in unfashionably probing the effects upon poetry of the personality that made it, Dr. Smith blends a measured response to the poetic texts with a concern for the biographical credibility of criticism. In acknowledging the distinction, he finds an openness of approach that take us closer to the poetry of a puzzling literary phenomenon.

By contrast, Patricia Morley's *The Mystery of Unity: theme and technique*

in the novels of Patrick White focusses almost exclusively on recurrent images and fictional motifs. Her aim is to demonstrate the Jungian unity of life (comedy and tragedy, ridicule and compassion, inseparably bound) which the Australian novelist Patrick White tries valiantly to unfold. The result, if not so satisfying as Dr. Smith's book, is a tough-minded and enthusiastic study, and one of the first attempts to see in any extended way the growth and singular character of Patrick White's literary world. It reads, to begin with, altogether too much like an undigested dissertation; the résumés of European mysticism and the elucidation of Northrop Frye's critical terminology labour their points, for example, and the cross-comparisons to writers like Lowry, Dostoyevsky, Faulkner, Melville, Dante, Joyce, and Schreiner, which ought either to illuminate White or be pursued for their own merits, are left instead like dropped clues to a mystery yet unsolved. The book is also hampered by the feeling of repetitiousness that its method arouses. Working with literary patterns, Dr. Morley moves us again and again over the same works of fiction instead of stepping vigorously from to another, and the sense of literary density she hopes to enlighten is somewhat overshadowed by her own critical style. These cavils aside, many of her observations about particular passages, and her overall theory about White's affiliation with mystic thought, show fine insights into White's ideas and a sensitive appreciation of the idiosyncrasies of his prose style. White himself, moreover, comes off as a more compassionate and complex writer than Campbell, and no less intricate a personality.

What one loses a little, reading Dr. Morley's book, is sight of Patrick-White-the-*Australian*-writer. There are compensations, of course. But it is the task of isolating certain features of Australianness in fiction that Barry Argyle (himself the author of a sprightly and useful monograph on White) has set himself in *An Introduction to the Australian Novel 1830-1930*. The result is a well-written, well-documented study (despite an unsatisfactory bibliography) of ten representative early Australian novels. It is also one of the finest critical books on Australian writing to appear in a long time. In lively, scholarly fashion, Dr. Argyle argues that the main influences on Australian fiction were Scott and Byron; that the "pattern for adventure", the romantic scenery, and the "typical heroes, who admitted no social allegiance", derived directly from those English and Scots sources; and that the "Byronic" heroes become contemporary "outsiders", epitomizing Australia's celebration of joyless exile, when in confirming their freedom from conventions they concurrently establish their "heroism" and underline their "despair". The "habit of thinking like a free man" which besets the existentially bound individual thus cages him even more. Such a transformation, Dr. Argyle writes, occupied the pages of nineteenth century Australian fiction, and in it one can find the rationale which informs contemporary Australian writing. The theory is skilfully and persuasively argued.

Moreover, the glimpse it provides of social pressures on literature in Australia also implicitly informs the way in which other literatures — New Zealand and Canadian, for example — might be interpreted. A contrast between Australian outsiders and Canadian "survivors" (to

use Margaret Atwood's term) might even turn up more likenesses than one expected. The title of a recent Thomas Keneally novel (*The Survivor*) and these lines from A. D. Hope's "Australia" —

> Her rivers of water drown among inland sands,
> The river of her immense stupidity
> Floods her monotonous tribes from Cairns to Perth.
> In them at last the ultimate men arrive
> Whose boast is not: 'we live' but 'we survive',
> A type who will inhabit the dying earth.

— certainly establish grounds for comparison. The common weal, in other words, and the common woes of Commonwealth literatures remain still to be explored.

A more recent book by Walsh is *Commonwealth Literature*, a more accurate but still frustratingly selective chart of much Commonwealth poetry, prose, and drama. The enterprise is limited in advance by his deliberate omission of South Africa and much of South Asia (though his enthusiasm for Olive Schreiner's work lets her appear any way) ; more debilitating is the failure to mention, in the chapter on Canada for example, the major modern prose writers. Miss Bradbrook at least found Watson and Laurence; Professor Walsh does not note their existence. Nor does he mention Godfrey and Atwood, nor the recent novels of Robertson Davies, nor for the most part any poems that have not been collected in anthologies. In other chapters, too, such idiosyncrasies arise. Randolph Stow is claimed as the "most gifted of all young Australian writers", but not one of his titles is named. The distinguished New Zealander Janet Frame is the author of over twelve books, yet only her first two are mentioned, and they are dismissed in two sentences. Selectivity is not itself a vice, of course, particularly in a book trying to assemble an approach to such disparate literatures. But that selectivity, to cite Walsh's preface, is being used to indicate "who counts .... who has significantly contributed to the canon of literature in English". By implication, Heavysege, Hunter-Duvar, and Stead must "count" more than Atwood then. Certainly, among those writers specifically named, Anne Wilkinson and Robert Finch are claimed as Birney's superiors. We are told further that "from the evidence of his poetry", Leonard Cohen has "a more mature sensibility" than Irving Layton, and that "Klein is one of the few Canadian writers untroubled about the problem of identity and without its attendant, modish hysteria about alienation". Various writings in other chapters are characterized more boldly as "a species of emotional tuberculosis" and "Hot Coca-Cola". The reader of a book thus concerned overwhelmingly with scales of values inevitably asks how valuable such judgments are. However discriminating Professor Walsh is in assessing eighteenth and nineteenth century writings, his largely Arnoldian criteria do not take him helpfully past the 1950's. Taking Smith as his guide in Canada, Narasimhaiah in India, McCormick in New Zealand, he provides a fluent catalogue of early received opinion. But if his book offers no new departures, it does prove easily readable.

UNOFFICIAL VOICES

Barbara Opala

Volvox, edited by J. Michael Yates. Sono Nis, $7.95.

VOLVOX is an anthology of poetry in English translation from Canada's "unofficial" languages. Some twenty-eight poets are represented in this handsomely bound and well arranged volume in translation from the Arabic and Japanese as well as most of the European languages including Icelandic and Yiddish. One arresting feature of this collection is the title itself. A volvox, I discovered, is a fresh-water organism consisting of spherical colonies of chlorophyll-bearing cells which are all in protoplasmic connection with their neighbors. A volvox then, is a fitting metaphor for this amalgam of highly distinct voices and visions because it too, has a kind of "protoplasmic" unity of its own. Not unlike that of an organism, the unity I speak of in *Volvox* seems to be derived from the cumulative effect produced by the individual poetic selections. It is largely a matter of an overall impact emanating from the richly-textured variety of this sensitively organized collection.

In part, the connective tissue between one poet's work and that of another is thematic. In many places, *Volvox* reads like a Canadian Odyssey of sorts, for whatever the cadence, the voices speak of the stranger in a new land. Separation for instance, the wrench and anguish of it, often explodes in an outcry:

> Oh, God, when shall I calm
> a heart that endlessly
> is tight with grief?
>
> (Pavel Javor: "The Exile").

Or it is imbedded in the sense of impending loss:

> Soon your ink
> fades into the yellowing page
> of your letter and
> all your feelings
> have come to be words.
>
> (Rinehard: "Winter's Fields").

Or it lies implicit in the essence of memories:

> I remember you in the butterfly that dances on the leaf of mist and dies in the child's heart.
> . . . . . .
> I remember you in the mirrored multitudes of two fingers pressed together, anxiously.
>
> (Ramon Mansoor: "Remember").

In other poems, the focus is directly on the emigrant experience. What is the dream for some?:

> Looking into their eyes you could see
> tremendous kinds of hope:
> Studebaker or Buick,
> refrigerator, radio, a house,
> and enough to eat always.
> . . . . . .
> And like a messianic pronouncement
> one word was heard again and again:
> money.
>
> (Walter Bauer: "Emigrants").

And above all, what is it that is most difficult to reconcile oneself to?:

> . . . and as we lay her
> in a foreign grave, we, who know no Icelandic,
> who know then almost nothing of what she loved
> and lived by, say our prayers over her in English.
>
> (Einar Pall Jonsson: "The Laundress").

My hands tremble
As I sign my naturalization papers
Making me a Canadian citizen
And Canada my final resting place.

(Takeo Nakano: "My hands").

Other thematic strands also, are interwoven into the texture of this collection. There are critiques of society's values, for instance, and commentaries on the "nature of man" in general. And, as might be expected in a fairly extensive collection of individual groupings of poems such as this one is, the question of human values, the broad existential question, looms large in the thematic pattern. Individual poets' apprehensions of the quality of the moral world they live in form a wide spectrum of experiences which is thus presented to the reader; and this spectrum reflects, at varying angles, the intellectual and artistic currents of our age. The fragments cited below represent the way in which the existentialist vision for example, is transfused into and effectively concretized in poetry:

This is this
Now is now
Here is here
I am I

Nothing else is true
there are no harps in heaven
there are no turtles holding up the world
the best investment in a t-bone steak

(Robert Zend: "Monday")

or

Death doesn't
end life
death just
interrupts it
. . . . . .
guests tonight
a movie tomorrow evening
six shirts at the laundry
a holiday in Mexico this winter

this is what things are like
when a period is placed
in the middle of a sentence

(Robert Zend: "When")

Elsewhere however the darkly oppressive tonality of poems in which this sense of the "condition humaine" is conveyed, is lightened by notes of the positive, as abiding human values in new formulations emerge:

Son of man, where do you get the tenacity
to shout into the storm?
. . . . . .
A voice echoes
from lands beyond graves:
"Die and be humble!"

But you die,
living curses on your lips.
you die making a fist:
your cooling fingers
trying to protect
a withered blossom.

(Arved Viirlaid: "Wandering")

Also, even in the most negative of visions, there is a felt, if unstated, underlying assumption that the creative act per se, is a value in itself. And in not a few places, art, as an affirmation of the human spirit is at the core of the poem:

Configurations are conspiracies.
Maturing is a matter of betrayals
and the recovery of innocence
and of the birds relentless
longing for migration.
. . . . . .
There is the law of the falling of ripe apples.

The law of reins.

Beyond self-betrayals
you must reach after flexibility.

But there is no consent to death.

(Bogdan Czaykowski: "Ars Poetica").

On reading *Volvox* one gradually becomes more and more aware of a certain

inter-connectedness, a sense of fusion taking hold of the mind. Something of this effect upon a reader's responses is generated by the thematic substance, as the foregoing quotations may illustrate. But this is not all. Another quality also, is felt to be part of the dynamics here and I hope that something of this too, will be conveyed by the examples cited. It is a matter of a unique coloration permeating all component parts of the collection, of a singular atmosphere in which all the specific little worlds of individual poets' creation partake, and by means of which they are fused into a "protoplasmic" connection.

What I think a reader will come to realize is that his experience of this particular collection of poems is a poetic experience of a special flavour, a certain cast imparted to it by sensibilities formed in other cultures, by consciousnesses perceptibly non-Canadian responding to various aspects of a new environment. For what all of these poems from fifteen languages share in common is this discernible tonal quality of being something "other than" Canadian or North American, of stemming from soils to be found elsewhere, however much they may, and indeed do, differ from one another in style, substance and poetic excellence.

Poetic merit in *Volvox* is more difficult to assess. Just how much has been lost in the almost inevitable diminution that poetry, in particular, undergoes in a translation is hard to gauge. Nevertheless, the triteness of the imagery is some few of the entries would suggest that these are mediocre even in the original. Also, some poems are in conventional verse translation, and this strikes me as a most insensitive choice, for the jog-trot rhythm of the sound pattern in these cases is not suited to the sense, grating upon the nerves, and destructive of intended effect. On the other hand, in other poems, and such a one is Bogdan Czaykowski's "Garden", the interpenetration of image, sound, rhythm and symbol conveys fully the intimate sense of things with the kind of power which one recognizes immediately as that of good poetry:

> And a man's naked torso emerges amid jasmine flowers.
> Rustling in layers of leaves and leaves leaves leaves,
> Rustling which kindles into a tall shape of flame
> Green sparks of buds. The greenness of grass burns.
> Night springs at the moon. A peacock slumbers beneath a star.
> The wind gathers rusty silver. A palm whimpers over the wastes.
> From a coconut shell a woman who certainly is here
> Drinks milk. Her body is gilded
> By the irreplaceable sun, then twilight chill combs
> Her hair and heaps it, warm, over her shoulder.

Uneven as to poetic quality in its constituent parts, *Volvox* as a whole nevertheless forms a genuine poetic experience. For if, as A. E. Housman claimed, "the peculiar function of poetry is to set up in the reader's sense a vibration corresponding to what was felt by the writer," then certainly the vibrations can be felt here, and they are present with enough force and frequency for the responsive reader to enjoy the process and gain an insight thereby into what to him are perhaps less familiar worlds of the "Canadian mosaic."

AS WE SEE OURSELVES AND OTHERS

George Woodcock

JOEY SMALLWOOD, *I Chose Canada.* Macmillan, $13.95.
HUGH GARNER, *One Damn Thing after Another.* McGraw Hill-Ryerson, $6.95.
DOUG FETHERLING, *Hugh Garner.* Forum House, $1.25.
ANN CHARNEY, *Dobryd.* New Press, $6.95.
RODERICK STEWART, *Bethune.* New Press, $10.00.
GEOFFREY STEVENS, *Stanfield.* McClelland & Stewart, $10.00.

IT MAY BE NO MORE than an impression bred of a single publishing season, but I have a hunch that Canadians, who have been producing occasional good biographies for the past two decades, may at last have reached the stage of confidence in their own identities — and also in their audiences — that enables them to write interesting and occasionally good autobiography as well.

I make the immediate distinction between interesting and good because the first book I mention — *I Chose Canada* — happens to be good in some parts, interesting in others, and downright bad for long stretches. It is Joey Smallwood's autobiography, whose best contents derive from the old pre-Canadian Newfoundland.

The first third of *I Chose Canada,* indeed, when he is telling of his upbringing and early career, forms a notable document on growing up ambitious in St. John's, and even the bragging is amusing enough to be acceptable. It is when Joey becomes a controversial politician, wooing and winning the Canadian wolf, that his book, which should now be at its best, declines into flaccid self-justification and partisan history. In the early chapters one feels that Joey is writing of his youth as he remembers it; in the remainder that he is writing of his political career for the sake of the record. And there is a world of difference between the two. *I Chose Canada* begins as an engaging and promising autobiography. It ends as a rather boring political apologia.

Hugh Garner's autobiography, appropriately called *One Damn Thing after Another,* resembles Smallwood's in its vanity and also in the fact that it too is a narrative of ascent from *les bas fonds* — of Cabbagetown in Garner's case. The title — *One Damn Thing After Another* — says a great deal about the shape of the book, for, compared with Garner's novels and stories, it is unexpectedly loose and rambling. At first the apparent formlessness disconcerts one, but in one way it is a very natural way to write a book of memoirs, the thoughts and recollections put down as they come into the mind. It is, indeed, so much like a man talking that, as one reads, Garner's gravelly

voice seems to sound in the ear and his compact cocky figure to take shape before the mind's eye.

One of the good things about this approach, from the viewpoint of any writer who will follow with a more formal biography of Garner, is the fact that he gives abundant detail on his publication record, even down to what happened to individual short stories. Another is that when he has written a good magazine piece about an episode in his life, Garner resurrects it instead of rewriting the incident from a later and vaguer perspective. One example is his account of experiences as a member of the Abraham Lincoln Battalion in the International Brigade during the Spanish Civil War. One expects this to come in chronological order between his experiences as a workless wanderer during the Depression (which included direct acquaintance with a number of American lockups) and his naval service during World War II (which included a stretch in a military glasshouse). But the whole Spanish experience is missed out at this point, and one begins to wonder whether Garner had found a reason for forgetting. But no! He has merely acted on the assumption that the most important thing in a writer's life is what he writes, and, having produced during the 1950's an excellent series for the *Star Weekly* on his recollections of Spain, he waits until the appropriate time in his autobiography, and reproduces the account with little change at a point twenty years after the experience took place. The time dislocation is a little disturbing, but the principle of using existing good material which cannot be improved on is an excellent one.

An interesting aspect of Garner's present attitude is his retreat from the political engagement which led him to Spain; it is not the same thing as a repudiation of his past. Indeed, when I interviewed him a few years ago for a CBC television programme on the Spanish Civil War, Garner defended the Communists as the only effective fighters against Franco, though he was no longer in sympathy with them. In *One Damn Thing after Another,* Garner gives a long account of that meeting between us and of his great binge which ended with his arrest and maltreatment by the Richmond RCMP. It was during the binge that the interview took place and though, as Hugh remarks, "poor George was a bit apprehensive that I might not make the taping", I can vouch that he indeed behaved like the splendid professional he is, and gave a fine interview.

So here is Garner, warts and all, with no attempt to hide the bouts of drinking that alternate with long periods of severe and sober work (a pattern strikingly similar to that of Dylan Thomas, who would astound one with fits of awesome sobriety when he was hard at work on his poems); with no attempt either to mitigate his vanity or to beautify his occasional fits of loud aggressiveness. All this goes with the refusal to give *One Damn Thing after Another* a form that would falsify the experiences. A professional writer's life, after all, *is* "one damn thing after another", since only those with independent means or university jobs can afford to turn down the hack work which the ordinary professional has to accept. The great thing in that life is never to let down your prose, and always to learn what you can in the way of facts and techniques which can be retained for better uses; these rules Garner has at most times followed, and so his periods of hack

writing have hurt him no more than they hurt Defoe or Dickens. He emerges from *One Damn Thing after Another* as a writer dedicated and obsessed — and whenever I am asked to state in a word the secret of literary success, that word is "obsession".

A rather astringent gloss on *One Damn Thing After Another* is provided by Doug Fetherling's brief study, *Hugh Garner*, in the Forum House "Canadian Writers and Their Works" series (a collection of brief introductory volumes that is little known because the publishers have been very erratic in distributing review copies). Doug Fetherling is an excellent choice for this kind of study. He is a young poet, refugee from America-as-it-should-not-be, and excellent in that primary art, but also a journalist and man-of-letters. From his experience and insight in these last roles he has been able to generate an understanding of Garner as a literary professional who defies all the literary categories. Fetherling wrote his introduction before *One Damn Thing After Another* appeared; I suggest readers observe the same order. *Hugh Garner* is a sound introduction to the works and a shrewd, sometimes oblique commentary on the life of Canada's toughest craftsman writer.

Compared with the rough-cut stone with occasional bright facets which Garner presents to us, Ann Charney had produced in *Dobryd* a curious polished gem of autobiography. Not a diamond, for what it projects is no glitter of white light; an opal rather, with its shadows merging constantly into its luminosities. It is the account of a childhood strange and perilous, emerging at last into the safety of a promised but hardly expected land. Ann Charney came of a prosperous Jewish family in Poland whose members had contrived between the great wars to become landlords; her narrative begins when, at five years old, having been sheltered for many months in a barn loft from the Nazis, she and her mother and aunt are rescued by the advancing Russians. The narrative goes on to tell of the shifts of living in a war-ruined country which another totalitarian power is taking over. The child gradually learns of the pre-war past which had hardly been real even to her elders when they lived month after month in the barn, at the mercy of the one peasant woman who knew of their existence and wrung their money from them bit by bit as the days lengthened into years. She grows into self-consciousness in a dead town where people live by selling the fragments of a past life which they find in the ruins, until, almost miraculously after long waiting and many further dangers, she and her mother are able to sail for Canada, which has been her home ever since. *Dobryd* is a document written with sharp recollection, and with a truth of feeling that never blurs into self-pity; what makes it unique — at least as far as my reading among refugee chronicles goes — is that it is told not from the viewpoint of someone who remembered living in a better past, as most refugees did, but through the eyes of a child who first becomes aware of herself in the closed world of a hiding place, and who finds life expanded rather than narrowed — as it seems to her elders — when she emerges. *Dobryd* is a haunting, subtly written and beautifully constructed little book.

Passing from autobiography to biography, one moves into a different frame of vision: ideally from passionate involvement to involved dispassion. In other

words, we have to judge the biographer by how far he can divide himself into the empathizer, whose aim is to unite with his subject, and the observer, whose duty is to remain apart.

I would say that Roderick Stewart in *Bethune* leans towards the observer side of this equation, and Geoffrey Stevens in *Stanfield* towards the empathizer, which I suspect is a temptation bound up with his subject. Stanfield is an eminently likeable and intelligent man, and I suspect that when he dies people will say of him, as Orwell said of Gandhi, "compared with the other leading political figures of our time, how clean a smell he has managed to leave behind!" But Stanfield resembles Gandhi in little more than his relative honesty; he has none of the flamboyant fire of politicians who make easy subjects for biography, and even his eccentricities are meagre. The only way to make him interesting is to try and establish a searching, intimate rapport with him as a subject, to try and reach the mind that seems to work with a great deal of slow power behind the masking platitudes and the deceptive hesitancies. The danger of such an approach is that one gets entangled in the dull details of one's subject's daily existence; such entanglement has at times slowed Stevens and his narrative to a Stanfield drawl.

Stevens has also placed himself in the difficult position of a man trying to sell an uncompleted house without knowing the final plan. At present Stanfield lives in an expectant limbo; his success as a Nova Scotia leader is already overshadowed by his ambitions as a national leader, and so his career retains a tantalizing tentativeness. Until he brings it to a plateau of election success or drops it into an abyss of failure, he does not offer the pattern for satisfactory biography. And so what Stevens gives us is really the sketch for Volume I, which will undoubtedly have to be adjusted when we get the material for Volume II.

Roderick Stewart has had a much easier task. Bethune is dead, having lived a dramatic and well-plotted life; by splendid irony, long forgotten in Canada, he survives as one of their great heroes in the minds of hundreds of millions of Chinese. There has been time to re-assess him, to look at whatever the biographer discovers with a new eye. A previous biography does exist, but so unexciting that the field is virtually clear for a new and distant view.

Stewart has conscientiously dug over his field. He has spent four years on research, travelling to Spain, to China, to all the places where Bethune performed as medical and political activist. The harvest of significant facts has not been abundant; leaving out the irrelevant, the repetitive, Stewart ends up with a thin volume — 167 pages of actual biography. But in keeping his text bare and almost meagre, he has perhaps shown us why Bethune's life acquired such symbolic significance; it did so largely because it contained only two passages of exceptional significance, his months of service in Spain, his less than two years of fevered activity in China, embedded in a ragged and frustrated life that might easily have tipped into futility. Of such boldly simple lives are legends made, and Stewart did well to present his facts starkly, without attempting a deep penetration into Bethune's inner life. He tells, in fact, the biography of a legend rather than of a man, and tells it admirably. We learn how a tormented, arrogant and in some ways very silly man, a kind of belated

Byron, became transfigured and achieved the stamp of greatness almost by accident. As Yeats put it of an Easter Day martyr:

> He, too, has resigned his part
> In the casual comedy;
> He, too, has been changed in his turn,
> Transformed utterly:
> A terrible beauty is born.

It is to Stewart's credit as a biographer that, revealing with a restrained frankness Bethune's human flaws, he does not diminish that terrible beauty.

THE STRENGTH TO RISE

Morris Wolfe

ARVED VIIRLAID, *Graves without Crosses.* Clarke Irwin, $9.50.

TWENTY YEARS AGO, as what I thought would be a joke, I took a recording of the Soviet national anthem to a high school party, and when it was my turn to play a record I put it on. An Estonian classmate grabbed the record and smashed it. Until recently I've only vaguely understood why. But now I've read Arved Viirlaid's documentary novel, *Graves without Crosses* (1951), translated into English by Ilse Lehiste.

After just two brief decades of independence following the First World War, Estonia was placed once again in the Russian sphere of influence by the Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact. When in August 1940 Estonia was "incorporated" into the Soviet Union, a number of Estonian men escaped across the Gulf of Finland and joined the Finnish army. Less than a year later the Nazis took the Baltic, and still more young men fled to Finland. In January 1944, when the Russian forces had again reached the eastern border of Estonia, many of "the Finnish boys" returned home to liberate their country from German *and* Russian tyranny. Their forces were decimated. After the Nazis had been driven out in September 1944, some of those who remained formed an underground resistance movement against the tightening Soviet grip on their country; others fled to Finland and even to Germany.

The haunting power of the story told in *Graves without Crosses* is apparent even in a bare outline. The book's central figure is Taavi Raudoja, a construction engineer in his mid-to-late twenties. His father had been murdered by the Communists in 1941. In that year Taavi became one of "the Finnish boys". In 1944, however, he returned to fight the Russians. When the novel opens, he, his pregnant wife Ilme and their seven-year-old son Lembit are trying to make their way to Finland. Ilme and Lembit are captured by the NKVD and placed in a prison camp. Taavi is captured and beaten, escapes, and is finally captured again and placed in a different prison from his wife and son, wholly ignorant of their fate.

The prison scenes in *Graves without Crosses* are particularly effective — as gripping as those in Arthur Koestler's *Darkness at Noon.* Taavi is locked in an ice-cold cell too low to stand up in, too narrow to lie down in. It closes out all but the sounds of the outside world; he can hear screams and other noises like "the sound one hears when tough meat

is beaten to make it tender." His partial confession is enough to get him into a cell crowded with seventeen others. While he is in this cell, the war in Europe ends; a dutiful Russian guard cries ecstatically, without understanding the prisoners' lack of response, "Comrades, shout for the health of great Stalin! . . . Hitler is down! . . . Estonia is free for ever." Shortly afterwards Taavi escapes from the camp.

Meanwhile his wife fears for the baby she's about to give birth to. " . . . the child would be planted into the seedbed of communism, fatherless, motherless, a being without a homeland or nationality." When the baby (Hilja) is born, Ilme's half-crazed cellmate claims it as her own dead child, and a tense struggle results. Eventually Ilme and her baby are released. She's told that her son Lembit (whom she never sees again) will be released if her husband turns himself in.

Ilme's experiences in prison have changed her almost beyond recognition. On looking in a mirror for the first time after her release, she asks a friend, "Is that me?" But the world outside the prison is even worse than that inside. Five Russian soldiers attempt to rape her; her baby dies. Her only defence is a retreat into an Ophelia-like madness. Taavi's reunion with his broken wife, her maddened pleas that he give himself up for their son, his refusal and her attempted suicide are also almost Shakespearean in their intensity. So is Taavi's decision at the end of the book to go alone to the "free world" to tell the story of the horrors Estonia is enduring. "They needed moral support from the free world. If somebody would only say: Hold out, men, we know of your plight. Hold out until the appointed hour. But no such message came. . . . "

The novel contains a number of superb ironies reminiscent of Marcel Ophuls' documentary film about wartime France, *The Sorrow and the Pity*. There are the two Estonian village elders, for example, whose rivalry extends to one of them wondering why the Russians chose to burn down the farm of the other rather than his own. Or the NKVD camps, reluctant to exchange information because they're competing with one another for prisoners and secrets.

The novel has a number of weaknesses. Viirlaid's minor characters — with the exceptions perhaps of Hilda and Reku — are for the most part badly realized. *Graves without Crosses* begins rather tediously and ends in a confusing flurry of activity. Viirlaid's prose is often heavy-handed. Here are the last lines of the novel, for example:

> Are these people really lost? If that is so, then truly humanity itself is at the threshold of its ultimate end.
>
> Taavi Raudoja cannot believe it, for he is still alive. These doomed people do not believe it for they, too, are still living. They are living their lives for future generations, for a new day, and, when it arrives, they will be those who have redeemed humanity in their graves without crosses.

Still, the excesses of the twenty-nine-year-old Viirlaid in a novel written just after his own escape from Estonia to Finland, England and then Canada are as understandable as the reaction of my high school classmate in smashing my record.

The most remarkable thing about Viirlaid and the people he describes is their courage. As Viirlaid puts it in one of his poems, translated in *Volvox*,

> Son of man, where do you get the tenacity
> to shout into the storm?
> Where do you get the strength
> to rise from your agony?

IN SICKNESS AND IN HEALTH

Ann P. Messenger

ERIC NICOL, *The Clam Made a Face.* new press.
DAVID FREEMAN, *Creeps.* University of Toronto Press.

TORONTO THEATRE-GOERS, large and small, had the good fortune to see both *Creeps* and *The Clam Made a Face* in 1970 and 1971; *Creeps* had a stunning success in Vancouver in the Spring of 1973. Now, those of us who could not share these experiences can read these two very good one-act plays that help considerably to discredit the myth that Canada has no native drama worth bothering about. Both plays, though vastly different in their contents and their intended audiences, deal intelligently with manifestations of the sickness and the health — and with the difficult task of healing — in today's world.

Eric Nicol has had his ups and downs in the theatre, from success in Vancouver to disaster in New York. In *The Clam Made a Face,* he drops most of the rather facile wit which characterizes his writing to present a genuinely imaginative play for children based on the legends and customs of West Coast Indians. The children enter not a theatre but a longhouse, where they attend not a play but a potlatch in which they take an active part. They are given Indian names, they metamorphose from clams into people, they whistle like the wind and croak like frogs. They even help to save a starving whale by spearing imaginary fish for it to eat. Perhaps Nicol remembered that his own applause at a performance of *Peter Pan* once helped to save the life of the fading Tinker Bell.

The link among the collection of legends is the Chief's son, Little Bear, also known as Henry. Henry is discourteously late for the potlatch and expresses a sharp contempt for the old legends which, he claims, contradict scientific explanations of the origin of species. He rejects the culture of his fathers and yearns instead for houses and boats, stoves and refrigerators and cars. But the Chief demonstrates to him that the legends do not conflict with science; both the theory of evolution and the legend of the clams posit man's origin as a formless blob in the sea. Henry is eventually reunited with his own heritage when a magical ball of white wool given him by the Chief turns into fog and blinds the Cannibal Ogre that is just about to seize and devour the fleeing youth. After this incident, Henry willingly takes back the name of Little Bear. Finally, his yearning for the consumer goods of white society is silenced by the legend of T'elch who wanted nothing but what he had — his wife, his health, his cave, and enough to eat — and was turned into Siwash Rock as a reward for his wisdom.

Since Little Bear is hostile to his own culture at the beginning, there is some awkwardness about his taking part in acting out the legends when he first appears at the potlatch. Nicol's text communicates no sense of why the young man is willing to perform; perhaps the actor playing Little Bear could convey

a reluctance to join in, although his first speech as Raven is so lyrical as to make reluctance improbable. Some tinkering with the text at this spot seems to me to be called for. However, the play certainly deserves the success it has had in the repertory of the Young Peoples Theatre as they act out the communion of whites and Indians at the potlatch and the healing of the alienated young Indian's sick spirit.

Creeps, by David Freeman, is about another kind of sickness, the crippling of the psyche caused by emotional dependence on a Big Mama. The plot and structure are similar to Sidney Howard's *The Silver Cord* (1926) in which two sons struggle to break away from a domineering mother; one succeeds and one fails, forever. In *Creeps*, Tom, a painter, manages to break his chains, but Jim, who wants to be a writer and whose spirit is weaker, stays home. However, Big Mama here is not a person but a kind of home, a "sheltered workshop" for the victims of cerebral palsy. Except for the two social workers, all the characters in the play are spastics. They gather in the men's lavatory at the workshop to relieve themselves literally and metaphorically: to talk, and to escape for an hour their demeaning tasks of folding boxes, sanding blocks, and weaving rugs, tasks at which they earn seventy-five cents a week. Their talk is the heart of the play; its steady beat is the life force of the story of Jim and Tom.

All the men speak of their alienation from the world outside, the physical, social, and emotional barriers that drive them together into their own community. Each man reacts differently to his condition. Pete, for example, who wanted to be a carpenter, soon found the going rough and came to the workshop with a "why not?" attitude, willing to pay for ease with humiliation. Sam, in a wheelchair but sexually active, is bitter and destructive; he fights with every weapon he has — his urine, his vomit, his sexuality — to pay the world back for pitying him. Here I have one small quibble with the play. Sam has been in bed with Thelma, an apparently spastic girl who attends the workshop. Her parents' discovery of their act and reaction to it drove Thelma into madness. Thelma is still at the workshop, but her attendance now is somewhat improbable: she is the only female spastic there, and a mad one at that. She serves a useful purpose, always off-stage and calling out regularly, "I need a priest!", which underscores the theme of spiritual death. But she is part of the realistic level of the play — the men speak of her and shout back at her — so her presence needs to be justified more clearly.

The play has an unrealistic level as well. Three times the remembered outside world breaks into the men's lavatory with circus clowns, hot dogs, Shriners, and pretty girls. They treat the men like children and like freaks (or creeps) in their circus show, but it is really they, with their silly costumes and phony benevolence, who are the creeps. These unrealistic intrusions are good theatre, flashing colour and action across the stage; they also make a point about the inversion of reality with which these men must live.

Creeps invites comparison with John Herbert's *Fortune and Men's Eyes*, another recent Canadian play written out of its author's particularly painful experience. Yet despite the time that Herbert spent in prison, his play lacks the ring of

authenticity, the genuineness of language and feeling that Freeman's play has. For Freeman himself is spastic, but *Creeps* does not tell us so. It is the artist's skill, not simply his experience, that makes the play good. Like his own character Tom, whose paintings gain recognition from a critic who has never seen him, Freeman won my admiration before I saw Tom Hendry's essay in *Saturday Night* (July 1972) which describes his condition and his life. Perhaps a better comparison is with Christy Brown, an Irishman and a spastic, who has written his autobiography, *My Left Foot* (the only part of him able to operate a typewriter), and an autobiographical novel, *Down All the Days*. Working in self-revealing forms, Brown necessarily wins some fraction of his readers' interest by showing us his own tormented being. But Freeman has chosen a relatively anonymous genre; good plays tell the audience nothing about their authors' lives. In so choosing, he has cut himself off from winning interest and sympathy for himself. His play succeeds entirely on its own merits.

books in review

LIVES OF GHOSTS AND LOVERS

ROBERTSON DAVIES, *Hunting Stuart and other plays*. New Press. $8.95.

THERE IS SOMETHING perennially appealing about Europe to Robertson Davies' Ontario-bred imagination; its histories supply the ghosts for his characters' minds, and its ghosts animate the lives that his plays unfold. *Hunting Stuart*, about a Canadian civil servant's blood tie with Bonnie Prince Charlie; *King Phoenix*, about the last days of (old, merry) King Cole of Albion; and *General Confession*, about Casanova's unconscious, provide three examples of his dramatic response to that appeal. Written respectively in 1955, 1948, and 1956 and printed now for the first time, they also provide a retrospective view of the developing experimentation with Jungian archetypes which led Davies more recently into *Fifth Business* and *The Manticore*.

General Confession offers the most obvious instance. The first scene opens with old Casanova in his library, overhearing an unsuccessful attempt at a seduction. The play gathers momentum when Casanova offers to raise spirits magically from the dead for the young people's entertainment, and when Voltaire, Cagliostro, and "The Ideal Beloved" accordingly appear, promptly involving Casanova in a series of scenes from his own life. Voltaire pronounces fluently on morality and freedom; Cagliostro counters with humiliating revelations and comments on character; the Beloved simply exists and enharmonically alters form. The other characters see what Casanova at first does not: that the spirits are merely part of him — his "philosophy", his "ideal of womanhood", and his "Contrary Destiny". Horrified at such a revelation, he wonders aloud if the spirits are sent to madden him; they reply:

> We do not want anything from you — cannot want anything from you — which you do not want from yourself. All that lies in our power is to show you yourself. . . .

It is fairly easy to transform them, then, into Casanova's Jungian ego, shadow, and anima, and to see that balancing them becomes his task in the play. Old, at the beginning, he lives in memory and history and wants only peace; "rejuvenated" by the end, he pursues a new manifestation of the Ideal Beloved and starts life afresh. With a sign of the cross (symbolically mandalic), the play closes.

Comparable rejuvenation of "the old king" — and a concomitant revitalizing of his kingdom — forms the central action of *King Phoenix*. Aging King Cole in his healthy merriment does not recognize his age, but meanwhile his Druid archpriest is trying to poison him and to sacrifice the princess's suitor. Blind with Druid faith, young Leolin is a willing victim until he and the princess admit their love; then the Shadow is robbed of its power. Cole dances on the sacrificial stone and topples to his death, but Leolin is promptly declared the new king, and the characters sequentially intone over Cole's body:

> — you died that I might live. . . .

> — the King died to spite his arch-enemy . . .
>
> — he died laughing in order to show that laughter — laughter like his — is holy and great . . .
>
> — he died as all men do. . . .

The princess Helena half playfully is arrayed in a beard and wig from a ceremonial mask, which dismays the arch-druid, *"for it is as if COLE had truly risen from the dead"*. Cole's commitment to life, that is, carries on in Helena and Leolin together. Static history thus turns into current vitality, and one of Davies' recurrent themes becomes clearer: reason is meaningless without passion, and ability without imagination is constrained.

Casanova, towards the end of the visionary scenes of *General Confession*, observes to his audience:

> I did not promise you completeness, or explanations. Not the logic of music or the bustle of a neat comedy. Only a man's life.

In the gift is life itself. Out of that which was life and is history comes that which is life and shall only be history unless it is constantly rejuvenated. The reiterated conjuror's phrase in *The Manticore* — "Time is . . . Time was . . . Time is past" — argues the timelessness, the freedom from history, that accompanies a moment of illumination; and that moment itself occurs when the correspondences between past and present allow in a kind of intense excitement a concurrent experience of the two. Casanova's visions provide an example. They also provide an early version of David Staunton's Jungian therapy in Zürich in *The Manticore*, and the novel's references to the character of Canadian life spell out the metaphoric meaning of the European connection. In the September 1972 issue of *Maclean's*, Davies himself observed:

> A lot of people complain that my novels aren't about Canada. I think they are, because I see Canada as a country torn between a very northern, rather extraordinary, mystical spirit which it fears and its desire to present itself to the world as a Scotch banker. This makes for tension. Tension is the very stuff of art.

The European settings thus serve not as escapes from the present into a romantic, ordered, noble past — "imagination", he writes, "is a good horse to carry you over the ground, not a flying carpet to set you free from probability" — but as frameworks in which to explore the interpenetration between a world bounded by time and a world fed by vision.

Hunting Stuart gives the wittiest form to that tension. *King Phoenix* allows itself some barbed one-liners about "business ethics", but if anything they detract from the play's tonal integrity. And *General Confession* jokes about liaisons between men and women, but the women characters are made so preoccupied with being Anima that they seem too abstract to give substance to the wit or real psychological tension to the play. In *Hunting Stuart* the satiric thrusts against the I.O.D.E., New York commercialism, English cooking, amateur psychologists, the civil service, and what has since come to be known as the Vertical Mosaic, all connect with the Davies vision of psychic balance. If there are overtones of Merrill Denison's domestic wit and Lister Sinclair's "A Play on Words", that only shows one of the directions Canadian drama was taking between 1930 and 1955; in search of a dramatic language, the theatre took language itself as its subject. But from Davies' pen the language — varying from jargon and cliché to contemporary colloquialism and lyrical eighteenth-century formality — sparkles. The

fey plot is animated, and the potentially stereotypical characters are given individual vigour.

When the play opens, mild Henry Stuart seems a nonentity. His bourgeois wife is infatuated with a belief in her own noble ancestry; his daughter is infatuated with a psychology student with a comparably simplistic sense of his own importance. When the Drs. Sobieska arrive, unknown experts in family trees, they add another dimension to that picture of aggrandizing ego. But they have come because of their discovery that Henry is a direct male heir of Bonnie Prince Charles, and they pursue him with both salesman-like vigour and "scientific" magic. They have a potion that will transform their subject into his ancestor of any given date. When Henry takes it, however, his regal transformation startles everyone. The Sobieskas had simply wanted control over an experiment-*cum*-prisoner. Lilian, the wife, after a glow of vicarious pride and a shudder of personal humiliation, wants just a return of the status quo. But as in *General Confession*, such stasis is no longer possible after the enlivening encounter with anima and shadow. For Henry himself, at the end of the play, the problem (and challenge) is simply how to get his crown. If we judge by Helena and Casanova, he already has it in the sheer gusto with which he now greets experience. His ghosts are his own, and his love makes him strong. Happily, here, Davies' celebration of such recurring human spirit invigorates the action with more than ephemeral merriment and gives his ideas a stageworthy form.

W. H. NEW

SINS OF THE FATHERS

DAVID FRENCH, *Leaving Home*. University of Toronto Press.

DAVID FRENCH'S *Leaving Home* was, along with David Freeman's *Creeps*, one of the successes of the 1971-72 season at the Tarragon Theatre in Toronto. Both are naturalistic dramas that stage better than they read. The stronger of the two, *Creeps*, manages both sympathy and humour towards the spastics who are its subject; they are three-dimensional human beings whose problems, though special, are recognizably related to *la condition humaine*, and this is a considerable achievement. The play's principal weakness is its unsympathetic portrayal of Carson, the director of the "sheltered workshop," who appears late (better never?) and is surprisingly flat — almost a caricature. Here the author's (and the play's) point of view about the authoritarian Carson is too egregiously that of the spastics, and whereas their reaction to him is understandable, it is too limited to serve us as a *total* perspective on such a character.

Leaving Home has an analogous problem. Both Freeman and French are young playwrights who seem to have difficulty treating father-figures with understanding. In *Creeps* it is only a minor problem, for Carson is a minor character — though he symbolizes the home that needs leaving. But *Leaving Home* is much more seriously marred by a failure of authorial sympathy for the *pater familias*, Jacob Mercer. It is his home that Ben (18) and Bill (13) are trying to leave throughout the play, as Tom and Jim are trying to escape Carson's in

Creeps. In outline, at least, Jacob is not an unattractive character: a kind of Newfie hardhat — Archie Bunker with a dash of Zorba the Greek. At fifty, after a hard day's work, he can sing, dance, and court his wife with the Song of Solomon. Even his bigotry has a comical innocence:

> How many drunks you suppose is wearing Roman collars? More than the Pope would dare admit. And all those thousands of babies they keep digging up in the basements of convents. It's shocking.

But the play is so "loaded" against Jacob that it becomes impossible to take his side, difficult even to take him seriously. Now this is a problem, for a drama requires tension, which needs a rough balance of opposing forces for a while, at least. But here the scales are constantly weighted in favour of one side, and hence the drama suffers. French's identification with Ben is flagrant. Setting the action "in the late fifties," when *he* was about 18, he makes Ben articulate, reasonable, intelligent, liberal, and generally *right*; the heaviest father would be hard put to find fault with this:

> Dad, will you listen to me for once? It's not because home's bad, or because I hate you . . . I just want to be independent, that's all. Can't you understand that?

Of course we can — only Jacob cannot. But then Jacob is inarticulate, unreasonable, narrow, and wrong, as a rule. First he lies to the family, saying there is no whisky in the house and pulling out the screech to test his sons' "virility". Later, when he realizes Ben really means to leave, Jacob "charges into Ben's bedroom" and begins impetuously hurling personal effects onto the living room floor. After three such trips French pulls the rug, as Ben coolly comments: "I don't want to spoil your fun, Dad, but so far all that stuff belongs to Billy." While Jacob is reeling from that blow, he absorbs two more. First French hits him with a scene direction: "Jacob stares at the scattered records and shirts, alarmed." Then Mary, his attractive wife, lets fly:

> Now you've done it, boy. Will you sit down now? You're just making a bigger fool of yourself the longer you stand.

Jacob's only halfway successful relationship has been with Mary, but throughout the second half of the play they round on each other. Mary is the play's most sympathetic character, and when she criticizes or refutes or gives the lie to Jacob, we listen: "I have no sympathy for you. You brought this all on yourself." Agreed, and what the play needs is a sympathetic father, who can counterpoise Ben as Pierre Gravel balances André in Gratien Gélinas's *Yesterday the Children Were Dancing.* Near the end Mary tells the "slightly incredulous" Jacob that Ben supported the family with his own money during the previous year while Jacob was in the hospital. Jacob is suitably flabbergasted, but the whole *deus ex machina* misses the point. The problem is not to make Jacob appreciate the likeable Ben, but to make us like Jacob.

Leaving Home would be a good effort by a bright undergraduate. Though late-adolescent in tone and perspective, it does give shape to a story that is common and important, several of the characters are genuine creations, and much of the dialogue is workable. But French is 34; he has been writing television plays for ten years. Perhaps that's the trouble: working in the different and, I think, less demanding medium of TV may have re-

tarded his development as a legitimate playwright. Certainly he should be further on. When we hear from him again, as we certainly shall, we have a right to expect work of broader sympathies and firmer balance.

R. W. BEVIS

A DOUBLE EXILE

DAVID WATMOUGH, *"ashes for easter" & other monodramas.* Talonbooks, $4.00.

DAVID WATMOUGH'S three stage plays in *Names for the Numbered Years* (1967) revealed an imagination capable at worst of stiff, portentous dialogue, at best of making ordinary experience come alive before being blighted by madness, horror or despair. By writing within the stricter limitations of monodrama performed by himself on stage, Watmough paradoxically releases more creativity and finds a greater emotional range than in his plays. Those who have not seen him perform can listen to his record *Pictures from a Dying Landscape*, on which he reads versions of three monodramas, "First Job", "Trading in Innocence" and "Ashes for Easter", discreetly altered and cut, presumably to fit the timing of the disc. In *"Ashes for Easter" and Other Monodramas* we have these three and seven other monodramas printed to suggest the main pauses in the reading voice: clumps of two or three sentences occur separated by gaps.

The monodramas are clearly written for performance, and though they are interesting enough as writing, they should not be considered as prose poems or even that kind of dramatic monologue which Honan defined in *Browning's Characters* (1961) as "A single discourse by one whose presence is indicated by the poet but who is not the poet himself". Where Browning presents a one-sided conversation mainly concerned with the revelation of character through recited verse, Watmough's prose form is designed to convey actions recollected in anxiety. But the narration also gives us irony, and humour, while the variety of settings and voices externalizes the theatre of memory. The stage can be both head and heart; under the lights we watch and hear the dissection of a man. From our place in the dark we can see what is laid bare, we can watch him stitched up again, and feel the healing fountains start.

The different rhythms and voices of these monodramas demand the accompanying flicker of gestures and mimicry of tones and dialects: vigorous, eager, guileful Cornish, Black New Yorker, a European's broken English, Vancouver Canadian, and the brisk, at times wistful lilt of Watmough's narrator who provides the story line, point of view and tone.

This drama is subjective, yet it is more retrospective than introspective. If the manner is sometimes confessional, it is still the revelation of a densely *peopled* landscape of the past and the self. The narrator's homosexuality is a theme not vaunted for its own sake. It is not a guilty embarrassment of a furtive or mawkish kind; nor is it a prurient secret revealed for sensational purposes. It is rather the painful, irrational destiny sharply defined in "Scar Tissue" which brings with it folly, shame and danger. It cannot be shaken off, nor can it totally heal. The lurch of desire, excitement and degrading masochism which leads as far as death is powerfully conveyed in "Black Memory".

His range also encompasses that sensitive recollection of childhood, "Trading in Innocence", beautifully written for the actor, as if by a Dylan Thomas whose inkwell had run out of alcohol. "First Job" is a gently humorous piece in which healthy young love escapes the confines of the working day and the tyranny of decaying old men in the newspaper office. The middle-aged narrator's voice harks to young Davey Bryant's love-making, but with irony, while now he recalls the cancerous old man, Trebilcock, with compassion and tolerance. The least successful piece in the book is "Wickanninish Memory"; here the "wicked" gossip and desultory talk of the characters provides a setting for a death, but the situation fails to become interesting or moving, while the glib, knowing, "sophisticated" voice of the narrator seems irritating and empty. But Watmough's art fails only momentarily, and in this one piece.

In "Ashes for Easter" and "Shipwreck" he summons honesty and toughness to face the desolation of double exile — that of the emigrant and the deviant. The narrator imagines at one point his father's funeral procession. His last links with the old land and family are broken. He is suddenly aware "... as I walked in isolation behind those grim-lipped farmers, that I walked as a family of one...."

Watmough classifies his monodramas as "Pictures From a Dying Landscape" (Cornwall) and "Pictures From a Living Landscape" (British Columbia) but judging from this book, it is the elegiac note which stirs his imagination rather than the celebration of the present.

ANDREW PARKIN

RADIO AND STAGE

JOHN REEVES, *Triptych*. C.B.C.

Triptych is the first work Mr. Reeves has published in more than a decade. His previous piece, *A Beach of Strangers: An Excursion* won the prestigious Italia Prize in 1959 and was published by Oxford two years later. Both were written for radio; both are full of literary qualities that merit separate consideration in print.

A great deal has changed in Canadian drama during the past twelve years. In fact, this period will come to be regarded as the beginning of a dramatic tradition in English Canada and as the breakdown of the colonial system of wholesale importation of foreign plays. The process is by no means completed. The majority of our subsidized theatres continue to discriminate against new Canadian plays, which is partly explicable by the fact that a majority of the directors have drawn their professional experience and inspiration abroad. But, despite their resistance, the number of new playwrights is on the increase every season. Several young and poorly-subsidized companies are concerned exclusively with the production of Canadian plays. Twelve years ago a published play was a rarity; today — though publication is far from automatic — many are available to libraries, college and school curricula or distributed as typescripts to theatre groups throughout the country.

Curiously, this new fermentation has been neither matched nor even reflected in the work of the CBC, where Mr. Reeves has been employed as a radio producer. In the forties and fifties the

CBC was the sole outlet for most dramatists. As a training ground, the Corporation indubitably fathered the professional theatre of the sixties. At the same time, the effort of procreation seems to have left it exhausted, hopefully temporarily. But for the present, I believe it is generally agreed that television drama programmes — the few that remain in Canadian hands — are derelict in major writing talent. Radio drama likewise has been greatly reduced in variety, originality and importance: playwrights tend to use it as a financial sideline to their newfound opportunities on the stage.

As a result, when *A Beach of Strangers* was produced and published, it was an important event in the mainstream of dramatic activity in English Canada. By the time *Triptych* was brought out by the CBC, it was denied the cynosure that the work deserves.

The Corporation has spent many millions of dollars on transmitters and similar hardware, to ensure that every Canadian could listen to its programmes. But it seems unwilling to spend a few thousand on alerting the population to the programmes that are being transmitted. Any small stage production in a provincial city penetrates the public consciousness further than the drama being disseminated on a nationwide network.

I have not heard *Triptych* when it was broadcast by the CBC in 1971 and 1972. I regret it, because a full appreciation of this work is impossible merely by reading the script. For one thing, it breaks new ground as the first full-length quadriphonic radio drama ever written. Also, the author has composed organ music for the piece which is not made available with the text. Both elements are integral to any production. *Triptych* has been performed by students at York University, and — Professor Mavor Moore tells me — it worked extremely well on stage.

Mr. Reeves has taken the three major festivals of the Christian calendar to present a series of contrasts. They are treated on the one hand in accordance with the faith of ages, including direct quotations from Scripture and medieval mystery plays. On the other hand, both in terms of meaning and sound arrangement, we hear the secular sounds of these holidays, stripped of religious connotation. There is a middle ground of commentary on a variety of learned topics. Mr. Reeves seems to use verse for religious emphasis and conviction; various shades of prose depict a progression away from that conviction. Because of the subject matter, the use of poetry is better here than in *A Beach of Strangers*. But when it comes to conveying vulgarity in a vein of gross comedy, the earlier work has a satiric facility and edge, which seem more forced in *Triptych*. Masterful phrases still abound and startle ("at seven she was still a virgin", or "her absentee glandlord"), but the longer passages of invective are there as if to imitate a style the author used so well before. The line is thin between the seductive bite of the satirist and the underlying earnestness of an insufferable moralist. On the whole, Mr. Reeves manages to keep on the more palatable side of satire, but it is (clearly) costing him greater effort than in the previous work. No amount of original language can hide the fact that commercialized Christmas and religion are commonplaces in the weekly and monthly press. Similarly, most of the information imparted by his Scholiast about the pagan origins of our festivals or the historic background to the gospels,

may be gleaned in greater detail from any paperback on the subject. This is not remarkable in itself. But sometimes I detect that this material is introduced to compensate for the relative scarcity of delightful insights or clever jibes, which *A Beach of Strangers* abounds in. And at times I catch a creeping note of the High Anglican snobbery that mars some of T. S. Eliot's writing and also makes the difference between early and late Evelyn Waugh.

But all in all, *Triptych* is a work of considerable distinction, where every phrase has been — perhaps at times too noticeably — carefully licked into shape. It belongs to a tiny body of radio drama of which Dylan Thomas' *Under Milk Wood* is the best known, and which not only uses the medium in an original manner but also transcends it. Two desiderata remain. The contemporary theatre in Canada must discover and produce the work of Mr. Reeves on stage. And Mr. Reeves should, in my opinion, re-join the mainstream of dramatic activity in the country by writing for the stage, which stands in great need of his superb linguistic craft.

PETER HAY

UP THE NEW!

GUY DUFRESNE, *The Call of the Whippoorwill;* MARCEL DUBE, *The White Geese;* ROBERT GURIK, *The Hanged Man.* New Press. $6.95 ea.

THE RECENT RASH of Canadian play publications is a sign that publishing companies are finally catching on to the fact that Canadian playwriting is alive and well. Unfortunately, these same presses still do not seem to realize that the new momentum in Canadian theatre has been generated by a group of playwrights who have only really surfaced in the past three years. These new writers, with rare exceptions, have been totally ignored by Canadian publishers.

Since 1969, my main preoccupation has been the Canadian playwright, his work and his advancement, and I was thrilled to hear that New Press would be publishing a series of Canadian plays. What a disappointment, however, when their choices were announced! Outside of David French's hit of 1972 *Leaving Home*, New Press had chosen to publish works by playwrights of the Sixties . . . and the Sixties are now comparable to the Stone Age in Canadian playwriting.

This was supposed to be a review of the three French-Canadian plays published in English translations by New Press in 1972: *The Call of the Whippoorwill*, *The White Geese* and *The Hanged Man*. After several readings, however, I decided that the first two plays were not worth discussing. I would like to blame the translators for these tedious scripts but the real blame must go to New Press for choosing them in the first place. New Press did not have to opt for conservatism but, like several other prominent publishing companies that now distribute Canadian plays, it seems to be working under the unspoken policy that a play must satisfy one of the three following criteria for publication: It must be written by a "name" (even if that name wrote it twenty years ago); it must be edited by a "name" (and that means the editor and not the play takes precedence); and it must have been a "hit" (whatever that implies). It seems that publishing companies are scared of publishing any play that does not con-

form to traditionally safe formulas. These safe formulas did *not* make Canadian plays popular in the past and they *will not* make them popular in the present.

If a play is published, it should imply that an intelligent editor really believed that it was a beautiful script, and if it is published in translation, it should also follow that the editor was convinced the translation did justice to the original script. Neither Dufresne's *The Call of the Whippoorwill*, nor Dubé's *The White Geese* can possibly have satisfied either category, for both plays are boring to read and aggravatingly translated. Dufresne and Dubé, like Gratien Gélinas, are playwrights of the Sixties. These authors have now been replaced by more stimulating and revolutionary writers. Why print a play in the Seventies that is no longer relevant? I believe that there are vivid and stimulating French-Canadian plays by younger authors waiting to be published, just as in English-speaking Canada there are many new and very fine plays crying out for distribution *now*.

The status of the Canadian playwright has been greatly advanced in the past three years. The Playwrights Co-op, since 1972, has served the majority of them well but distributors are still unwilling to handle the Co-op's manuscript copies. This is why we need publishers who will print Canadian plays in paperback for distribution across the country. Talon, in Vancouver, is one of the few companies that has shown some courage of choice. In addition, Rolf Kalman's handsome volume *An Anthology of Canadian Plays*, published in 1972, has included new plays and even one unproduced play. But these are rare examples, and no continuity is implied since Talon is poorly financed, and its output is irregular as a result, and Rolf Kalman is an independent publisher whose commitment is subject to his own whim. Money does not seem to be forthcoming from the Canada Council to publish Talon's newest projects, such as their *Anthology of Factory Plays*. The Canada Council is also impressed by "names" and not by unknowns such as George Walker or Larry Fineberg or by controversial writers like John Palmer. The ironic factor is that the Canada Council will give subsidies directly to these playwrights but not to the publishing companies that propose to print their plays. It's important to these playwrights that their plays appear in paperback if their work is going to be better known across the country. Until the moneyed companies break free from their hesitant and traditionally gutless choice of plays, Canadian playwriting will continue to be a rather pallid segment of our culture, especially in the eyes of the book-buying public.

The Hanged Man, the third play on the New Press list, does redeem its publishers to a certain extent. On the surface, *The Hanged Man* is a simple play, about simple people. The play is about a crippled father and his blind son, who live together in a decrepit mine hut. Joel, the son, had been blinded in a mining accident. He supports his father by begging in the village. Suddenly his sight returns. He continues to beg but people stop giving him money. Times are bad for everyone, and Joel despairs about life. The father, however, comes up with a brilliant plan to make money. Joel will pretend to hang himself and the old man will sell bits of the lucky hanging rope to superstitious and wealthy buyers. The plot succeeds; Joel and his father are getting rich; the rope brings luck to the

village. The poor begin to call Joel a saint. As a result, he starts to dream about a new world where the poor can create a better life for each other by working together. He decides to come down from his rope to lead them. His dream, tragically, is shattered by a group of beggars and misfits that he has invited to share a banquet. They are quarrelsome and unchanged and fearing loss of their luck, they turn on him and furiously kill him while the father cowers in a corner.

The Hanged Man is a tragedy and Joel the universal sacrificial victim. Throughout the play there are subtle repetitions of Christ-imagery. Joel stands with his arms outstretched on his table above the beggars, he breaks a loaf of bread to settle a quarrel, he is betrayed by his father and so on. Gurik is in control of his craft and never overplays this imagery which adds a deeper dimension to the play. The author has not written a grand-scale masterpiece but he has created a powerful theatrical space. *The Call of the Whippoorwill* and *The White Geese* leave you on the outside, *The Hanged Man* pulls you in. This is a rare accomplishment. With the exception of the songs which seem unnecessarily cumbersome, the translation preserves the honesty and sensitivity of the original script. The play is not only readable but also seems eminently producable. New Press made one good choice. Oh, for a dozen more in the future!

CONNIE BRISSENDEN

DRAMATIC IMAGINATIONS

WILLIAM H. NEW, ed., *Dramatists in Canada.* University of British Columbia Press. $5.50.

TO THE CASUAL EYE it must appear that the dramatic imagination surveyed the land, from St. John's to Vancouver Island, shivered, hunched itself into its parka and fled in panic. Perhaps it was bushed early in its struggle to survive. How many plays does Margaret Atwood mention in *Survival?* What is the size of Jack Gray's bibliography at the end of his article on drama in *Read Canadian*? Canadian poetry and fiction, by comparison, are alive and well and at home in every province.

As George Woodcock reported to the Ontario Royal Commission on Book Publishing in 1972:

> The one field of writing in Canada that has been neglected by publishers of all kinds, and in which large numbers of good manuscripts may still lie unpublished, is that of drama. In Canada a book of printed plays is a publishing occasion merely because of its rarity; even a well-known and relatively successful playwright like George Ryga has to publish his plays with a small, non-commercial Vancouver press, Talonbooks, and I know several other good dramatists whose plays have never seen print. The reasons for this special situation are complex, and the responsibility may lie less with Canadian publishers than with Canadian playhouses, which, despite their professions of interest in native drama, have been notably more reluctant to stage Canadian plays than publishers have been to present Canadian books. Publishers, understandably, have in their turn waited on a stage success which for most playwrights here never comes.

This situation is, however, improving daily. *The Brock Bibliography of Published Canadian Stage Plays In English, 1900-1972,* is making scholars, actors and

producers aware of the number of usable plays in print. New Press is expanding its drama series, and play anthologies like Eugene Benson's *Encounter*, Canadian drama in four media, are reaching the market. What has been missing, apart from Murray Edwards' incidental evaluations in *A Stage in Our Past*, has been a critical overview of whatever drama there is in this country. William New has now supplied this in a volume of essays, *Dramatists in Canada*, culled mainly from *Canadian Literature*.

Of the three categories which organize groups of these essays, Part I, "The Voice of Tradition", Part II, "The Voice of the Artist", and Part III, "The Voice of Experiment", the latter is by far the most densely packed. Its eleven essays overpower the four articles in each of the other two sections. Since four of the eleven contributions to the third section were commissioned, this diversity and range of views constitutes part of the strategy of the anthology: rightly or wrongly, the editor seems to have concluded that Canadian drama and theatre must be saved and regenerated through experiment.

If this is indeed a wholesome prescription for the cure of the fabulous invalid's ailment in Canada, how do the contributions to Parts I and II help to establish a diagnosis of the disease? "The Voice of Tradition" speaks to us through Michael Tait's "Playwrights in a Vacuum" and Norman Shrive's "Poets and Patriotism", commenting on the serious and Victorian phase of our drama, while William Solly's "Nothing Sacred" and M. W. Steinberg's "Don Quixote and the Puppets" focus on a characteristically Canadian blend of twentieth-century comedy. These articles, each in its own way, are well worth the reader's time. Michael Tait's essay, a chapter from his 1963 University of Toronto M.A. thesis, combines the methods of historical, biographical and formal criticism to offer perspectived assessments of the value of Heavysege's and Mair's pioneering dramas, *Saul* and *Tesumseh*. He is less tolerant of the shortcomings of Wilfred Campbell's *Poetical Tragedies*. Norman Shrive, like Tait, sees the main ailment of the nineteenth-century Canadian drama as remoteness from life on the one hand and from the stage on the other. Shrive finds it particularly deplorable that Mair, so directly and dramatically involved with the Riel uprisings, should have ignored his personal involvement with Canadian history and have returned to the war of 1812 instead for his heroic materials. "Distance lends enchantment to the eye" was a truism, surely, for the Romantics and Victorians alike. Their aim was moral uplift, not social reality.

Solly's article is a delight. Canadian drama has certain unique features, after all: of the three types of comedy — the satiric, the gentle, and the "sugar-coated" didactic — the first is definitely rated as best. Its typical features of the butchery of sacred Canadian cows, the naive hero or heroine, and the satire directed against the institution-deriding audience, evidently supply a perfect success-formula, for Canadian radio, T.V. and stage. The gentle comedies may be insipid, but the didactic ones in which martyrs are destroyed by the insensitive, envious multitude, seem to strike home. M. W. Steinberg concentrates on one dramatist, Robertson Davies, who provides some of the finest specimens in the third group of comedies. Fortunately, Davies' artist-re-

deemers survive to transform the insensitives.

Individualism even in the face of the shared pain of audience indifference sounds in "The Voice of the Artist", Merrill Denison's rejection of a national theatre for Canada, written in 1928 when he was smarting from Hart House disappointments and about to launch into hectic historical serial-writing for Canadian radio. Canada, he says, lacks a cultural centre and looks to New York, London or Paris for its standards. That is, its cultural stance is colonial, although it became a nation in 1867. The same disillusioned tone of voice, but a more positive concern for the development of original Canadian dramatic talent, emanates from George Robertson's explanation of the mediocrity and technicism of much radio and television drama. The most optimistic statements about the health of our theatre come from James Reaney and Wilfred Watson, both adventurously experimental despite their academic establishment connections. Here, it seems, is the beginning of the patient's health, which is to be examined in much more detail in Part III.

We are not disappointed. Although perhaps fewer than three essays, in this section, on Reaney's plays might have been preferable, and although another two articles by Michael Tait in addition to his Part I contribution may have robbed us of some other interesting points of view (such as Brian Parker's, for example, who edits Canadian plays for New Press, or Michael Booth's, who explores Canadian theatrical history), the variety actually achieved satisfies. Of these eleven pieces which make up section three, four deal with the Quebec scene, three of them in French. Well, we do want to know what is going on there, and this over-emphasis is part of the prescription for a cure. Quebec theatre, all four essayists agree, is rapidly moving towards health. Marguerite Primeau, writing about Gélinas, and Edwin Hamblet, analyzing Marcel Dubé's dramatic world, show that these endeavours of highly successful playwriting take the form of a very close probing of the wound; these dramatists, one might say, are in phase one of Atwood's *Survival*: they show the audience their true victim-condition. Naim Kattan in French and Max Dorsinville in English provide very useful overviews of Quebec dramatic activity.

Les Anglais, on the other hand, seem to perceive a number of different symptoms. Mavor Moore, following Artaud, would have the Canadian dramatists revitalize their art by a re-emphasis on non-verbal communication. James Reaney's language of props and poetic symbols, as discussed by Alvin Lee and Michael Tait, offers such a departure from the literary drama of masterpieces, which Artaud and Moore would shelve rather than stage. George Ryga, Simon Gray and John Herbert bring to Canadian dramatic writing unhackneyed subjects and surprising character explorations. Ryga's characters, Indians and other disinheriteds, "are partly tormented by their need for love in a world that denies it or corrupts its expression, [and] many of them are even more profoundly troubled by existential longings", Neil Carson observes. It is the blend of the comic and the sinister, according to William New, that makes Simon Gray's victim-victimizer plays "so arrestingly bizarre". Ann Messenger, investigating John Herbert's themes, concludes that his redemptive figure, "instead of redeeming on Christ-

mas Eve, . . . is dragged off to yet another crucifixion. . . . in the world of *Fortune and Men's Eyes* all Christs must fail." The didactic comedy praised by William Solly in "Nothing Sacred" has been metamorphosed into black comedy.

A helpful selected chronology rounds out this anthology which, despite William New's modest, and correct, introductory claim that *Dramatists in Canada* "makes no pretense to be a definitive analysis", has a catalytic effect upon the reader who does care about the health of Canadian drama. As the editor says, "successful drama puts people into critical positions and watches them make ethical choices and either solve their problem or worsen it." Here is our prescription. Heed it, Canadian dramatists, producers, audiences, scholars.

ROTA LISTER

GLOOM, DOOM AND PROMISE

72 New Canadian Stories, edited by David Helwig and Joan Harcourt, Oberon, $2.95.

IN 1971, Oberon Press published *Fourteen Stories High*, a collection of short stories never before published, in an attempt to give exposure to a number of younger short story writers. The experiment was successful both in uncovering a market for short stories, and in revealing a significant number of writers working with the genre. As a result, Oberon has made their project an annual event, and this book is the current offering of sixteen stories culled from close to a hundred submitted from across Canada.

Recent anthologies have had a tendency to duplicate their authors and their story selections; therefore it is something of a treat to sit down with one which offers a completely new set of stories, many by unfamiliar writers. Six of the authors are published poets. Among these Margaret Atwood, John Newlove, and George McWhirter show the most promising use of the short story genre. Atwood's "The Grave of the Famous Poet" is concerned with the final breakdown of a relationship. Ego brings isolation; the male lover assimilates the identity of the dead poet; the woman is left arranging shells "like teeth, like flowers". George McWhirter writes a lyrical tale entitled "The Harbinger". An explicit story of sexual barter in a European marketplace, the story uses a rich blend of dialogue and interior monologue to create an effective mood piece about the relationship between sexuality and death. John Newlove's "The Story of a Cat" is perhaps too didactic to be a first-rate story. Written as a monologue, it contains a series of observations about loneliness, fear, and the pressures of responsibility. Newlove, in spite of his pedantic passages, can handle prose with considerable skill. Poetry readers will find this piece an attractive contemplation on themes which frequently appear in his poems.

Gloom and doom continues to oppress these younger story tellers. Two authors, however, manage to bring a touch of humour to their stories. Leo Simpson's "The Ferris Wheel" is a rather lightweight piece which puts down civil service "pecking orders". John Sandman brings more weight to bear in his story of mismatched youths hitch-hiking to Vancouver. He has a good ear for colloquialisms, and he develops his characters with skill and understanding.

The collection is intelligently edited.

Helwig and Harcourt have obviously been aware of the need for a variety of techniques and styles to balance what could have been a straight diet of obscure, subjective "mood" pieces. It is usually these "mood" pieces that have difficulties. On several occasions, one wonders if they warrant the work to ferret out what kernels of insight they do possess. Obscurity has become a virtue for some without the redeeming values of symbol and significance.

Gail Fox's "The Man who Killed Hemingway" is not overly obscure, but it misses the mark partly because it is about dull and lack-lustre people who lack definition and credibility. Andreas Schroeder's "The Mill" also fails to convince me that the death of his character who ends up "keeping alive huddled over the fitfully burning limbs of his own body" is any loss. I do not know why he suffers, and for me at least he fails to become in any meaningful sense representative of the human condition. McWhirter, Newlove, Nora Keeling, and Jane Rule handle the impressionistic mood piece with much more success.

Generally speaking, however, this is an intelligently edited and interesting set of stories. There are no crashing failures among the tales — something one might expect from sixteen newcomers — and there are a number of very fine pieces which say a good deal about the health of the short story genre in Canada. One would hope that future anthologists would feel less inhibited about broadening their selections to include more work by some of these very promising authors.

S. E. MCMULLIN

HOPES AND TREPIDATIONS

VICTOR COLEMAN, *Parking Lots.* Talonbooks. $3.50.

VICTOR COLEMAN, *America.* Coach House Press. $4.95.

ROBERT HOGG, *Standing Back.* Coach House Press. $3.00.

VICTOR COLEMAN is a particularly difficult poet to come to terms with. Sometimes I suspect he both likes and plans it that way: he just does not care if he reaches a wide audience. When Coleman writes poems that many readers find strange and uninvolving, it is highly likely that he knows very well what he is doing.

I came to his two new books, then, with quite high hopes and some trepidation. I have read both a number of times now, and while I am still not entirely clear of his intent, it seems to me that Coleman is trying to achieve in poetry certain effects remarkably like those of the new fiction (Borges et al.) In "The Beachcomber" (itself a pertinent image of the kind of poet Coleman often strives to be: language is his beach, thought and life his sea, and the poems he picks up mere flotsam and jetsam thereon) Coleman writes of "objects of speech" so as to suggest that speech both has and *is* "objects". Art has its objective correlative, too, and Coleman appears here to be speaking of both the inner and outer worlds at once, rather than merely using the latter to mirror the former or vice-versa. This attempt is fascinating to follow, even if it doesn't always succeed.

What does emerge from the attempt is a poetry so intensely private that even some of Coleman's friends must sometimes wonder what he's saying. Perhaps

the matter is unimportant if the manner is enjoyable; perhaps. Certainly, with their allusive punning and rhyming wit, the poems in both *Parking Lots* and *America* are often pleasing enough even when they are most opaque. Coleman is a fine manipulator of language and rhythm, and sometimes meaning in the sense of personal meaning for the reader does emerge. Many of the poems in both books "flashed" on occasion with surprisingly sharp images of a truly revolutionary nature. Coleman is a man possessed of his visions, and possession/obsession shines through all the poems.

The poems of *Parking Lots* are more accessible to the ordinary reader than are those of *America,* but they are part of a whole and what they share is more important than what differentiates them. Nevertheless the natural speaking voice and the obvious poetic rhythms of that voice recorded on the page are more easily observed in *Parking Lots. Parking Lots* is like a series of letters to far-away friends; *America* reads more like a series of messages in special code to a select few.

All the poems in *America* are acrostics: forced acrostics in that Coleman often breaks words in two at the ends of lines to get the right letters at the beginnings. Thus, as Allan Ginsberg says in his short Afterword: "Ear rythm choppy, mind very high./Acerb repugnant honesty." Ginsberg is correct; these are grittily honest poems, however much the gamesmanship of the acrostics suggests a kind of flippant foolery. But I was surprised, after reading Coleman's earlier poetry, to discover such a careless attitude towards rhythm in the poems. (On the other hand, Coleman has, since the appearance of these poems, stated that he has given poetry up for "collaborations," and these, obviously, cannot possibly reflect an individual's personal rhythms; so maybe *America* is merely a first attempt to break poetry out of this "confinement" — Coleman perhaps sees it.)

In some of the early poems the acrostics are words such as Marijuana, Hashish, Tape Recorder. "The Elements" of course has EARTH, AIR, FIRE, and WATER. "The Heavens" contains all the major astrological signs, while the two major poems, "America" & "The Trumps," contain every card of the Tarot pack. By itself, this game is not enough to sustain a long sequence of poems, and it is certainly not the only thing Coleman offers. His use of internal rhymes and puns is often provocative, pulling the reader back into the poems just as boredom begins to threaten. There is also what Ginsberg calls Coleman's "Acerb repugnant honesty," repugnant because we both turn away from it in him, and from what it mirrors of our selves. These poems state nothing clearly, but they do, at their best, haul the reader, in a most circuitous manner, into a series of systems of meaning which demand reflection and consideration. Coleman is writing about the present, the here and the now as he envisions it, however distortedly, and when he is successful he convinces his readers that the distortions he records are not his but those of his environment. This is no mean feat.

I have no such trepidations when speaking of Robert Hogg. He is not one of our most prolific poets, but his one previous book, *The Connexions* (Oyez, Berkeley, 1966), was one of the most powerful of its year (he also had poems in *New Wave Canada*). *Standing Back* is not a large book, but it reveals a dis-

ciplined and rigorous talent, and the long poem, "L'Anse aux Meadows," reveals a new direction in his work that possibly points to important poems to come.

The poems in *Standing Back* are, on the whole, more restrained than those of *The Connexions*. The poems of the early book were obsessed visions of various extreme situations while the new poems seem spiritually serene in comparison. This serenity is neither false nor escapist; rather it appears to be a serenity born of peaceful living and hard-won craftsmanship. Unlike Coleman who is something of a large-scale muralist in his recent work, Hogg is a miniaturist: he achieves his effects in small, subtle, delicate thrusts of language and imagination.

I envisage Hogg as a gemologist in poetry, carefully polishing every word until the whole poems glows (his fine ear for nuance and rhyme shows through at every turn). The short poem, "Once," is an example of his verbal and rhythmical dexterity: every word counts and is placed with the greatest care:

> There was a line in my head
> that would have gone around you
> delicate as hair
>
> now the syntax evades me
> the words I hear
>
> fall about your shoulders
> but do not rime or cast
>
> patterns on your face
> or mine

"L'Anse aux Meadows" appears to demand a much more complex response from the reader, if only because it is a longer poem, an interwoven pattern of historical and mythic meditations and historical and contemporary narratives, but to say this is to deny the great subtlety of such poems as "Waki's Dream," "Aries in Pisces Dream," and "Passages," to name just three. The greater length of "L'Anse aux Meadows", plus its documentary "contents", do create a specific kind of complexity in the poem, but it's merely a different kind, rather than a greater kind, of complex artistry than that found in the other poems. I find it a fascinating experiment, for Hogg is here attempting something new for him: an objective examination of other people and their experiences. With great compassion and clear poetic vision, the poet sees and renders the contrast between the hopes and presentiments of the early Viking explorers and the lost hopes and weary acceptance of the contemporary fishermen whose way of life is being slowly destroyed.

Robert Hogg is a fine craftsman, he uses his language with devotion and loving care, he has a pure poetic imagination; and *Standing Back* is a small but powerful poetic testament to his growing talent. I look forward to his next book.

DOUGLAS BARBOUR

MARSHMALLOW WORLDS

SEYMOUR BLICKER, *Shmucks*. McClelland & Stewart, $5.95.

JOHN MILLS, *The Land of Is*. Oberon, $3.50 paper.

WHERE IS the land of is? One of its outposts is John Mills's Vancouver, a city of sordid brothels and sleezy hotels, also containing a university whose sole identified faculty member is a Professor Jackell who is given to having embarrassing erections in the Faculty Club. Another is Seymour Blicker's Montreal, the

chief landmark of which is a bitterly contested downtown alley.

The boundaries of the Land of Is are defined for us halfway through Mills's novel by a British Museum clerk turned blackmailer: "a marshmallow world of Is which doesn't expand the consciousness . . . but rather shrinks it to the dimensions of a pin-head." This "huge cosmic marshmallow", the modern world, blunts the sensibility of those who live on it, producing a tangle of blackmail, sexual perversion and murder in Mills's book, and of frustrated anger and sexual ambition in Blicker's novel.

Mills reminds us that the marshmallow world did not always exist by continual, ironic reference to *The Tempest*. The chief characters of his brave new world are called Prospero, Ariel, Mirabelle and Ferdinand; more subtly, incidents of Shakespeare's plot are parodied: Mirabelle (a whore) prefers the novel's Caliban (half Eskimo, half inbred English aristocrat) to Ferdinand (the heir apparent of a prominent bootlegger).

Mills's novel overflows with parodies and literary allusions. The plot is remarkably inventive and skilfully managed. There is a formidable array of narrative devices: letters, confessions, tales, codes, editorial notes, charts. Yet, for one reader at least, all this energy and ingenuity is ultimately tiresome. Mills is able to give his characters interesting attributes: his prostitute is intellectual, his Eskimo has (or believes he has) an enormous flaccid penis that causes him to black out in crucial situations, his Ariel has become inarticulate through reading *Finnegans Wake*. But these traits seem imposed on each character, rather than given a genuine imaginative life. Only the Eskimo (one Dominick Fester) seems to be convinced of the reality of his bizarre identity. The others smile and grimace as the puppeteer bids them.

So, despite the bewildering assortment of characters and narrative methods, the chief impression the novel leaves is that of a single satirical voice, the author's. This is true of many satires. But the satiric voice here is not incisive or withering: it is sour rather than acid, peevish rather than penetrating. Take, for example, the description of a character's arrival in Vancouver:

> The megrim of passengers from the London plane had long ago disembarked and were now herded, bored and irritable, into confrontations with officialdom — some to be stamped and duly entered, others to be frisked for drugs, a few to be detained at Her Majesty's pleasure. Most made it through the gates into the pinesol and tobacco fume atmosphere of the main concourse, where some got their faces kissed by relatives, others their hands shaken by sales managers and the rest their freedom to be set adrift in the streets of the city once more alone and masters, whatever that means, of their destinies.

The satire seems willed and self-conscious, feebly lunging after ill-defined targets. One does not wish to damn a book on the basis of a single passage, but in this case the passage seems representative of stylistic weakness and a lack of satirical focus in the novel as a whole.

If Seymour Blicker's *Shmucks* appears more consistently successful, it is clearly a far less ambitious work than Mills's novel, both in its form and in the range of its satirical attack. The action of *Shmucks* begins in an alley which two cars enter simultaneously from opposite directions; it ends there the next morning after both drivers, a Roumanian taxi operator and a young Jewish businessman, have stubbornly refused to back out, and

have remained in their stationary positions all night. Apart from occasional flashbacks, the rest of the novel stays in the alley, which is visited by a young girl, a rich drunk, an irate local resident, and, finally, a policeman.

The trick, of course, is to maintain a sense of momentum and interest within the framework of an essentially static situation. Blicker does this remarkably well. All the characters are types and some of the jokes are tired, but the central situation is never allowed to become tedious; it is exploited just long enough and then resolved by a clever ending appropriate to the characters of the two protagonists. For the most part, the action is allowed to speak for itself, with very little of the authorial intrusion so pervasive in Mills's novel.

What Blicker tries to do, then, he does very well. Nevertheless, his novel gives the impression of being a succesful entertainment, rather than a serious achievement. In part, this is because his characters are convincing enough to maintain the comic situation, but often have neither subtlety nor depth, and do not seem to lead to any moral or philosophical speculation (the difference in this respect between Blicker and Richler, who draws on much of the same source material, is obvious). Blicker's most successful creation is the taxi-driver, Pelzic, whose painfully self-defeating attempts to seduce a girl or cheat a rich customer are pathetic as well as funny. If the other characters could induce equally complex responses, one's praise would be less grudging. But the other principal character, Levin, seems shallow and much less vital. His stubbornness in withstanding constant sexual temptation in order to prolong the duel with Pelzic is amusing in itself, but much less distinctive than Pelzic's muddled vision of a financial coup. None of the other characters are of more than superficial interest, apart from a Westmount millionaire whose hobby is to scrawl "something that'll strike at the core of a particular situation" (i.e. "the Queen sucks") on the bathroom walls of his club.

Shmucks ends with a reconciliation, though an involuntary one, between the two antagonists. Pelzic is granted his dream of a fat insurance claim, in contrast to Mills's characters, who exit pursued by their own neuroses, and the elusive grail of a Yugoslavian buried treasure. In Blicker's world, the marshmallow Land of Is leaves a sweet after-taste; in Mills's novel, the marshmallow is satirically roasted. Not bad in either case, but hardly fit for *The Gourmet's Canada.*

T. E. TAUSKY

LOVE DISGUISED

ROY MAC SKIMMING, *Formentera.* new press. $7.95 cloth, $2.95 paper.

FORMENTERA, the smallest of the four best-known Balearic islands and the locale of Roy MacSkimming's first novel, lies just off Ibiza. But when the novel opens the outside world seems far away to the few North American expatriates who live there. Among them are John, a Canadian lamenting the apparent loss of his Toronto girl-friend Joanna; and his friend Bruce, another Canadian. John is living with Bruce and a Scots girl, Deirdre. He sleeps with Deirdre while Bruce gets along on absinthe and masturbation, which he later supplements with Liromal tablets. When Deirdre leaves, John meets a new arrival, an American named Syl-

vie, who has taken a European vacation from her *fiancé* back home. Sylvie has been sleeping with everything in pants since she came to Europe but with John she finds a temporary happiness, only broken when their neighbours, a nice Communist couple, suggest a bout of committee sex. John backs out but Sylvie, distressed because her *fiancé* is about to arrive and all seems lost anyway, complies. The next day John, who has the stuff of which martyrs are made, rationalizes:

> Turning back to Sylvie, he watched the frantic play of doubt in her eyes. The question attacked his brain: What did she get from them last night, besides this horror of herself? Pleasure? Did she enjoy it? The first answer was Yes, but it led to another question: Does she need it like that? And the reply he heard was No, because it costs far too much. And what's today going to cost her, cost me — yet I know she wants me and it makes me want her, random irresistible process I'll never understand, giving in to it at last, thankfully, like its fuel sex, the excitement of friction: the giving and hurting and enduring both, loving.

This of course, is an echo of the book's epigraph, a line from a Joni Mitchell song: "Will you take me as I am?" Sylvie breaks up with her *fiancé* and with John leaves the island. The Communist couple also leave, but for different reasons — they're fleeing from the Guardia Civil. Bruce, a material witness in a killing, must stay. Nor does he seem to mind: the island is a sensual compensation for his virginity. But even Formentera's sensual simplicity is doomed by the influx of fat German money-makers and the paranoid denizens of the drug culture.

Formentera, says the book's jacket, (since MacSkimming is a partner in new press, jacket copy must be taken seriously) "is a lyrical novel about the disguises of love and the forces that repress it." Indeed, love is so well disguised that I cannot find it. There is sentimentality about island scenery, and sexual satisfaction — the girls seem fond of fellatio — but the core of the novel, John's relationship with Sylvie, is unconvincing. Love implies emotional intensity, and this is lacking; it gets lost in the traffic jam. MacSkimming seems not to have decided whether his novel is about John and Sylvie, or about the Formentera community. As a result the reader has to keep track of numerous personal names (I counted 48 in a 187-page novel) which remain only names.

Nor is the reader helped by the novel's structure. John's viewpoint alternates with Bruce's and Sylvie's, Bruce's chapters being told in the first person, John's and Sylvie's in the third. This shuttle service, though interesting technically, fails to bring anyone's character into fuller dimension. Deirdre, for instance, is from Glasgow, but for all her individuality she might as well be from Pago Pago. If the technique is meant to mirror the restless drifting of the expatriates it succeeds, though it doesn't make much of a novel.

What is good about the book? Some of the detail succeeds — "a white she-goat with a face like Bertrand Russell." The island motif — psychic and geographic — is an old idea, but not necessarily a bad one. The "love" scenes, usually couched in prose that is a combination of D. H. Lawrence and *An Analysis of Human Sexual Response*, occasionally aspire to be something more. These successes, minor in terms of this book, are enough to make me hope MacSkimming will write another one.

FRASER SUTHERLAND

SINGING SMALL

RAYMOND SOUSTER, *Selected Poems*. Oberon Press. $2.95.

SINGING SMALL seems to be Raymond Souster's way of being a poet in the world (something he shares with his friend Cid Corman, and with William Carlos Williams, mentor to them both). Souster is at his best when dealing with local, immediate, concrete experience. Plenty of evidence for this can be put together from the work under review, but it is much less easy to see what principles of selection have been used for the book, since it overlaps with other Souster titles, *The Years* and *So Far So Good*. The latter was sub-titled "Uncollected Poems", but its general quality is very much that of these *Selected Poems*. So, these cannot be *the* Selected Poems? Good work in the other volumes is not included here (nor is the nice little baseball poem "Yeah Tigers", which appeared in *Made in Canada*).

A number of the *Selected Poems* are overt testimony to Souster's long-standing affinity with Williams. Souster's "Queen Anne's Lace" (subject also of a Williams poem) offers his sense of the poet making poems:

> as brief, as spare
> so natural in themselves
> as to take breath away

which corresponds closely in attitude (and tone) to Williams's:

> what is
> a poet — if any
> exists?
> a man
> whose words will
> bite
> their way
> home — being actual
> having the form
> of motion

Souster's opening lines echo Williams's "things others never notice":

> It's a kind of flower
> that if you didn't know it
> you'd pass by the rest of your life.

Noticing such things is Souster's chief strength: the face of the ragged postcard seller on Yonge Street, the movements of cats (another preoccupation shared with Williams), of small birds, the shapes and colours of old buildings, the small immediate actions of people. Yet, in the strict sense, Souster's are not the imagist poems they are often said to be, but rather (in Gary Geddes's phrase) "mini-parables". They are "mini" in more than the obvious formal sense. As parables they tend to be judgments and when the judgments are small and local, involving the minutiae of daily life, they often contain a "shock of recognition", either painful or exhilarating, but in any case very real:

> Paper handkerchief
> or silk
>
> it's how you wave
> that puts the kiss
> in goodbye
> (*At the Airport*)

In the light of such poems it is difficult to understand Souster's allowing reprint here of "Death Chant for Mr. Johnson's America". In length and scope the largest poem in the book, this is far too close to Ginsberg's "America" and it lacks the saving humour of Ginsberg's closing line: "America I'm putting my queer shoulder to the wheel". The tub-thumping oratory of Souster's piece is quite unsuited to his temperament. Even though he probably feels what he says,

his statement of it here has a stale air.

We come back to the mini-parable and Souster's very real virtues, and we encounter a paradox. Souster presents himself (justly) as a man whose eye is determinedly on the object, as one who will not say more than is *there*. When in practice his aesthetic is most fully realized he often *says* a good deal less than is there. Place together two poems from the 1950s. First "The Opener";

> From where I was sitting
> it looked like an easy double-play.
>
> But at that precise moment
> a sloppy-looking freighter
> slipped through the Western Gap
> with a clothesline of washing
> half the length of her deck,
>
> and the runner going into second
> took one look at the ship
> and yelled: "Hey, look, they got
> my old lady's black pants
> flying at the masthead."
>
> And when all the infield
> turned around to get a gape,
> he made second, stole third,
> and scored standing up
> the winning run in what otherwise
> was one of the cleanest-played openers
> in a Toronto ball-park.

Now, for comparison, "Welcome to the South":

> Kidnapped, beaten,
> shot in the head,
> his body tied to a ninety-pound weight
> and dumped in a river:
>
> a fifteen-year-old schoolboy, negro,
> vacationing from Chicago,
>
> enjoying just a sample
> of that good old southern
> hospitality.

The irony of the second is heavier, more obvious, but its real limitations may be located in the use of the indefinite article. All appearances to the contrary, this is an abstract poem, while "The Opener" (one of the happy handful of Souster's baseball poems) is more subtle in its irony and genuinely humorous, including admiration for the tricky know-how with which the run was scored. A similar and equally successful baseball poem is "The Roundhouse".

When he truly has his eye on the object Souster is good at recording nuances of behaviour, particularly in relationships between people or in capturing moments in which someone is revealing a particular sense of himself ("Dominion Square", "The Ugliest Woman", "Central Park South", "Decision on King Street"). What makes these poems is the recognition of a moment's uniqueness. Seeing clearly at the precise moment is the good thing, but simply seeing clearly in itself is not enough to make a poem, as the shrug which may attend upon a reading of Souster's flatter poems will attest.

The particular technique depends on a catch of the soul, or epiphany, and when it fails results only in (the very thing Souster would set himself against) explanation (see, for example, "Shoe Store"). Sometimes the poem is all *there* already, but he explains in a tagline ("Armadale Avenue Revisted"). Better, in "Late Arrival", the moth at the poetry reading, which:

> changes in the winking of an eye
> to the young unspoiled face
> of a girl in the third row smiling up at me.

Souster's other strength is in his sense of humour, well exemplified in "The Spider Outside Our Window", wherein the spider has to cope with the problem of what to do with a rose petal which has fallen into his web:

> Then one day, inspiration!
> He painted up a sign in bug's blood,
> hung it out proudly:

HAPPY CHARLIE'S ROSE GARDENS WHERE YOU'LL ALWAYS MEET A FRIEND.

Because of its characteristic brevity and opacity (in Pound's sense) Souster's work does not lend itself to (or require) analysis. His successes (and there are happily a good many in his work as a whole) are like baseballs which have been well hit, both for lift and flight. WHOMP! and they're over the fence. His batting average is pretty good, too!

MIKE DOYLE

THERIAULT'S LAMENT

YVES THERIAULT, *Ashini*. Tr. Gwendolyn Moore. Harvest House. $2.00.

YVES THERIAULT, *N'Tsuk*. Tr. Gwendolyn Moore. Harvest House. $2.00.

YVES THERIAULT'S two books are a lament for what was and what might have been. The protagonists, an elderly Indian man and woman, Ashini and N'Tsuk, are telling their stories near the end of their lives. The author is particularly adept in his comparison of the nature of white man's time and Indian's time. The narrators speak in the present tense, because they think in the present tense. N'Tsuk, the old woman, says, "According to these same Whites, I would be a hundred years old." But her life is not measured in years, it is measured in marriage, children, seasons of good hunting, and finally, in death. She embodies the continuity that the Indian has known, but is losing, and that the white man, at least in his North American fury of exploitation, has never known. "Your country with its people, will it not become a vast and evil land where human beings unlearn how to live, progressively, from one generation to the next?" asks NTsuk.

Ashini, "the Rock," show the will for cultural survival, and with it provides a key for cross-cultural understanding. He uses a logic which Thériault succeeds in representing as alien to white thought, but remains clear and natural in the novel's context. Ashini is not unrealistic, but he tries to maintain his Montagnais way of life even after his family has died or gone away and his tribe has given up and gone to the reservation. To him, and to Thériault, it is immoral to abandon in one generation the incredibly complex culture required to survive and flourish in the wilderness, a culture which has taken thousands of years to evolve. He is not hidebound or inflexible; he can imagine co-operation or compromise with the whites. "... It would have been praiseworthy," he says, "to have allowed a third culture to flourish here, another race, a different language, capable of enriching the country with its traditions, with its wisdom and its intelligence."

Thériault's novels are really about us, the whites, for Thériault is a white, and by showing us the value of what our civilisation has destroyed he is trying to give us a standard of comparison. His technique is effective, but not bitter or chastizing. Stop and look, he is saying, put yourself outside your culture, be it French or English, and see what you are part of, and see what it has done. Was it worth it?

The narrative style adopted by Thériault for his Indian characters and their slight tone of one speaking a foreign language with care, have allowed the original French to lend itself well to translation. Gwendolyn Moore's version reads fluently and accurately. My only reserv-

ation concerns her use of excessively literal terms such as "ingurgitate" for French "*ingurgiter*," but these do not seriously detract from over-all quality of the translations.

HECTOR COWAN

PROPHETIC ANACHRONISTS

JAMES POLK, *Wilderness Writers*. Clarke Irwin. $3.50.

THIS IS A SET of three compressed biographical essays, attractively illustrated and designed. Its subjects are the patriarchs: Ernest Thompson Seton, Charles G. D. Roberts, and Grey Owl. Readers misled by the title into expecting a survey of wilderness writers, or even of Canadian wilderness writers, should be placated by Mr. Polk's gentle introduction and by the charm of the essays themselves. Like Roberts's best stories, this is a simple book but not a childish one.

The thesis of Mr. Polk's "The Lives of the Hunted" — that Canadian writers have a special identification with wild animals — is presented in muted form. He argues that by facing the harsh realities of wilderness life, Seton and Thompson were able to lift the beast tale above its anthropomorphic level, and that it is no accident Canadians did this first. It is an argument which overlooks the effervescently human creatures of Indian yarns and legends, as well as the wave of conservationist concern that was building all over North America by the end of the last century. Indeed, a cynic could contend that nostalgia, as much as anything, sold Seton's books, packed Roberts's lecture halls, and sent Archie Belaney trotting from city to repellent city in his incongruous Plains headdress, for by the time they matured as writers wilderness had ceased to be a threat both in the U.S. and Canada. Three years before Grey Owl was born we had grown sufficiently smug to begin creating national parks.

In one sense, therefore, the careers of these men were anachronistic from the start, and they themselves were mere entertainers to a complacent time. Yet, in championing wild creatures, and in doing so with authority and skill, they gave adrenalin to the youthful conservation movement, and for this reason alone Mr. Polk has chosen his subjects well.

He acknowledges Seton's and Roberts's debt to U.S. sales and sympathies, but his over-all approach remains a bit parochial. He might have reminded his readers that by 1893 the Sierra Club had been formed, John Muir's books were selling briskly, and *Walden* had been discovered at last; or that by 1903, nearly fifty pieces of state legislation had been passed to protect threatened wildlife, and Teddy Roosevelt, concerned with national fibre and lost frontiers, was lending formidable support to the wilderness lobby. By not placing his subjects more clearly in their continental context, Mr. Polk denies his book a useful perspective which it could easily have had.

Also, it is a real pity that he does not trace any major literary influences. An enticing moment in Nancy Ryley's fine CBC Grey Owl film occurred when the camera panned across Archie's boyhood bookshelf, and it would have been good if a writer of Mr. Polk's insight had paused for a more leisurely examination. Instead, he stresses family and social influences, often encumbering his essays

with quasi-fictional and improbable dialogue. The credibility of the Seton biography is weakened by an unlikely episode at the beginning, and too much valuable space is given to the chatter of Belaney's aunts and mother. Because it contains less of such speculative dialogue, and because Mr. Polk's expository and critical skills are more firmly in command, the Roberts essay is the most successful. Ironically, it is Roberts who seems most alive — a genial, humorous, introspective scholar, oddly restive with success.

Indeed, despite the sometimes intrusive talk, Mr. Polk brings fresh air to all three lives — no small accomplishment in so short a book. His insights are shrewd, his judgments reserved, and his vignettes often poignant. It is impossible not to sympathize with poor Seton, watching myopically while his dream of an Indian Woodcraft Movement is diverted by a militaristic Baden-Powell; or with Grey Owl, separated and sick at heart, seeing Anahareo and his child pass by him in the sunlight. Mr. Polk does well to remind us that Canadian wilderness — the Kawarthas, Tantramar, and Temagami — helped to shape these writers, and that they have repaid their debt many times over. Their influence is inestimable, both because it has been huge and because it is continuing. Against great odds, what they championed has survived; Ojibway is still spoken, and there are still wolves. Whenever the preservationist ethic wins even a small victory over the GNP these men will be in part responsible. Grey Owl's verdict on his own life stands for them all: "Atavistic? Perhaps it is; but good has come of it."

Good should also come from James Polk's book. WAYLAND DREW

OXFORD COMPANIONS

THE *Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature* has become, since it was first published in 1967, an indispensable handbook for anyone needing quick and accurate references on matters relating to Canadian writers, their writings, and the facts of the Canadian past that formed their material. The Supplement to *The Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature* (Oxford University Press, $9.50) brings the record up to date, and it is an astonishing sign of the abundance of recent Canadian writing that it should take 318 pages to do so.

It is an even more astonishing tribute to the erudition and industry of Norah Story, who single-handedly compiled and wrote the original *Oxford Companion*, that the supplement has involved the labour of no less than 37 contributors, under the general editorship of William Toye! Among those 37 contributors one is glad to welcome again Norah Story.

Admirably planned and co-ordinated, the *Supplement* continues the excellent tradition of the *Companion*, and we can doubtless look forward to the establishment of an institution, with successive volumes transforming the original *Companion* into a *Company*, in the original sense, of course.

L.T.C.

LATE CALLAGHAN REPRINTING

IT IS RATHER SURPRISING, at this stage in Callaghan's old-master repute, to realize that two sizeable early works have not been reprinted for more than forty years. Yet this is the case with his two novellas, "An Autumn Penitent" and "In His Own Country". Both of them appeared in *A Native Argosy* in 1929, but they escaped collection — doubtless because of length — in *Morley Callaghan's Stories* (1959), and were not reprinted separately — doubtless because of brevity. Together, however, they make up into a respectably sized small volume, and as such they are finally reissued in the Laurentian Library under the title of *An Autumn Penitent* ($2.25). Old wine is not necessarily good wine, and one doubts if these pieces will ever be regarded as vintage Callaghan. They belong to the same period as *Strange Fugitive* and share with it

Callaghan's evident inability at this early stage to adapt his gifts as a short-story writer to the dimensions of a novel or even a novella. Their appearance reminds one how short was the period — the three years between *Such is my Beloved* and *More Joy in Heaven* — during which Callaghan showed any real mastery of long fiction.

G.W.

TRANSPORTED AND TRANSLATED

INDIVIDUAL NOVELS written by Quebec writers in French have been translated and published in English Canada, but rather sporadically, and often for reasons of sensationalism rather than quality. A few have found their way into such series as the New Canadian Library, but we have long lacked a planned series of translations that would make available in English those works of French-speaking Canada which we should be reading if we were serious about our bilingualism, but which we rarely do.

Harvest House, an English publisher in Montreal, is now undertaking this task — selecting works that are representative of Quebec writing and at the same time excellent in their own rights. Their series is called "French Writers in Canada", and already we have noted in these columns the excellent versions of Thériault's *Ashini* and *N'Tsuk* by Gwendolyn Moore with which the series first appeared. Now Gwendolyn Moore presents her version of Anne Hébert's classic collection of novellas and short stories, *The Torrent* ($2.50), and Pierre Cloutier has translated Jacques Ferron's novel, *Dr. Cotnoir* ($1.95).

The beginning is good, and one looks forward to the translations of novels by Claude Jasmin, Jacques Hébert, Louis Dantin and others which are promised for the forthcoming seasons.

G.W.

SUPPLEMENT TO THE BROCK

LAST YEAR appeared the *Brock Bibliography of Published Canadian Stage Plays in English 1900-72*, an extremely useful checklist in a field where there was no competition. The project has been continued, and now appears *The First Supplement to the Brock Bibliography of Published Canadian Plays*, which is obtainable for $1.50 (plus 25¢ postage and handling costs) from Playwrights Co-op, 344 Dupont Street, Toronto M5R 1V9.

In the first supplement the editors have not only listed the hundred new plays (a gratifying total) that have seen print in English in Canada during the past year, but they have also added a considerable number of earlier plays unnoticed in the original *Brock Bibliography*, and for the first time have included lists of published radio, TV and film plays.

In the process they have — in all these categories — added about 700 titles to the original bibliography; the supplement covers 32 three column pages (not counting prefaces and indexes) while the original covered 35 pages. The editors claim that in the process of researching off-stage plays they have encountered "old myths" and "disproved" them. "For instance, Canadian radio plays do exist in published form," they say, "and in rather large numbers." In fact, however, they list a mere 112 that have seen print, a meagre proportion indeed of the thousands that have been produced by CBC alone.

G.W.