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CANADIAN LITERATURE N^o. 61

Summer, 1974

FIFTEENTH ANNIVERSARY ISSUE

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CANADIAN LITERATURE

LITTÉRATURE CANADIENNE

NUMBER 61, SUMMER 1974

*A Quarterly of Criticism
and Review*

EDITOR: George Woodcock

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PRINTED IN CANADA BY MORRIS
PRINTING COMPANY LTD., VICTORIA

Second class mail registration
number 1375

Publication of *Canadian Literature* is
assisted by the Canada Council

Canadian Literature is indexed in the
Canadian Periodical Index and is
available in microfilm from
University Microfilms,
35 Mobile Drive,
Toronto M4A 1H6

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

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

SUBSCRIPTION \$5.50 A YEAR

ISSN 0008-4360

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FIRST ISSUE SCHEDULED FOR FALL, 1974. SUBSCRIBE NOW.

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WHEN DID IT ALL BEGIN?

THERE ARE TIMES these days when one wonders dazedly whether “Canadian literature” is fact or monstrous fantasm. A whole army of protagonists from Margaret Atwood to the editors of *Alive* have embraced its cause with varying degrees of militancy, to the extent, in the case of the *Alive* group, of offering themselves as martyrs to the cause of CanLit by defying the Guelph bylaws against selling papers in the streets. (Needless to say, if we do not go all the way with *Alive*’s views of what Canadian literature is or may become, we condemn, on general grounds of the freedom of speech and writing, any laws or by-laws that interfere with the free dissemination of the word — of any word!)

The teaching of Canadian literature courses in the universities has proliferated to such an extent that where, twenty years ago, a single teacher might be allowed to conduct one course at a university, now there are whole sections of English departments on many campuses which are devoted to what has become a sub-discipline of its own. *Canadian Literature* long stood in solitary isolation as the only journal dedicated to the criticism of Canadian books, but now it has become like the central trunk in a great banyan, with journals devoted to mere facets of Canadian writing (two already appearing on Canadian fiction and one announced on Canadian criticism) taking root around it. Publishers, of course, have welcomed the surge of interest in Canadian writers, and houses devoted specifically to publishing Canadian books have increased vastly, while popular magazines like *Maclean’s* and *Saturday Night* have bent to the wind of opinion.

I find myself reacting in two ways to such developments. The first of these, of course, is natural to a member of the relatively small group of people who worked in the field a decade and a half ago when *Canadian Literature* began to appear

(for this number celebrates the fifteenth anniversary of the first issue in August 1959). I find myself a little incredulous, wondering whether it is all real, whether it will last or somehow dissolve into that Shelleyan limbo where

faiths and empires gleam,
Like wrecks in a dissolving dream.

On reflection, I reach the conclusion that such fears themselves are insubstantial. The present self-conscious aspect of the Canadian literature movement will doubtless tone down into something less strident, but the movement itself represents a genuine mutation in the way our society views itself. On the less worthy level, one can point to the infrastructure of a literary world that has developed on the campuses, in the media, in the world of publishing, in the network of small presses and little magazines and poetry readings that makes a closely-knit literary ambience such as has never before existed in Canada. It is unlikely that this will easily be dismantled or that those who live within it will be quickly deflected from their present preoccupations. On the higher level, it is by now quite evident that Canadian writing has become not merely a distinctive form of literature in English, but also the verbal manifestation of a culture attaining maturity.

So, even if the cant of CanLit is likely to be forgotten as our literary maturity is prolonged into a tradition we take for granted, it is impossible to imagine that we will ever go back to the colonial attitude which assumes that the products of the classic European literatures — or of the imperial American literature — are necessarily better than our own. We shall continue to recognize that while there is a universal dimension of criticism within a language in which all works may be judged in relation to each other, there is also a particular one in which works can only be judged in accordance with their appropriateness to time and place. And so, if Shakespeare or Stendhal is complete in the sense of being good for all men at all times, there are certain books in any culture whose goodness indeed may be local in relevance yet in local terms may also be complete. There will no longer be any need for a Canadian to think himself provincial if he elects to take to that mythical desert island of the quiz-masters not only his Shakespeare and his *War and Peace* but also his A. J. M. Smith anthology.

But this brings me to my second reflection: that the general public mistakenly tends to see all this concern for Canadian literature as something new. Yet in reality it is new only to the academics and the media. To Canadian writers it is an old theme. Even before Confederation the Canada Firsters were speculating

on the proper concerns of a truly national literature, and I am reminded by a recent batch of reprints how consistently the idea of a distinctive body of Canadian writing, and the hope of a body of writers becoming economically free to express their country's nature and future, persisted through what we often think of nowadays as a dark age of mental enslavement to colonial impositions.

E. K. Brown's *On Canadian Poetry* (recently republished by the Tecumseh Press of Ottawa), not only contains Brown's remarkable analysis of Canadian literature and its problems at the crucial time of the mid-1940s — an analysis to which Margaret Atwood is clearly indebted in formulating her ideas on colonialism's effect on literature — but also reminds one of Charles G. D. Roberts and his dream of "*starting a Canadian literature*", and of Lampman's delight on reading *Orion* "that such work could be done by a Canadian, by a young man, one of ourselves," and of Lampman's own lecture in 1891 in which he declared that in the Canada of his time people were too busy to read with any discernment, but that the time would come when the country would develop "a literary market and a literary atmosphere."

One might expect such sentiments to be quoted by Brown as a critic seeking a form for the Canadian literature he prophetically saw taking shape around him; one might expect such remarks from poets who in verbal imagery stood in the same relation to an awakening Canadian consciousness as the Group of Seven did in visual imagery.

What I find more impressive is that other writers at the turn of the century with much less national inclinations were also concerned about literature in Canada. Three recent titles in the University of Toronto Press's Literature of Canada reprints are Robert Barr's *The Measure of the Rule*, Robert J. C. Stead's *The Homesteaders* and Frank Parker Day's *Rockbound*. Among them, there is no doubt that in literary terms *Rockbound* is the only real re-discovery: a strong novel of the harsh life of fishermen on the Atlantic coast, remarkably untrammelled by the stylistic affectations and moralistic fads that afflicted most Canadian fiction published before 1930. Stead's and Barr's novels, while they have an interest in terms of social and literary history, are hopelessly scarred by their times, and are hard books to read for their own sakes. One could apply very aptly to them some shrewd remarks about Canadian writing up to World War II which E. K. Brown makes as an aside in *On Canadian Poetry*:

Nothing is so difficult for a Canadian as to give a living presentment of a natural human individual. Canadian biographies never put before the reader a man in his habit as he walked and talked; they are the equivalent of marble busts. Canadian

novels are full of characters who are simply the *porte-parole* of their writers, or conventionally humorous nondescripts, or pale idealizations.

But that is not the point I am trying to make, which is that of these three novelists one, Frank Parker Day, was hailed by Archibald MacMechan for the specifically Canadian quality of his writing and for bringing true realism into Canadian literature, while both Stead and Barr went beyond presenting a recognizable Canadian tone in their novels to an explicitly expressed concern for the conditions under which Canadian writers worked and for the prospects of a Canadian literature. Barr's point of view was essentially economic, and his main argument in his long 1899 essay on "Literature in Canada" is summarized thus:

What chance has Canada then of raising a Walter Scott? I maintain that she has but very little chance, because she won't pay the money, and money is the root of all literature.

Somehow, he concludes, we must educate people to spend less of their money on booze and more on books. And Stead in 1931 wrote an essay in the "Origin and Trend of Canadian Literature" in which he found comfort in its amateur status, its surviving optimism, and its "lack of that emphasis on sex which is found in much of the current literature of both the United States and Great Britain." Stead also complained of the economic difficulties that prevented almost all Canadian writers of his time from living by their typewriters, forgetting that this was hardly consistent with his praise of their amateur attitude to writing.

These will doubtless — in 1974 — appear primitive viewpoints, but they do emphasize that, among writers at least, the matter of Canadian literature is not a new subject of discussion and concern. Indeed, it had been clearly there from the moment Canadians recognized themselves as Canadians, and that process began in the bitter lessons of 1812.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

PROTEUS AT ROBLIN LAKE

Mike Doyle

RECENT COMMENTATORS have suggested that Al (or A.W., Alfred, Alfred W.) Purdy is, in Margaret Atwood's phrase, a poet of "many over-lapping self-created versions". George Bowering, in his Purdy monograph, says of the earliest version, perpetrator of *The Enchanted Echo* (1944), "he seemed to think that the poet had to be a sort of Emily Dickinson, maybe with a moustache". Mention of Emily Dickinson in the same breath as *The Enchanted Echo* is gross flattery to that jejune conglomeration of verses, yet Bowering has a point. He cites a quatrain which does *sound* like Emily Dickinson, the resemblance deriving from the fact that Purdy, too, seemed to need to make poems in fixed stanza forms, many of them standard in nineteenth-century hymnology. *The Enchanted Echo* demonstrates two things about Purdy, both crucial. First, even in the formal strait-jacket he provides himself, he has an ear. Second, perceptible when *The Enchanted Echo* takes its place in the Purdy *œuvre*, this is the initial promulgation of poet Purdy, Purdy Mark One (so to speak, since we are in the Air Force) at "a sort of moral attention".

The last phrase comes from the narrator of *The Great Gatsby*. Scott Fitzgerald told us that Jimmy Gatz (i.e., Jay Gatsby, earlier version) derived from "his Platonic conception of himself". *The Enchanted Echo* reveals what conception of "the poet", and himself as poet, Purdy developed from the age of thirteen, when he began to write the stuff, up to his mid-twenties when he was unwittingly (unDuchampishly) a moustachioed Emily Dickinson. One can think of numerous examples of poets whose first books are awkward or amateur beyond belief (two well-known examples: John Crowe Ransom, William Carlos Williams). Closest parallel to Purdy among "colonial" poets is his New Zealand near-contemporary Louis Johnson, whose *Stanza and Scene* (1945) bears the same relationship to Johnson's mature work as *The Enchanted Echo* does to Purdy's. Some poets, from their beginnings, produce highly developed and beautifully finished work, usually in small quantities. Dylan Thomas is a fine example. Others, and Johnson

and Purdy are two, grow and metamorphose in public. Such poets are more available to negative criticism, often known for their mistakes and limitations, but they seem to need publication for growth. Today, Purdy rejects that first public version of himself, regarding the work of that phase as "crap". No wonder! for both technique and substance are routine, mechanical, stock-response. The large gestures of the verse bear no relation to Purdy's day-to-day life. They introduce us to someone apparently plugged in to the whole range of "king and country" clichés.

We know today that Purdy was never really like that. Part of him was, of course, if *The Enchanted Echo* has any truth to it at all, but all of him, no! He did not even begin to get all the possibilities of himself into that early book, which was an act of homage to an outdated and extremely provincial conception of "the poet", and which shows only that (like Jay Gatsby) he had to begin somewhere. Seemingly, he began from a position of extreme cultural poverty and met the need to externalize his sense of vocation in a book, an echo because of a sense, perhaps, that he was talking only to himself.

What happened next may seem surprising. As far as book publication goes, nothing happened for more than a decade. A first book, apparently, rid Purdy's ego system of a need. He submerged. A restlessness, physical and psychological, showed itself in his way of life: running a taxi business in Belleville, Ont., and working in various factory jobs, just as in the thirties he had ridden the freights across the country. That, says Bowering, is "the stuff literary legends . . . are made of", but such a legend had already been pre-empted at least a generation earlier by the old Georgian poet, W. H. Davies, who told us about it in *The Autobiography of a Supertramp*, fifty years ago.

Who knows what inner reasons Purdy had for his courses of action? But the "legend", when matched up against the poetry of the late 1950s (such things as the pervasive archaisms and "poetical" language of *Emu*, *Remember!*) gives a distinctly schizoid impression. As far as the craft of poetry is concerned, Purdy had simply gone further into the British tradition. He had exchanged the Quiller Couch schoolboy stereotype of the poet for another and livelier one, but still a stereotype. Yet there are signs of growth: a developing consciousness of sound, language, a sense of the immediate environment — of what is actually and physically around him, and of the poem as part (an important part for him) of the process of being alive. He has begun to choose better models, in particular Hopkins, whose device of hyphenated phrases he adopts in (as Bowering acutely observes) a "striving for openness and the natural motion in freedom".

During the late 1950s, the new influence of William Carlos Williams was being felt among Canadian poets. Up to this point Purdy had shown himself to be a typical colonial poet (easily matchable with poets in Australia, New Zealand, South Africa and elsewhere) but now he, too, began to show signs of Williams's influence — in his explicitly-stated concern with particular objects, in the run of his lines, and in his conscious concern with craft (though he labelled it, less than happily in the circumstances, "the crafte so longe to lerne") :

I forget whether I ever loved you
in the past — when you enter the room
your climate is the mood
of living, the hinge of now,
in time the present tense.
Certainly you are the world
I am not done with
until I dispense with words —

Yet Purdy was already too much himself to be confined by another artist's conception of reality and the poet's relation to it, even one as seminal as Williams's. Purdy's eclecticism, his protean personality, first shows itself markedly in *The Crafte So Longe to Lerne* (1959), sometimes destroying the particular poem, as in "Whoever You Are", with its metamorphic sentiments, which curdle at the end into "romantic" melancholy. Underlying a number of the poems of this period is a strange fear of disintegration (see "Whoever You Are", "After the Rats", "Vestigia", "At Evergreen Cemetery" and even "On the Decipherment of Linear B", which portrays the work of Michael Ventris as a threat to a cherished perception of history. A half-submerged "romantic" nostalgia is betrayed here both by the theme and the poem's closing cadences.) In contrast, Purdy shows himself as Alfred W. Purdy, somewhat learned but tongue-in-cheek, in "Gilgamesh and Friend", where he uses controlled lightness of tone to interfuse condensed mythology with contemporary details and tone of voice. Equally successful, and more important, is "At Roblin Lake", introducing the locus of so many future poems, which was to give Purdy a central fixed point in the local. Several facets, versions, of Purdy merge — the bookish Alfred W., the self-observer, the punster, the vulnerable:

... wondering at myself, experiencing
for this bit of green costume jewellery
the beginning of understanding,
the remoteness of alien love —

From some poems in this volume one has a sense of disintegration — already mentioned, from others “the beginnings of understanding”. Seen in the long perspective of three decades of published work, perhaps the key moment of *The Crafte So Longe To Lerne* is in the conclusion of “At Evergreen Cemetery”:

Myself, having the sense of something going
on without my knowledge, changes taking place
that I should be concerned with,
sit motionless in the black car behind the hearse
waiting to re-enter a different world.

AN ADMIRER of Purdy has described him as being “very Canadian without being provincial”, offering an unconsciously backhanded compliment. Why has Purdy become so significant a poet for Canada today? To an outsider Canada must present a somewhat puzzling international image: innocent yet canny, straightforward yet oblique, open and yet shut in, eclectic and yet groping for a single image of itself. Some or all of these characteristics apply to Purdy, who seems as much as anyone writing today to sense what it is, the Canadian thing, the local thing, and whose work may be seen as a slow unpeeling, a groping towards the core of that thing.

Years ago, reviewing *The Crafte So Longe to Lerne*, Milton Wilson suggested that, “Purdy has to find his directions by indirections; poetically he needs to be devious.” Part of the explanation may be in Purdy’s intuition of the gap between his fellow Canadians’ daily experience and his own vocation (“Canadian without being provincial”):

Now I am a sensitive man
so I say to him mildly as hell
‘You shouldn’ta knocked over that good beer
with them beautiful flowers in it’
So he says to me ‘Come on’
so I Come On
like a rabbit with weak kidneys I guess
like a yellow streak charging
on flower power I suppose
& knock the shit outa him & sit on him
(he is just a little guy)
and say reprovingly
‘Violence will get you nowhere this time chum

Now you take me
 I am a sensitive man
 and would you believe I write poems?'
 But I could see the doubt in his upside down face
 in fact in all the faces
 'What kinda poems?'
 'Flower poems'
 'So tell us a poem'
 I got off the little guy but reluctantly
 for he was comfortable
 and told them this poem
 They crowded around me with tears
 in their eyes and wrung my hands feelingly
 for my pockets for
 it was a heart-warming moment for Literature
 and moved by the demonstrable effect
 of great Art and the brotherhood of people I remarked
 '— the poem oughta be worth some beer'
 It was a mistake of terminology
 for silence came
 and it was brought home to me in the tavern
 that poems will not really buy beer or flowers
 or a goddam thing

First, an aside on provincialism. I do not believe a poem such as this could have been written by an English poet until the rise, in recent years, of live poetry in centres such as Liverpool and Newcastle. It could, however, have been written by any number of Australian or New Zealand poets in the last forty years. More to our present point: the energy with which this incident is portrayed locates the great advance of Purdy's work in the early 1960s. At its worst such energy and self-mockery results in a leer, a display of knowingness, but the best work in *Poems for all the Annettes*, for example, is due to a tension between energy and watchfulness, energy and diffidence, energy and scepticism. An earlier introversion has been superseded by something more positive. Sometimes the new energy is manifest in sweeping declarations, catalogues of whole masses, but in such instances the energy is largely of the surface and largely lost. Where it really counts is in the exploring of a relationship with one other person, a situation at once open and closed, tentative and yet assured. This is why the whole notional framework of *Poems for all the Annettes* is a happy one.

Simultaneously Purdy seems to grapple with the shape of a human exchange and the shape of a poem, as in "Encounter", a (finally unsuccessful) piece about

loosening a screw in a pantry door which had been fixed in place by another man a hundred years earlier. The poem's very occasion demonstrates Purdy's sensitivity and alertness, but he lets it diffuse into stridency, first betrayed by a verbose elongating of the line and finally by capitalization. Yet there has been an encounter and it is precisely revealing of Purdy's strength that he can realize he is talking about "the metaphysical notion about how we're all interconnected", but makes us feel the palpable human reality of his nineteenth-century counterpart. (This poem too, incidentally, has its provincialist element: the poet imagining what others must think of his being a poet — "a phony".)

With recurring amazement and admiration one meets Purdy's sensitivity to "the one important thing among so much meaningless trivia/ the one thing that always eludes you," of which he meanwhile professes, "Nothing is said or can be said." Elusiveness is directly related to life's limitless possibilities, the quality of experience, the process, painful enough and yet open :

every decision, word, thought, positive act,
causes the sum of the parts of a man's self to change
and he betrays himself into the future day after day

But this is "talking about it", one reason why this poem, "Collecting the Square Root of Minus One", appeals to me less than the finely realized concreteness of "House Guest", where Purdy combines the texture of a two-way relationship with the fabric of his own mental interests and experiences. Technically hardly more than a list, an enumeration, much may be learnt from "House Guest" about Purdy's skill in handling his materials, his adroit use of line breaks and conjunctions, his laconic eloquence, and the absurdity and yet appropriateness of detail:

Every night the house shook from his snoring
a great motor driving us on into daylight
and the vibration was terrible
Every morning I'd get up and say 'Look at the nails —
you snored them out half an inch in the night —'
He'd believe me at first and look and get mad and glare
and stare angrily out the window while I watched 10 minutes
of irritation
drain from his eyes onto fields and farms and miles and
miles of snow

Since the guest spent so much time there pounding nails, the psychology of this

is acute, and, indirectly, is a strong expression of affection for the guest, who is close enough to the poet to be included in his characteristic self-mockery.

As its title suggests, many of the two-way relationships in *Poems for all the Annettes* centre on women. “The Old Woman and the Mayflowers” epitomizes what Gary Geddes (in a recent article on Purdy) calls Canadian “orneryness”, portraying the end of a woman who, “after almost 80 years of bitchiness”, had died in a field:

She'd picked maybe a dozen mayflowers before dying, and a goat ate them out of her hand.

Ending in an understatement and diminution, Purdy yet has made a local myth, thereby giving Ameliaburg Township a meaningful name. Once again the reader is aware of a closeness, poet to subject, and perhaps the old woman is even a surrogate for the poet.

A woman is also focus of “Archaeology of Snow”, frequently seen as centre-piece of *Poems for all the Annettes*, with its complementary statements:

we encounter the entire race
of men just by being
alive here

and

a few more moments
to hang in a private gallery
of permanent imaginings

Here we perceive another element of the tension which gives Purdy's work its vitality. He is public, he is the globetrotting Canadian who makes pronouncements about public events, but one feels in the texture of his work that he is also intensely private and that, in the end, may be the more interesting thing about him. Of course, encountering "the entire" human race is not, of itself, just public. Again, the poet feels himself part of a vast process; but the meat of the poem is a human encounter and its reverberations.

Open form, particularly the fragmented beginning, establishes the poem's exploratory nature. The protagonist has lost his girl-friend, Anna, laments the loss, but does not romanticize it. Something, at once comical and beautiful, ephemeral and tangible, remains with him:

Day after next day
 I found her
 heavy buttocks
 in the snow

 printed there
 like a Cambrian trilobite
 Except the girl was not there
 but was there also somehow

Later he refers to her as “Helen of Illyria with the big behind”, at once humanizing the myth and mythifying the human. Chill weather helps retain the lost girl’s imprint, as though in some sense she is invisibly there; but with warmer weather, new season, spring, she will disappear inevitably, because the large process of the universe continues. But has she gone? Purdy’s “Platonism” intervenes to save her:

the form is HERE
 has to be
 must be
 As if we were all immortal
 in some way I’ve not fathomed

and the poem resolves itself into a sense of the “grandeur” of the interpenetration of all things into one, including the humans, of whom “there’s no end.”

Purdy’s strength shows here in his correlation of a sense of the immensity of flux and the fleetingly possessed and mock-heroic human, in the antithesis implied by the title — “Archaeology of Snow” — that man leaves traces though almost everything melts away. One thing I have not perhaps sufficiently stressed may be indicated in these opposites: Purdy’s inclusiveness, his capacity to bring to bear many facets of his personality. This, as much as anything, serves to make *Poems for all the Annettes* a landmark in his career and in Canadian poetry.

WHEN *The Cariboo Horses* was published in 1965 it confirmed Purdy’s public status, but more than one commentator remarked that no poem in the volume is the kind of “finished structure which focuses and holds attention”. Mercurial as Purdy is, that is not surprising. The most significant pieces in *The Cariboo Horses* have not a memorable facade but a presence, a texture, which permeates. Some features of Purdy’s craftsmanship at this stage will show what I mean.

My first-year English grammar text informs me that, in verbal structure, “The

continuous forms denote an action, an event, or a condition that is incomplete and still continuing”:

At 100 Mile House the cowboys ride in rolling
stagey cigarettes with one hand reining
restive equine rebels on a morning grey as stone
— so much like riding dangerous women
with whiskey coloured eyes —

Purdy is attached to objects, particularly what Williams once called “the raw beauty of ugliness”:

the football players
ride in colourless convertibles their
upholstery worn down
to foam rubber quivering tho it
is still
quite beautiful —

But, despite this, he is a poet of the verb and many poems in *The Cariboo Horses* gain their immediacy and emotional force from the verb-form (responding to Heidegger’s dictum that the human condition is *to be there*.) Poem after poem moves in the continuous form; even (“My Grandfather Talking — 30 Years Ago”) remembered incidents, are recreated as if happening now.

Such technique is one index of Purdy’s sophistication, but other methods also contribute to the poems’ momentum. In many instances the poem is a continuum, its forward pressure developed through the deployment of verbs, on the one hand, and link words, conjunctions, transitions, on the other. Used at line ends or beginnings, such devices can control the pace:

dreaming not of houris and other men’s wives
but his potash works and the sawmill hearing
only the hard tusked music of wheels turning
and hardly ever heard anything soft he
did not know one March that June was early . . .

Gary Geddes asked Purdy, in an interview, whether the open-endedness of his poems is merely a “device”. Acknowledging some debt to Olson, Purdy agreed, but said it is also “a philosophy”. If so, it is indicative of one more version of Purdy. Casting our minds back, momentarily, to a phrase in “Archaeology of Snow”, I suggested that “the form is HERE” carries “Platonic” overtones (i.e., that one element behind Purdy’s experiences is a vision of an ideal experience), but more deeply felt is the sense of the leaving of human traces. Their qualities

of presentness and movement make Purdy's mature poems highly dramatic. We are immediately involved in the process of his responses. We may then ask: what is the nature of those responses? What answers does Purdy have? I tend to disagree with those who suggest that none is offered; gradually coming into the work is a feeling for the specific occasion, person, object. Instead of Plato's chair:

I see the myth of God
is a kitchen chair
full of wormholes
and fall down and worship

The flux itself is for Purdy an answer, and a sufficient answer. His grandfather tells him "you don't dast stop/ or everything would fall down" and all indications are that Purdy believes him, profoundly. Life is that and nothing more, the movement through, — though his imagination longs for it to be more, as he suggests in "Method for Calling up Ghosts", with its wish image of the dead leaving white-painted trails. Meanwhile, experience is of "fumbling to stay alive/ and always the listening." Stoppage is death for Purdy, as is revealed even in a casual phrase such as "television's awful semi-colon" (an informative side-light on his technique).

To return to the kitchen chair. Cast up in the flux, it has particularity, but it is also common, and representative — of what one lives with day by day, "full of wormholes". Such an attitude is movingly captured in "The Country North of Belleville", a poem of the harsh farmlands, which shares something with such "provincials" as Williams, and Patrick White in his great novel of pioneer farming, *The Tree of Man*. Deeply conscious as he is of the countryside in question, "the country of defeat", where "Old fences drift vaguely among the trees", Purdy speaks as one whose restlessness has drawn him away, but who is drawn back albeit reluctantly to "the same/ red patch mixed with gold".

Time and space, spartan time and empty — or snow-filled — space, predominate in *The Cariboo Horses*. If *Poems for all the Annettes* marks the moment when Purdy's creative energies gathered into a cohesiveness which comes through, at its high points, as fierce joy, *The Cariboo Horses* follows up by confirming that he is a *Canadian* poet. Purdy's answer to Northrop Frye's (and Margaret Atwood's) question, the Canadian question, "Where is Here?", is now in the *texture* of almost every poem. One could argue *ad nauseam* about the meaning of "provincialism" (as I would argue that, seen from London or Paris, Canada is "provincial", but then I do not consider "provincial" to be a term of deroga-

tion), but I note simply that many foremost Commonwealth writers continue to feel the need to come to terms with European culture. Purdy is manifestly Canadian partially because his consciousness is a link-point between past and present, between European (but also North American) history and "the country of defeat":

Here we are
 Euclid and Ptolemy and I
walking along the dusty road

From this point on Purdy will be much preoccupied with the question of how, in what manner, Canadians dwell in their homeland.

Something of that manner he offers in himself — a mixture of understatement, self-mockery, pathos and comedy, beautifully evident in the two poems "In the Wilderness" and "One Rural Winter", both narrative in their basic thrust. In the first, his encounter with the Doukhobors at Agassiz is an encounter also with Canadian history. Admiring the spiritual strength of these people, he knows throughout that he is not one of them, but merely taking notes in "a steno's notebook". The resulting complex stance is fruitful and revealing. Objective and yet self-mocking, he perceives both the grandeur and comedy of "the nay-sayers and spirit-wrestlers of the Kootenay".

Self-mockery controls "One Rural Winter", miniature mock-epic of a "journey", to a distant outdoor john in the midst of snowbound winter:

The earth is frozen
the beautiful trees are frozen
even the mailbox is frozen
& I'm getting a little chilly myself

He journeys between Muse and everyday reality, between the girl he goes out to meet ("my most delicate imagining") and the dwelling held together by pounded thumbnails, his necessary haven (the journey too is necessary!) On his return:

the WIND
steals all my internal heat
my heavy body is doped with wind and cold
 and the house door
 drags me into the hall
 and the door knob
is a handle I hold onto the sky with

Purdy is not a poet of "gems" (his discursiveness alone would make that diffi-

cult), but *The Cariboo Horses* is a rich book of which much more could be said. A grasp of the central image in "One Rural Winter", however, may convey the book's substance and the core of Purdy's work, the quality which endows the best of it with its peculiar excellence. A lone figure struggles with a harsh environment to reach the goal where he can commune with his imagination? Or is it just a guy answering the need to relieve himself, in difficult conditions? In entering Purdy's world it is hazardous to forget the necessary existence of either the shit-house or the sky.

TODAY, a common feature of Canadian poetry is the book with the single, explicit (usually factual) theme: Louis Riel, the mounties. Some good books have been produced this way, some very dull, but the interesting thing is the desire to shape a book of verse around a significant theme, often the pioneer quality of Canadian life in the not-too-distant past. Al Purdy, still in his fifties, anticipated much of this in the explorations of his own work, and perhaps his *North of Summer* (1967) started the whole trend.

Never particularly conscious of the poetry of epiphany or the lyric moment, he travels, steno's notebook at the ready, going after poems. The assumption seems to be that, given contact with his sensibility, there are poems everywhere. His task is to draw them forth. In *North of Summer*, using a familiar figure, he evokes his own role:

listening
reaching under the stone
to the far side of the world
into space and beyond space

He is both maker and medium. In a "Postscript" to *North of Summer* he details the external circumstances of his 1965 Arctic visit, starting from Frobisher Bay, going north to the Arctic Circle, journeying by canoe to the Kikastan Islands in Cumberland Sound (merely recording the names here gives the project a degree of concreteness). Writing at every stage of the way, afterwards, as he tells us, he "worked on the poems for more than a year". Thus we may adduce at least two distinct stages of deliberateness, of calculation in working these poems, which have been described as "journalism". Yet there is a further element, in which,

On the country road these spring days
odd things happen

brown men in mukluks climb
 the snake fences
 with Norris Whitney's sheep
 near Ameliasburg
 and I'm afraid to mention it
 at the village store

Purdy knows his facts, and carries them lightly, but his *attention*, concentration, does not stop there. He absorbs first the book information, next the on-the-spot details. He does not pretend to be other than what he is, a traveller come to look and listen, but his opening lines (above) should warn us that something more will emerge. When he ponders, "About the poems: they seem to me like a set of binoculars thru which you can view the Arctic . . . What I'm doing here is providing my own particular kind of optic glass," the remark has more range than may seem so at first, for everywhere he is conscious of the Arctic in the perspective of Western history, of "the Innuite/ The People/ these unknowable human beings/ who have endured 5000 years/ on the edge of the world," who yet fit into the world of Achilles, Picasso, Odysseus and Maple Leaf Gardens.

Purdy carries the book with ease, enabled by a verse-line which he handles consummately well. Capturing the bleak, brooding quality of the landscapes, he is never pretentious and his characteristic self-mockery does not desert him (see, for example, the witty "When I Sat Down to Play the Piano", another outhouse story). Notebook-carrying Purdy sees himself as one of the "white men/ who were also visitors/ and thought to be human", for better or worse bringing the twentieth-century to this arid outpost. If this were all the book has to offer it would be thin pickings indeed, but behind the cultural ambassador is another Purdy, the one whose vision may on occasion stretch to "the other side" of things:

the sea crowded with invisible animals
 the horizon full of vague white shapes
 of icebergs in whispering lagoons where
 Old Squaw ducks are going
 "ouw-ouw-ouw"
 And I think of the other side of that sound
 I have to
 because it gathers everything
 all the self-deception and phoniness
 of my lifetime into an empty place
 and the RUNNER IN THE SKIES

I invented
 as symbol of the human spirit
 crashes like a housefly
 my only strength is blind will
 to go on

A pity, perhaps, that the latter part of this passage is over-explicit to a degree, but the lines touch on something notable: first, Purdy's image of the spirit as "runner", second his puritanical conception of life as "blind will" pitted against "self-deception and phoniness". As ground for such a struggle he has a preference for spartan landscapes and there may be more than a touch of resemblance between this "empty place" at "the edge of the world" and the country around Belleville.

LIKE EARLE BIRNEY, to whom *Wild Grape Wine* (1968) is dedicated, Purdy has taken to travelling a great deal. In the interview first published in *Canadian Literature* 41, he told Gary Geddes "somehow or other one uses up one's past," and later added, "I like to think of a continual becoming and a changing and a moving." *Wild Grape Wine* (as its blurb tells us) includes poems on Mexican poverty and post-revolutionary Cuba, but the book's considerable strength derives largely from Ontario poems such as "Wilderness Gothic", "St Francis in Ameliasburg" or "Skeleton by an Old Cedar", or from the pre-history of the North American sub-continent in "The Runners".

Since 1968 four major Purdy collections have appeared. Two of these together, *Love in a Burning Building* (1970) and *Selected Poems* (1972), are a substantial retrospective. The others, *Wild Grape Wine* and the recent *Sex and Death*, are both extensive and wide-ranging. The moment seems propitious for a summing-up, but this is not easy since Purdy is both elusive and multi-faceted. Joker, traveller, mythographer, political commentator, wine-maker, common man, archaeologist, poet — all these versions of Purdy have been ably touched upon by McCallum, Bowering, Lee, Atwood, Gary Geddes and others. Something beyond these Purdy *personae* is at issue. Margaret Atwood perhaps located it when, reviewing *North of Summer*, she said, "One of Purdy's specialities is catching himself in the act."

Purdy has proved many things: among them, that a boy from Hicksville with the worst, most platitudinous and tum-ti-tum sense of poetry can become a subtle and sensitive craftsman, and that through the imagination it is possible to see

Canada clearly and see it whole (however spreadeagled and sectarian it may seem geographically and politically). To my sense, however, he has one major problem to solve before moving on.

Wallace Stevens put it that the distinctive characteristic of good poems is "the presence of the determining personality". In that sense Purdy is very much present, but often *too much* and too self-consciously. Sometimes he is too obviously the succinct recorder: details with moral, as in "Beothuck Indian Skeleton in Glass Case (St. John's Museum, Nfld.)", which opens, flatly, "Six feet three inches/ a man of 40". This kind of economy may easily be justified (and, in fact, is essential) but it can also have a certain air of banality, like the TV ads in which the husband lies beside his wife in bed at night after having taken his indigestion pill. Dialogue: *She*: "Feel good?" *He*: "Feel great!" Of course, thousands of dollars depend on the omission of those pronouns, etc., but the outcome is a travesty of honest conversation. When Purdy's notebook is more evident than his spark, his efficiency more obvious than his insight, his work can resemble that ad. This plus a certain discursiveness prevents *Wild Grape Wine* from being as satisfying as *The Cariboo Horses*. Yet there is much excellence in the book: the almost uncanny depth and rightness of "The Runners" (a touchstone, as Dennis Lee notes in his eloquent response to the poem), the zest of "The Winemaker's Beat-Etude" (with its "GREAT JEROBOAM/ that booms inside from the land beyond the world" — presumably the land of the Sky Runner, found in a moment of earthly release), and the crucial discovery of *a tone of voice* in such cornerstone poems as "Wilderness Gothic", "Roblin Mills", "The Runners" and "My Grandfather's Country", in which Purdy appears to be establishing Canada's psychic bearings.

That he could not do with vague generalizations and he achieves his tone partly by knowing a great deal, factually. Avid bookstore browser and collector of Canadiana, Purdy has grounding in Canadian history, ancient history, world affairs, art, myth, psychology. Since the basis of most of his verse now is story-telling (note how, in recent books, the characteristic poem length is two to three pages) he can deploy a great deal of *information*. A resulting journalistic element in the poems is an added dimension of self-consciousness. Self-admittedly, he goes looking for poems the way another man would go on safari. *Sex and Death* contains great slabs of poems got from a trip to South Africa. Nothing wrong with that, except that it presents a paradigm case of the risks involved. Going to South Africa one is, inevitably, the liberal visiting fascist/racist stronghold. From such a preconception, the poems can begin to write themselves.

Purdy's Ontario poems *feel* (I, as immigrant, can suggest no more) as if they have a deep rightness not present in his South Africa/Cuba/Etcetera "trips". In *Sex and Death* particularly one encounters the journalist who goes to the places he writes about in order to authenticate his "literary product" ("At Acayucan we stopped/ to water and feed/ the engine's horses").

Deliberately sought "experience" has as its corollary in this instance the poet as observer at a distance, able to throw in an occasional knowing aside ("I'm being too clever about it of course"). Purdy seems to have given up, for the most part, the participatory verb-forms of *The Cariboo Horses*. Often a static, ponderous quality has seeped into the verse. One cannot but admire "Hiroshima Poems", for example, for their competence and unexceptionable sentiments, as a man's offering of "a part of himself not even original" but necessary. Necessary obeisances to the horrors of our world, such poems are not the true depths of Purdy. Rather the essential tone of voice (the voice as essence), the equally essential participation, reach us again in, say, "The Horseman of Agawa". Here we are not buzzed by overt reference to "identity questions", but watch a reaching out for a "secret knowing" beyond words. Purdy is beginning to grope not only with the problem of "Where is Here?", but the ontology of selfhood.

What I am saying, I suppose, is that many poems *display* too much Al and Co., but *reveal* too little Purdy. Perhaps it is churlish, however, to ask for an artist attributes he does not wish for himself? Purdy ends the main part of *Sex and Death*:

And we the third persons
are a kind of privileged children
suspend judgment sometimes
and not loving ourselves
love the mystery
and do not understand it

The poem is called "Observing Persons". But what mystery is this? As I have worked with Purdy's poems, ranging from doubt as to their value, to the excitement of fully discovering a zestfully genuine poet, to the sense of some elusive element in the work (a depth glimpsed, fleetingly, occasionally, then gone, gone) I have been reading also the new edition of Merton's *Seeds of Contemplation*: "Contemplation . . . is the experiential grasp of reality as *subjective*, not so much 'mine' (which would signify 'belonging to the external self') but 'myself' in existential mystery." What has this to do with Purdy?

Here and there in his work of the past few years are poems in which Purdy the

personality and pundit is completely submerged, where the sense of subject is totally empathetic:

And I do not know why
 whether because I cannot hunt with the others
 or because the things I have done are useless
 as I may be useless
 but there is something here I must follow
 into myself to find
 outside myself in the mammoth
 beyond the scorn of my people
 who are still my people
 my own pain and theirs
 joining the shriek that does not end
 that is inside me now
 The shriek flows back into the mammoth
 returning from sky and stars
 finds the cave and its dark entrance
 brushes by where I stand on tip-toes
 to scratch the mountain body on stone
 moves past me into the body itself
 toward a meaning I do not know
 and perhaps should not . . .

Far deeper than surface coruscations, fluid in movement and of the exact tonal essence, in such poetry participation and self-definition merge in a way which suggests (through vibrations as much as words) that Purdy may yet take us to realms unexplored. Thoreau once said, "I have travelled much in Concord". Purdy may have the means to do likewise around Ameliasburg. A year or two ago he professed to be "running out of places" to travel to. But then he was referring only to places *out there*.

O'HAGAN'S ROUGH-EDGED CHRONICLE

Michael Ondaatje

THE FASHION in our generation of authors is to have stories of heroes told by anti-heroes. Narrators have gradually forced themselves — along with their inhibitions and qualitative judgments — on to the original source of the story until their books have become psychological studies or witty and ironic narrations. Some of the best literature in the last century has emphasized this style. Wilkie Collins, fascinated by the way a jury discovered the eventual truth of an incident by hearing several witnesses in a court of law, used a parade of narrators in *The Moonstone*. Nabokov's *Pale Fire* and Robert Kroetsch's *The Studhorse Man* are two satirical examples of how narrators insist on making themselves the heroes in someone else's tale, and this quality is parodied even more succinctly in Costa-Gavras' film *The Sleeping-Car Murders*, where relatives of the deceased arrive at the police station and insist on talking about *their* lives and *their* problems. The hero has been qualified or masked to death and we have to go back to Joseph Conrad to find a moderate and humane balance between story teller and central character. Yet even Conrad's compassion and identification suggests a great weakening in the status of the hero. The power of Greek tragedy was after all caused by the very fact that the narrators, or Chorus, had no true understanding of the dogmatic, determined power of the central characters. Kurtz is the only one of Marlow's human studies who is allowed that power.

It is the result of a literary evolution that allows one to read several exceptional examples of complex narrative devices while it is difficult to find books in which the original myth is given to us point blank. The writing may be finer, more careful, more witty, but it has lost that original rawness.

About six years ago I read Howard O'Hagan's *Tay John* and just recently read it again. I've read little else of his work, mainly because his book of short stories — *The Woman who got on at Jasper Station* — is almost impossible to find. When I spoke to other writers about *Tay John*, most said they liked it but that the book was flawed or badly written at moments. Yet I can think of no novel that has got as close to that raw power of myth as O'Hagan's book does.

And although his book also moves out into the control of its narrators, the power of the hero's story is left intact and virtuous. The source is not qualified.

The story O'Hagan tells is built around the legend of the Yellowhead Pass, of Tay John whose name is a bastardized version of Tête Jaune. The book is in three sections. Part 1: "Legend" is about Tay John's father, Red Rorty, who goes among the Shuswap tribe with religion in his head, impregnates an Indian girl, is murdered. The girl dies while pregnant but a baby is found crawling out of the grave six months later. The tribe brings up the boy who has no shadow, for "he was not born as other children between the ground and the sun where his shadow could find him." He is given a shadow, made human, but eventually leaves the tribe. Part 2: "Hearsay" is the recollection of a narrator Jack Denham, who speaks of two incidents in Tay John's life that he or his friends witness. Part 3: "Evidence" — without a finding — deals largely with the growing civilization of the railroad hustlers, ending with Tay John's death/disappearance with a woman into the earth once more.

The story is powerful because of the way O'Hagan has found it and retold it. Narrators stay in the background, and although Parts 2 and 3 are told by Denham in a technique very similar to the narrations of Conrad's Marlow, the cast is small and the mysterious centre is given power to grow. O'Hagan, one senses, truly understands where the dramatic sources of myth lie. Myth is biblical, surreal, brief, imagistic. There are three or four scenes that take up not much more than an eighth of the novel but whose strength invades the rest of the book. They are the remnants left to story-tellers — a fight with a bear, the chopping off by Tay John of his own left hand on a fur trader's table. . . .

"So you know him?" I asked.

"Know him?" McLeod rose, pushed the dishes back from the table top and pointed to some dark stains in the wood. . . .

"Look at that — what do you make of that?" he said.

I looked closer. "Blood, perhaps. I don't know." It was a great wandering black stain, like the map of Russia.

"Blood. You're right, man, that's what it is. And I can't wash it off. I've scrubbed and soaped and still there it is, and I have to eat off it. . . ."

We follow Tay John's path with fascination and horror.

MYTH IS ALSO ACHIEVED by a very careful use of echoes — of phrases and images. There may be no logical connection when these are

placed side by side but the variations are always there setting up parallels. Tay John chops off his hand; the woman Ardith cuts off the nails of a baby bear to stop it scratching her and the paws bleed. After the bear fight, Tay John slices off its head and leaves it in the branches of a tree; Red Rorty's brother commits suicide in a tree (Red himself having been tied and burned to a tree); Tay John chases an escaped horse and is seen with some of the hairs from its tail in his hand; after a fight from which Tay John escapes we have this description:

One of the men remained standing in a dazed fashion gazed at some yellow hair clutched in his fist. He shook his head, opened his fingers. The yellow hair floated to the floor. . . .

Some of these echoes are more obvious than others, and in fact the weaker ones are more suggestive. In any case the use of echoes is crucial to the myth in the book for the action in the novel turns in on itself, is incestuous. O'Hagan is aware that legend needs only two or three images to sustain it; myth breeds on itself no matter what the situation or landscape. This is especially important, for the landscape is being changed with the coming railroad; the fragments and formulas however will repeat themselves for ever.

The most consistent and carefully plotted image is Tay John's birth from and eventual disappearance into the earth. The only other story of O'Hagan's that I have read — "The Teepee" (reprinted in Rudy Wiebe's *Stories from Western Canada*) — ends this way:

From the doorway I watched him go along the ridge and down it, wading through the willows that in the moonlight rose around him, around his legs, his hips, his shoulders until at last, when against the gleaming river his head dropped from view, it was as though he had walked down among the roots, under the faded grasses, into the earth to which he was a closer neighbour than I.

That image is the central one in *Tay John*. At various times we get scenes like this one after the bear fight:

Then the mass quivered. It heaved. A man's head appeared beside it, bloody, muddied, as though he were just being born, as though he were climbing out of the ground.

or later:

His legs were spread, each foot firmly set. Yet it was not an impression of solidity he offered, so much as one of emergence — from the ground itself, as though he had sprung up there a moment before my arrival.

On rereading the book I felt that perhaps these images of Tay John's link with the earth were heavy-handed. But in fact they physically parallel the strange and dark asides of Jack Denham in a crucial way. The suggestion in the last quotation is not one of power but of fragility. Tay John is little more than seasonal grass. He *has* to disappear. From the very beginning he is part of the mechanics of nature and the fateful metaphor will also assure his rebirth. Images revive. As his mother was buried pregnant — so he goes into the snow at the end with his dead and pregnant woman. And the pulling of the toboggan which carries her reminds us subconsciously — with no mention made of it — of his shadow. Early on in the book this is said :

Men walk upon the earth in light, trailing their shadows that are the day's memories of the night. For each man his shadow is his dark garment, formed to the image of his end, sombre and obscure as his own beginning. It is his shroud, awaiting him by his mother's womb lest he forget what, with his first breath of life, he no longer remembers.

These asides must be seen in the light of Tay John coming out of or going into the ground. They are on one level the voice of Indian legends, on another the world-view of O'Hagan. They unify the book by being the mediation between the physical glimpses of the myth. They are a part of a comical vision of the world to the likes of Jack Denham who sees all civilization as ephemeral, and tragic to those who take their foothold on the earth too seriously.

He fled from the old. He looked for the new. Yet there is nothing new — these words, nor their meaning — nothing really new in the sense of arrival in the world unless an odd meteor here and there. We have ½ a million tons of them and their dust a year. To-day was implicit in time's beginning. All that is, was. Somewhere light glowed in the first vast and awful darkness, and darkness is the hub of light. Imprisoned in its fires which brighten and make visible the universe, and shine upon man's face, is the core, the centre, the hard unity of the sun, and it is dark.

All that is not seen is dark. Light lives only in man's vision. Past our stars, we think, is darkness. But here, we say, is light. Here is light where once was darkness, and beyond it, farther than our eyes can see, than our greatest telescopes can pierce, is darkness still.

The witnessing of myth, its arrival and disappearance in the midst of civilization, Tay John's fragility of position, must be seen in this context. Man becomes a pulse of light in a dark landscape. He disappears into historical time and re-emerges in an echo. Tay John is the progression made from the blood of a dinosaur. As in Birney's "November walk near False Creek mouth", man is placed in

a context by the eye that can see a million miles up past shelves of clouds or downwards through shelves of the sea.

He listened to the seconds, ticking, measuring his mortality, theirs the only sound in all eternity where suns flamed and stars wheeled and constellations fell apart. A woman's laughter reached me from the building. I shook myself. . . .

The civilization growing up around Tay John is ludicrous in its self-importance. In the midst of its birth/death it feels no need to destroy him; it doesn't have to; the book contains no obvious myth of the scapegoat removed from society. Everything will disappear. Dobble's dream of a "Lucerne in the Rockies" — a sort of Banff Springs Hotel before its time — in the end rots under the snow. "You might say Dobble left barely a trace behind." Even New York, one of the steps along the way for the woman Ardith, echoes Conrad's sepulchral city in *Heart of Darkness*:

It was there in that sculptured city, in that outpost of man in time, in that white tombstone of the future, that she met the Canadian man of railways.

ONCE O'HAGAN has established the base of the book — the myth with its power and fragility — he is able to turn to the role of the storytellers. These men are separate from the source of power. They may eat off the table which has soaked up Tay John's blood but they get no closer. In the superb scene in which Tay John fights the bear, Jack Denham, who witnesses it, is separated by a raging river he cannot cross but which is only two yards wide. He is unable to cross over into the arena of pure myth. And not till the fight is over does Denham provide a social context:

He had won. *We* had won. That was how I felt. I shouted. I did a dance. . . . A victory is no victory until it has been shared.

And so the event becomes the centre of 'Jackie's tale' told to his cronies in the bars Denham inhabits, and for the rest of the book it is Denham who searches for "the remnants of his presence". Denham, we discover, is one of those men who loves the wilderness as opposed to "the treacherous period in town" but who is still overcome by raw nature:

. . . when you turn your back upon it you feel that it may drop back again into the dusk that gave it being. It is only your vision that holds it in the known and created world. It is physically exhausting to look on unnamed country. A name is

the magic to keep it within the horizons. Put a name to it, put it on a map, and you've got it. The unnamed — it is the darkness unveiled. . . .

"Yellowhead," "Yellowhead." I had to give a name so that I could help him — morally, you know. I had to align him with the human race. Without a name no man is an individual, no individual wholly a man.

If there is irony and qualification in the novel it is directed not towards the source of the myth but to the story-teller's need for order. Tay John comes into the world without a name or shadow and he is given several names and several kinds of a shadow "to align him with the human race". But words we have seen are part of the imperialistic disguise for an unnamed country, the social mask for the amoral human grass. Words bring morality and immorality. Tay John himself says hardly more than two sentences in the whole book. The action of the novel begins when Red Rorty the trapper takes the words of a preacher literally:

We who believe . . . are a small army. We must go out and take our message to all the world. . . .

He burns down his cabin and goes among the Shuswaps, a John the Baptist to Tay John's later arrival. Most revealing on the status of the word is Rorty's death when he is tied to a tree and his beard set on fire:

With the fire his mouth opened to shout but no sound came from it. Yaada took a small round stone and shoved it between his jaws, and it stayed there, as a word he tried to utter, while the flames began to roar around him. . . .

While the ground was yet hot and smouldered, Yaada and some others returned.

They found the skull, fallen to the ground and caught in the black twisted roots of a tree. The stone was still between its jaws. Yaada took a stick and pointed.

"See!" she said, "he was a great liar, and the word has choked him!"

Religion, like the word, brings values which are totally unnatural to the landscape, and it takes men such as Father Rorty with his "priestly arrogance" down twisted guilty paths to suicide. Even Tay John in his hand-chopping scene echoes his father's naive belief in words and metaphors and performs the act yelling, "If your hand offend you — cut it off." It is his one unnatural act and he is replenished later on with a steel hook. The Shuswap tribe is also riddled with custom and words and, although they are "closer neighbours" to the earth, Tay John leaves them when their ceremonies and laws limit him. They too are waiting for the moral voice of a leader.

As a narrator Denham is saved by his neutrality, his interest in other words. "In Edmonton I saw no newspapers for several days. I was too much taken,

maybe, with the labels on whisky bottles. Good reading that. . . ." He has his own flippant life to live. He is not, like Conrad's Marlow, living almost by proxy. He knows the story will exist without him.

Not that I feel any responsibility to Tay John, nor to his story. No, not at all. His story, such as it is, like himself, would have existed independently of me. Every story — the rough-edged chronicle of a personal destiny — having its source in a past we cannot see, and its reverberations in a future still un-lived — man, the child of darkness, walking for a few short moments in unaccustomed light — every story only waits, like a mountain in an untravelled land, for someone to come close, to gaze upon its contours, lay a name upon it, and relate it to the known world. Indeed, to tell a story is to leave most of it untold.

Denham is not the secure, more assured narrator of Conrad's Europe, but a voice genuinely apt for describing an unfinished legend that is reshaping before his eyes. Tay John's life is seen only in the brief seconds of lightning in the night; the rest is tentative meditation. The source therefore dominates our minds.

For these reasons the style of the book and its themes are sensitively linked. There is for instance a very specific way in which O'Hagan describes his characters and this structure of characterization parallels the movement of the whole book. Take the first descriptions of Red Rorty. In the first sentences that deal with him we see him as a fragment of the landscape: "In 1880 one man remained by the Athabaska river where it flowed through the mountains." Then we are given one detail about Rorty — his ability to shout. Then the paragraph ends by moving from the clear image into something that is almost mystical:

At other times he would shout when there was nothing to shout for, and would listen and smile when the mountains hurled his voice — rolled it from one rock wall to another, until it seemed he heard bands of men, loosed above him, calling one to another as they climbed farther and higher into the rock and ice.

The long shot, then the close-up, then the eventual dissolving out of focus into something mysterious and uncaught is the general movement of the whole book. After the tough, tight power of the first two sections the last section is diffuse and scattered — literally "Evidence — without a finding." This has an irritating effect on the reader. For instance — where the book should be reaching its crisis or denouement, four pages from the end, O'Hagan suddenly introduces a new character-witness, Blackie, and gives us a portrait of him that takes up two of the last four pages. The story is taken away from Tay John. What is important about legends now is the effect they have on other men. And, as with all stories told, it is crucial for us to trust and believe in the character of the story-teller.

The dispersing of tension in this way is, I think, intentional on O'Hagan's part. The narrative force is lost because in this new civilization legend tends to have a more decorative role, something heard about in bars, with hideously little to distinguish it from the drama of rumour. Tay John and Ardith not only disappear into the earth, they disappear from the minds of men who have other things to do.

I remembered, too, that woman was the death of heroes and the destruction of heroes' work — but heroes, those vulnerable men, are gone from the earth, and woman's power therefore no longer what once it was.

Both Tay John and Ardith, though hero and heroine, have lived on the boundaries of civilizations. Tay John, when we think back, is the accidental intruder in every scene — in the world of the Shuswaps, with the Aldersons, in the resort at "Lucerne". He is given new names in every setting and he slides through all his roles like water. He leaves just fragments of his myth behind, he has no cause or motive or moral to announce and as a result is of no worth in these new societies of commerce, religion, and imperialism. His life, in the midst of all the words, is wordless — as the core of the sun, which gives off so much light, is pitch black. He is vulnerable to fashion and progress and his only strength is the grain left in the memory and in the hope he will emerge in the future in different forms.

LIVESAY'S HOUSES

Susan Zimmerman

IT IS PERHAPS NATURAL that Dorothy Livesay should write about houses, for the identity of woman has always been tied to the home. A home, generally speaking, is a house with a wife and mother inside it; the woman is the keeper of the hearth. As a young girl, she must choose whether or not to accept this role. The question will depend on her need of a hearth for herself; she will usually find that if she needs one, it is she who must tend it. *Signpost*, one of Livesay's earliest books, is about such a choice. I would like to begin with that book, examining in detail the story told within it, then look more briefly at some of the later poetry in which the question is restated and answered afresh.¹

In the epigraph to *Signpost*, the poet describes the two alternative ways of life between which every individual must choose. As we shall see, the decision is especially difficult for the woman, and it is particularly a woman's development the poet traces.² The choice, then, stimulated by the spring, is between digging in one's garden (intimately associated with houses throughout the poetry) and following "the flight of the crows" (who lead an uncertain but free life, "led by a veering sign-post"). The dilemma is presented lightly here; it is only if we have read later poems, from "City Wife" to "Page One", that we recognize its importance.

Yet the title of Part One, "Sober Songs", may give us a clue. The section deals primarily with the individual's attempt to be free, to escape all enclosure. The woman here identifies herself with the outdoors rather than the four walls and hearth which are her traditional domain. The first poem, "Staccato", takes place inside a house, but the writer feels uneasy. Even in a warm bed she is not safe from night, wind, or the phantom of a man. So in "Weapons" she moves outside:

Lest I be hurt
I put this armour on:
Faith in the trees,
And in the living wind.

To keep her integrity, she feels she must turn away from the man. She tries to protect herself from injury by not believing what he says; she is cynical and refuses to commit herself in a human relationship:

Could I have thought there was something greater
For my heart to gain
By running away untouched, unshackled,
Friends only with sun and rain?

(“The Unbeliever”)

She wants, above all, to be secret. She knows that a woman's nature makes her “as earth upturned, alive with seed”, but she had hoped to keep this from her lover. She realizes now that she is bound and free at once; consequently, real escape is impossible — the lover, or any man, may know her passion, her thoughts, even her body, for they are all revealed in the spring, her special season (“Sun”). So her very “weapons” give her away. Now she is as vulnerable as the first crocus. Her “spring” is threatened by a “breath of winter”: there is something about the lover “relentless/ as the March wind's arrow” (“Ask of the Winds”). The young woman becomes wistful, a quivering bird (“If Looking Were Saying”), wondering how the lover will react if she visits him unasked (“Interrogation”), afraid a single word from him might make her tense heart “snap” (“Climax”). She who had faith in the living wind is now betrayed by it, for the night wind, unlike the daytime wind, belongs to the man. In his garden, alienated, left out of his “radiance”, she stands shivering from the cold (“Alienation”). She dances once more, but only because of his “blindness”: “Your blindness saves my self's integrity.” She tries to reveal herself subtly, through the sign-language of colour, but he willfully misunderstands (“Perversity”). Even her friendship with the sun is over, now that she has learned to weep:

I dread the sun
For his fierce honesty.
(“In the Street”)

She has learned, too, how to reckon the damage done by sorrow (“Song for Solomon”). She realizes that the man does not love, as she does, immediately and with passion; his loving is “too slow” for her (“The Difference”). The lovers part, but are held together (“Chained”); the woman finds herself unable to escape his “cobweb image” (“Dust”); and the thought of him still fits “like a glove” (“Time”). A house, appropriately enough, symbolizes in “Neighbourhood” this lost human relationship, which had disrupted her earlier relationship with nature.

In the last "Sober Song", "Wilderness Stone", she falls asleep at the edge of a field, dreaming of a house with a warm fireplace. She did not need this house before the lover invaded her skies; in the daylight, she was friends with sun and rain. But waking in the cold night which is his symbol, she realizes her homelessness: allegiance to field, sun, and rain are no longer enough. She needs a hearth, after all.

In Section Two, "Pastorals", the woman chooses to go indoors. "Threshold" documents the change; much is gained, but something is lost as well:

This is the door: the archway where I stopped
To gaze a moment over well-loved fields
Before I sought the fire within, the bright
Gold sunlight on the floor, and over all,
Upstairs and down, some clear voice singing out
Music I knew long since, but had forgot.

Now she can only look out from her doorway at "the fields of noonday sun"; but she has found something she needed, "a resting-place":

Balanced for this brief time between the thought
Of what the heart has known, and must yet know.

There follows a period of peace. The natural things of her youth on the prairies had filled her with excitement — "sharp pain/ Sudden and sweet", a "quick pulse", "wonder", "delight" — things she knows she could still experience. But a quieter beauty is taking possession of her: the "orderly succession" of Ontario roads and fields, "a sober-mantled loveliness", contentment. There is a place inside her for tamed things as well as wild: "This land grows like a garden in my heart" ("Sonnet for Ontario"). A gentle sun pierces the clouds; a lonely tree — like her — becomes "surrounded by its neighbour trees" ("September Morning"). She sees the joy of the brown earth again, and realizes that though people cannot stay in a "sun field/ Of wayward grass", nature's wild raspberries, grasses, and bees will inhabit it (" 'Haunted House' "). Nature has become separate from the woman, though it gives her joy: the lovers share a moment of perfect intimacy among the delphiniums by opposing themselves in laughter to "the sober-sided bee" ("The Intimates").

Her thoughts go back in time; her sympathy grows broader. When she was young, rain and wind had meant only her love and her "love's house"; now, looking back, she thinks of her grandmother and her grandmother's house, understanding something of the nature of the place and the woman ("Green

Rain"). She begins to analyze people outside herself: the "people of the farms" in "Prince Edward Island", the old men in "Vandal" and in "Old Man". All three of these poems are written in the third person; the last, "Old Man", deals interestingly with the male problem of getting back to the hearth he has left, "the glowing fire, the steady certain light". But this seems to turn the woman's thoughts back to her own situation as keeper of the hearth: the final poem of the section, "City Wife", is once more written in the first person. Spring has come to the young wife in the poem; and spring, we remember from the epigraph, "is for ever a question". So the city wife asks herself questions, suddenly enchanted by "knowledge of wind and sun on open fields". Reality, she has decided, is the "scarlet sun", or perhaps the harsh song of the crow. The crows turn her mind "from quiet thought,/ Serenity, to unexpected fire". Her very heart becomes an open field upon which she feels "slow feet treading". She has discovered the incredible beauty of the wild cherry trees, and she is afraid. She runs away, but:

No! the spring sweetness was too much: a voice
Seemed to cry loud and louder: Turn! Turn once —

She is afraid to look again at the loveliness behind her

. . . lest any evil chance
Should tell us how life vanishes . . .

As she walks homeward, she hears "lost ecstasy fall back". She hopes to bind her husband to her in the quietness of the dark, but still the wild crows haunt her:

Is it a song they shout —
Or a warning cry?

She cannot finish her song, for her husband is coming home. She cannot hurry her spring-time, but must be silent again, as the elm at the gate/ Which broods till the time of leaves". She longs for joy and passion, but the elm advises her to be "still and enduring". So she waits. There is a suggestion that, by identifying with the city wife, the poet has become dissatisfied. The winter inside was long; spring is coming.

In Part Three, "Variations", the woman examines her position. She has, by this time, taken up her role of housewife in the most literal sense of that word: that is, she has been joined for ever to the house. If Solitude or Loveliness should knock at her door, the house itself will deliver her message; she cannot, for she is now "a thing they'll not meet" ("Testament"). She takes up a woman's ways, stealing the poppy from the field and enchanting a farmer on the road ("Fable").

She cannot live with magic and joy, but must shake the stars from her hair "to be common again,/ To have common care". Joy is a "snare" and a fearful one at that ("Song for Departure"). She wonders if her freedom might ever return:

If I should walk lightly again
As the swallow flies,
My feet in time with the rain,
My head in the skies. . . .
(*"Daedalus"*)

Then, perhaps, she could kill her own fear, restore her own pride. The relationship with the lover is tainted. The woman criticizes the man's ways of thinking, which "are cold and waxen and remote" (*"Sea-Flowers"*). Their conversation has become "biting analysis" (*"Consideration"*). Yet she stays where she is; and the following confession, tossed off lightly in *"A Confidence"*, is significant from someone who has considered following the flight of the birds:

Once I am in a place, it's hard to get out,
It's hard to get away:
Once I sit down anywhere
I like to stay.

In autumn the couple share one day of truce, though both are described as "thieves", who are "in the noose" (*"In the Wood"*). Then presumably the truce is over, for the woman leaves the house, only to discover that her spirit stays behind. It is interesting that the "stranger" says goodbye to the House itself, not to the man inside it (and notice the capital letter). The woman still runs in the halls of the house, and stands grieving at the gate. When night falls, she too must go inside and climb the stairs, for she is "fast rooted to this place". (*"Farewell."*) Finally, in *"Protest"*, the woman defends herself from attack. Can I help it, she asks, if the spring-time makes me, like the maple, remember "solitude" and independence? Can I help it if I see the flock of crows pinned against the sky, and "seize forgotten ecstasy"? It is my fault that the winter is over; is it any wonder if, instead of the washing, I "hang my secrets on the line?" Perhaps she is suggesting that solitude and flight have been unfairly denied her, and that writing these poems releases her frustration, and gives away her "closed thoughts", her dissatisfaction. But she is still caught: though she expresses herself, she uses the language of housewifery. Though she leaves the house, her spirit belongs to it. She does not seem to believe any more that following the birds is a real possibility in her life.

IT WAS MANY YEARS before Livesay returned to this problem in its personal and sexual aspects. In the social poetry of *Day and Night*, she did not forget about houses or the flight of the crow. She had decided, however, that individual liberty would have to wait for social liberty. The crow still appeals to the young, this time to the outsider:

The thing I feared, the crow
Was hoarse with calling, whirling, diving down
And suddenly his urgent social bent
Was answer to my inwardness.

("The Outsider")

He leaves the house for the city, but learns that there is "no milk nor honey flowing there". When he returns, "the house/ Receives him without wonder." *Signpost* had been a question; "The Outsider" answers it in social terms:

This is your signpost: follow your hands, and dig.
After, the many will have parachutes
For air delight. Not veering with the crow
But throbbing, conscious, knowing where to go.
There's time for flying.

The horror of capitalist industry was that it infected the home, the bed, the heart:

We bear the burden home to bed
The furnace glows within our hearts. . . .

("Day and Night")

And, as in "The Outsider", Livesay asks the individual to put aside his personal desires for love or liberty in the interests of the revolution. "West Coast", too, deals with the problem: Livesay's own house had to make way for the huts of the shipbuilders. Was it worthwhile? It was essential that the decision be made according to social rather than personal criteria.

This social concern of Livesay's, once awakened, was not lost, though later it takes second place to more personal questions. After the war, she was no longer certain of the proper priorities; as many readers have noted, her Marxist evangelism is replaced by compassion. Houses and homes remain at the centre of her concern. In "London Revisited" (*Poems for People*), the poet describes a tour of the ruined houses of the city: "long fingered wall", "house disembowelled", a bombed cellar full of grass and goldenrod. She had not come to London for this,

but for "printed Golders dancing" and "happy Shepherds hunting". Instead she falls in the dark, and recaptures the terror of homelessness:

And above, no ceiling.
And below, no wall.

Nothing, no "mushroom houses", can erase the past, when "winter was".

Similarly, *Call My People Home* examines in its broadest sense the concept of "home", using it to condemn the treatment of the Canadian Japanese during World War II. Livesay tells how the Japanese had wanted "to make a home near water" and "put down their roots". The Isseis tell what home meant to them: the uprooting; the fisherman explains: "Home was my boat" and, after thirty years, the internment is "the end of my boat, my home". The Niseis had "called British Columbia home"; now they learn they were wrong. The Mayor, who knows what is needed, says: "This is your home." He vows that by spring, "This village would be home." Then comes another choice, another move, "a prairie place called home". Finally, the Niseis discover the real meaning of the word: "Home . . . is where life is." It is "something more than harbour", more than family; it is "labour, with the hand and heart", and something much "rougher", "tougher", "more magnetic" than anything they had known. All Livesay's compassion and understanding is expressed through these homes and uprootings.

But by this time much of Livesay's concern had once more become personal and sexual. In *Poems for People*, for example, we find alongside such poems as "London Revisited", "Of Mourners", and "FDR", the intensely personal "Page One". This poem describes one of the key experiences in Livesay's own life.³ It uses the winter-spring polarity we have seen in *Signpost*, and once again the flight of the birds is a symbol of freedom. The poet goes back to her first house, her father's, describing her life inside it as "ten frostbound winters". The young girl is "manacled", "in bondage"; even play is "an ordeal to be endured". In the wintry landscape of her youth, she sees how the boy-shapes of trees are made into "ladies" by the snow. The snow is lovely, of course: in winter there are "glass palaces" about which a girl may dream. She can trace the life of a princess in the crystal; she can pretend, for a time, to be that princess. The romantic fantasies of young girls have their beauty:

O might there always be
Those wishes three
That dazzling evanescent dress

Those pearls, those tears
That slipper made of glass —

But not for me.

This is no Cinderella: "The ice that bound her could not be her home." So, in the spring, she responds to the cry of the wild geese. Her ambition is not simply to leave this house for one of her own: no, the geese know of a whole forest to be conquered and she too feels "no one home hers, but all homes to be found." More than twenty years later, Livesay retells the experience in prose; she still insists that she had been in bondage, and recounts with joy her first liberation, the liberation from childhood:

... I was really lifted from the earth to see the sky itself. . . . And I saw the horizon! I saw its farther shores. From that day onward I had a different feeling about my father's house — the small white clapboard house, the brown fence railings, the boundaried street — these were no longer the hedge to keep me home. These had been like fetters, holding me down. My two hands soared upward, . . . longing to break forth free where there was only earth and sky, and a race of geese going north. ("A Prairie Sampler".)

Instead of "going north", we have seen that the poet goes to a new house, becoming wife and mother. She celebrates this position, but knows its cost. The mother "cannot walk alone"; "she cannot think alone" ("The Mother", *Poems for People*). The woman, like the female pheasant, is "pinioned". The poet is glad to bear children, but she wants the choice. So she is distressed by the sight of the pheasant and her warden:

... he: pleased grin, smile slant on him
Swore she'd breed yet! And nevermore would soar
Into the cloudy image of her lair.
(*"Pheasant", Poems for People.*)

Certainly she loves the hearth and the keeping of the hearth:

At the end of a day my hands hold heat;
Dipped in the fire of love, they burn
Like radiant isotopes, to illustrate
Where hours went: hot in the washing water. . . .
(*"'Invisible Sun'", Call My People Home.*)

Her hands go from child's face to oven, from cupboards to the making of beds. They are "scalded" and "burned" during the day, but this enables them to shape

"an invisible sun" in the night, "to be the veins of warmth within a room", a source of power and of love.

Still, this woman never quite fits the conventional stereotypes, not even the ones she documents in her own poems. Her dreams and desires are for much more than "land, . . . four walls,/ Four hands in a green garden" ("The Traveler", *Selected Poems*). She is not "essence of serenity" in a narrow room. Nor could anyone say of her what she says of the "geranium":

Whatever falls
She has no commentary
Accepts, extends. . . .
(*"Bartok and the Geranium"*, *Selected Poems*)

She is "daylight", but not content to be daylight only; she cries for darkness and knowledge:

Bind me with ropes of darkness,
Blind me with your long night!
(*"Nocturne"*, *Selected Poems*)

She refuses to be merely what "men prefer"; she insists on her own freedom to experience everything, to be "mainland" rather than "island", to turn to every orchard, hollow, mountain, field, and road rather than "forever winding inward" ("Other", *Selected Poems*). She hears with sorrow the old "battle of the bone" between the sexes ("Wedlock"), and wonders if some unity cannot be found:

One unit, as a tree or stone
Woman in man, and man in womb.
(*"On Looking Into Henry Moore"*, *Selected Poems*)

So with this desire for unity, Livesay comes back in *The Unquiet Bed* to the problem of houses and freedom. In "Ballad of Me", she reviews her life, remembering an attempt to escape house and husband:

And what fantasies do you have?
asked the psychiatrist
when I was running away from my husband.

But her purse has only "wishes" in it; so the psychiatrist solves her problem by denying it:

He sent me back home
to wash dishes.

Increasingly, she is concerned with reaching a compromise. In "Roots", she remembers Lowry: how, in "a house indifferent to strangers", he was not indifferent. And there are other, small compromises — ways to bring the outside in, "the sea roaring/ into the living-room". She returns once more to the house of her childhood, from which she had escaped so many years before, and remembers that spring had come even to her father's house, a "wild birth" of nasturtiums. In the same way, she had been planted in that garden "and never transplanted". The picture of her childhood is much more complex now that it had been in "Page One", for there is value in the garden as well as in the flight of birds.

The woman has learned to regard her housewifery with humour; she makes a truce with the house. "In between the everyday bread of doing", of cleaning sinks and tubs and vacuuming rugs, she "sandwiches" the reading of poetry. It is true that she uses the imagery of housekeeping to describe her reading: searching for "secrets" instead of linens on a shelf; "looking for silver spoons"; cleaning out an old trunk to find the poet's "photo of himself". Yet she shares the young poet's struggle, though she will never tell him so:

... his nakedness
 awkwardly visible behind the shining suit
 and his eyes, wrestling
 are mine also.
 ("To a Younger Poet")

The compromise is most clearly stated in "Woman Waylaid". There must be days when the woman will refuse to collect wood for the greedy, gaping pot-bellied stove. As Peter Stevens says, "She makes her choice as individual woman and she is free to make that choice."⁵ Of course, it will be a cold night; but the demands of housewifery must occasionally be resisted if the woman is to retain her individuality. When she sits in the open doorway, she is part of nature again:

I am a banquet
 bussed huzzahed!
 ("Empress")

She can feed on the morning sun, be "one/ with rolling animal life" ("Sunfast"), no longer alienated from her own element. Perhaps, like the "Pear Tree", she can stretch herself, "grow and glow" without tearing up roots: have the advantages of flight and of the hearth.

Finally, the "unwithered" woman is ready to try loving again, provided that love makes room for her, and recognizes her individual nature:

I'm not just bones
and crockery
(“The Unquiet Bed”)

She had escaped one set of “chains”; now she hopes for a love that “might set men free/ yet hold them fast/ in loyalty”. She tries to assess frankly what motivates each partner in “Four Songs”. But sexual love seems to require “The Taming” of the woman; she had learned the meaning of the words “Be woman” in an act of housewifery, cooking for a man and being told “Do what I say, woman.” Yet she still requires shelter and so is vulnerable:

I drown
in your identity
(“The Touching”)

She begins once more “to walk with pride”, as she had anticipated in *Signpost*; as her past shrinks behind her, once again her head is in the air, and she is taller (“A Letter”). In exchange, she has become uneasy inside the house, as she was in the first poem of *Signpost* — the phantoms are back: “Sometimes the room shakes” (“And Give Us Our Trespasses”). She dances differently, is “no longer desperate”; at the same time, she is totally vulnerable, “undressed to the bone”, with no defences left (“The Notations of Love”). She has come to depend on the hearth and the bed, “the paraphernalia and props” of love:

without the body of your house
I'd have no home.
(“Moving Out”)

At the end of the personal poems in *The Unquiet Bed*, in other words, we see the poet “moving out”; she has made peace with housewifery but not with “love’s house”, to be found only in the man’s body.

Her attitude toward the houses in her past has mellowed. In the dedication to *The Documentaries*, she pronounces a kind of blessing on them: on her father’s house and her grandmother’s house, her love’s house, prairie houses, Vancouver houses, a house in a field, a house in the city, the houses she had escaped and the houses she had built. She realizes, perhaps, that they have been the vessels of her life: in houses she has been child, lover, wife, mother, hostess, guest, above all woman. Her life can be summarized by a list of houses, and to these she dedicates her book:

For all the houses —
and those who came.⁶

The importance of her personal houses for the social poetry is emphasized by introducing and ending the "documentary" poems with "two subjective, autobiographical poems".

IN LIVESAY'S LATER WORK, the two editions of *Plainsongs*, we find the woman grown older and perhaps wiser. She knows she is "bound", but knows also not to believe the lover when he pretends to come only "for self-seeking ease" ("The Cave"). Once she had been afraid of being touched; now she realizes it is "not to be touched" that brings old age and insanity into her life ("Sorcery"). Because she is old, she must live inside: "a sceptred bird" has pecked out her eyes; and she dreams that she moves "in darkness now", behind closed windows ("Dream"). When the lover refuses to marry her, she finds herself in a familiar place, the dark garden from *Signpost* ("Auguries"). She knows how to recognize the signs of parting — in "Auguries", "The Sign", "The Uninvited". At last she can move in and out of cages, but she is old and alone. So she bird-watches instead from her window, sees "bird life free". More and more the house becomes a vantage point from which she observes the world. In the warm cabin, she remembers freedom and love "when there was no cabin built" but only the house of love: "its foundations our arms only" ("Birdwatching"). Now, however, she needs the fire and the four walls. Under her windows, the young and the free march with flowers ("The Metal and the Flower"). She worries about children, grandchildren, the world. Though she has come to terms with her own past, she does not think that the limitations placed on her as a girl were right. She describes the process of repression, using imagery reminiscent of "City Wife":

... a girl in spring
 looking at green fields unfolding
 must be blinkered
 hands re-folded
 A girl longing for breath
 of wind of love?
 must turn in a narrow bed
 clean white sheets
 hand-washed and hung
 on the line in the sun
 and never dance
 on the clothesline herself

And the moral is this:

You did not find
everything you wanted
but you learned to accept
everything you found.
(“Centennial People”)

Not Dorothy Livesay. When the man leaves her, she recovers her freedom, moving “up the mountain” (“Another Journey”), measuring herself as an individual and a woman (“The Operation”), wondering whether bisexuality — which had first called her indoors — or asexuality is really more advanced (“De-Evolution”).

The second edition of *Plainsongs* also emphasizes the house as vantage point (“Where I Usually Sit”). It is more concerned with the houses of the past, however — concerned, first of all, that they be retained, for it seems that birds can only be free where the old houses stand:

hold hold the houses down
build fences round the birch, the rowan tree
where robins still may come
(“Edmonton Suite”)

There is concern also with the old houses as “Canadiana”: the grandmother’s house, a weather-stained house on the beach (“Seashelter”), a “House Amongst Trees”. They are “The Artefacts”. She can hear the breathing of the old house though the young cannot; she alone understands its sleep and its movements, values its history, and knows its place in time:

In the middle of the night
the house heaves, unmoored
launched on a vast sea.
(“The Artefacts: West Coast”)

The poet leaves us with a “Weather Forecast” for her life and the world. She carries “leaf shells” into the house, which has become a place of safety for her. She is sixty years old, she tells us, and it is autumn; but “spring is still/ a verifiable/ possibility.”

She lives inside the house, “behind glass”, because the world is “frosted with snow” (“Where I Usually Sit”). Never does she give up her bird-watching, her hope of spring. She has bequeathed her dreams of freedom to the young, who may be able to fulfil them: she hears behind “The Children’s Letters” a familiar

voice "stuttering/ at the sky/ 'bird... bird...'" . They relive her youth, her "Halloweens"; perhaps their choices will be different; they cannot help but learn from hers.

NOTES

- ¹ As my concern is largely with "Woman" in Livesay's poetry, and I deal primarily with the lyric poetry, I review much ground covered by Peter Stevens in his article, "Dorothy Livesay: The Love Poetry" (*Canadian Literature* 47: pp. 26-43, Winter 1971). However, my viewpoint is not the same as his, and in most cases my reading of individual poems is quite different.
- ² This is generally true, I think, of the lyric poetry. In the social poetry, the poet is equally concerned with male and female approaches to freedom and the hearth.
- ³ She writes in *How Do I Love Thee* that the poem is "personal" and "about my Winnipeg childhood" (ed. John Robert Colombo, Edmonton, Hurtig, 1970, p. 12). Furthermore, she retells the experience in an autobiographical memoir, "A Prairie Sampler" (*Mosaic* 3: pp. 85-92, Spring 1970).
- ⁴ I assume this group of poems is from *New Poems* (1955), of which I was unable to find a copy.
- ⁵ Peter Stevens, "Dorothy Livesay: The Love Poetry", p. 26.
- ⁶ The book itself is full of houses, of course — a neighbour house (p. 2), and the house in "Ontario Story" (p. 6), as well as those I have already mentioned in "The Outrider", "Day and Night", "West Coast", "Call My People Home", and "Roots".

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CLOSED CIRCLE

Nancy J. Corbett

ONE OF THE MOST impressive qualities of *The Double Hook* is the fineness of the correlation between content, form, and tone. All are spare, elemental, and dramatic. From the essential simplicity of the work, many meanings open out and reverberate so that finally a great depth is achieved; the structure is a skeleton and the author, instead of padding it with flesh, polishes the bones until they glow.

The novel's structure is that of classical comedy, concerned with the social relationships of a small community and the transformation of that social order from the grip of the old regime into a more vital, life-oriented one. The fact that there are elements of tragedy contained in the transformation is quite consistent both with Aristotle's definition of comedy and with the example of Elizabethan plays of that genre.

The setting emphasizes the isolation of the little community in which the drama takes place. The bare, dry hills enclose the people, setting them apart as if on a stage, and imparting a quality of self-containment to what happens there. There is no tie to the larger, external world, and apparently no one to discover or care about the murder of Mrs. Potter. Not even God watches them; as Ara says, "there were not enough people here to attract his attention." Burials and births are handled by the community alone, which is thus a law unto itself, and a harsher law than any an outside authority could impose. Only James Potter tries to find a way out of the isolated, enclosed setting, and the road he takes is a dead end, barricaded by his mother's spirit.

It is essentially a childless setting, in spite of Angel's ragged brood who are in the beginning merely misfits trailing after their mother, who is like a stray cat "trying to step her way through the puddles of the world. Fighting the dogs. Mousing for her young."

The objective world pictured in the novel reflects an invisible, absolute order; the condensed syntax and clustering of images around the central metaphor of the double hook creates intensity and underlines the classical structure and

bare setting. These spare, terse qualities are reflected in the style and tone of the prose; for example, the account of the murder on which the book hinges occupies a single paragraph:

James walking away. The old lady falling. There under the jaw of the roof. In the vault of the bed loft. Into the shadow of death. Pushed by James's will. By James's hand. By James's words: This is my day. You'll not fish today.

The characters fit into this dry, spare world precisely and, like the units of a constellation, take their unique places in the novel's symbolic pattern. Without always being explicitly described as such, they represent objective forces such as Destruction, (Mrs. Potter, Greta) Fear (Coyote, Mrs. Potter) Creation, (Gretchen, Felix) Light, (Heinrich) and Insight (Kip, Coyote) as well as unique individuals. There are many references to the elemental nature of the characters also, Mrs. Potter and Greta representing Fire and Air; Ara, Water; Lenchen, James and Angel, Earth; and Felix, Air. The images of these people and their world form an integrated pattern which is as economical, complex, and carefully structured as a poem; the mystical truth embodied in the novel is ideally suited to its narrow, pseudo-poetic form. By isolating her characters as if on a stage, and focussing the pitiless eyes of the sun and Coyote upon them, Sheila Watson achieves an intense, transcendent quality which supports the spiritual and mythological content of the novel effectively.

The theme of the novel is the end of the old order and the birth of a new one, but this transformation does not result solely from James's physical action. Awareness, consciousness, is necessary to accomplish it, and therefore the theme of sight and insight is woven into every page of the novel. Each character is defined in terms of how he sees, what he sees, and, perhaps most importantly, how he feels about seeing. It is not ordinary perception which is the issue here, but a kind of seeing through or beyond ordinary events in order to discover their hidden meanings. This recurrent theme rests on a very profound and extended cultural base; the idea of a special sight is familiar to all mystical thought, from the "Third Eye" of the enlightened holy man of the East to the general description of individuals who possess prophetic powers as "seers" or visionaries". "He that has eyes to see, let him see"; and "There is none so blind as those that will not see."

IN THE BEGINNING of *The Double Hook*, the land and the people are parched, sterile, and hopeless under the dominance of Mrs. Potter

and Coyote. Both of these characters are omnipresent and all-seeing; as it says in the first line, all the action takes place "In the folds of the hills/under Coyote's eye". His extraordinary sight, however, as well as Mrs. Potter's, is used only for spying. The old lady sees all, but in a very important sense she is blind, searching with a lighted lamp for something in the broad daylight, something which she never finds. Coyote, the outsider, inspires fear in the people because he is inhuman and detached from the community, uninvolved and therefore merciless as he laughs at what he observes. He is a totemic figure who releases spirits and controls them, and his creative power is used perversely.

Coyote made the land his pastime. He stretched out his paw. He breathed on the grass. His spittle eyed it with prickly pear.

The life-giving forces of breath and water eye the land with monstrous, spiky plants; the eyes he creates and uses are hard and troublesome to people.

Under the influence of Mrs. Potter, the individuals of the community are isolated from each other and inarticulate. They are blinded by wilful ignorance and the denial of perception, a deliberate refusal to see which stems from fear: as Kip observes, "Angels can see but Theophil's let fear grow like fur on his eyes." Ara is aware of her lack of perception and says bitterly to William, "Could I be blinder than I am? Seeing things only in flashes." The Widow insists, fearfully, "I hear nothing. I see nothing." Mrs. Potter is, like Coyote, an inverted figure with great emotional power, having given life only to strangle it. Her grip extends beyond the human community to the barren land itself, since she "was there in every fold of the country," and it lasts beyond her death because she has created a successor in her daughter, Greta.

More than any of the others, Greta is the victim of the old woman's negative, life-fearing aura, and although she had been as eager as James to be rid of her oppressive presence, she is not freed by her mother's death. On the contrary, she inherits the old woman's characteristics and takes her place as mistress of the sterile house. As James soon realizes, Greta has merely replaced Mrs. Potter: she had

... sat in the old lady's chair. Eyes everywhere. In the cottonwoods the eyes of foolhens. Rats' eyes on the barn rafters. Steers herded together. Eyes multiplied. Eyes. Eyes and padded feet. Coyote moving in rank-smelling.

Nothing had changed.

Ara reflects, after Greta destroys herself by fire, that Greta "had inherited destruction. . . . She lived no longer than the old lady's shadow left its stain on

the ground. She sat in her mother's doom as she sat in her chair." Part of this doom is the rigid, fear-based repression which masquerades as morality in the wasteland of the old woman's world. The grip on the young girls is particularly harsh; William admits that Greta was the victim of far more pressure than he or James, and that she too had once been as free-spirited as they.

You wouldn't know how she was. Sliding down the stacks and falling into the creek. Ma was hard on her, he said. She thought grief was what a woman was born to sooner or later, and that men got their share of grief through them.

For a short time after her mother's death, Greta tries to manipulate the power she feels is now rightfully hers. She denies the truth and refuses to "see", snapping at Angel's question, "Why don't you take your own lamp and go looking for something?" and warning Ara not to interfere:

You've been seeing things, Ara . . . Like everyone else around here. You've been looking into other people's affairs. Noticing this. Remarking that. Seeing too much.

But she is literally burning with resentment, destroying herself finally because she "never thought of anyone. Not even herself. Only what had been done to her." Identifying with her mother, she projects her self-destructiveness on to James, saying that he will kill her too and comparing herself to a moth drawn into a flame. She is a victim of the old order, her mother's order, but James asks, "must the whole world suffer because Greta had been wronged?"

The answer is no. With the old woman's death, a new force has been released and Greta is too closely tied to Mrs. Potter's identity to survive her destruction. At Greta's death, Coyote cries ironically, "Happy are the dead/for their eyes see no more." In the living, however, changes begin to take place. Ara, dry and barren, fearful that William is the father of Lenchen's child, has a vision as she walks toward the house where Mrs. Potter lies dead of a dry stone coming to life:

She bent towards the water. Her fingers divided it. A stone breathed in her hand. Then life drained to its centre.

This vision, so reminiscent in its quality to that of the narrator's experience who looks into the drained pool in Eliot's "Burnt Norton" and sees it suddenly "filled with water out of sunlight" is repeated for Ara. With Greta's death Ara, the dry one,

remembered how she'd thought of water as a death which might seep through the dry shell of the world. Now her tired eyes saw water issuing from under the

burned threshold. Welling up and flowing down to fill the dry creek. Until dry lips drank. Until the trees stood knee deep in water.

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

Through Ara, William comes to see that his perception is not deep enough. She tells him, "You're seeing things all the time, but you never look at anything here" and he finds, on reflection, that this is true: "... I've not seen what was growing up in my own yard. It's like a man who stands on a rock looking over a valley. He doesn't notice the rock, he said. He just stands on it." His basically positive view of life, that "it's better to be trusting and loving", begins to come closer to realization.

Heinrich moves from the fear he felt at "seeing light the way I've never noticed before" to an acceptance that he must "be born into a light which burned but did not destroy." When Greta burns herself to death, he is able, with William and Ara, to contain the destruction and stop the fire from spreading.

Lenchen is subjected to the same uncharitable hardness as was Greta; in her mother's eyes, she is "a fat pig of a girl" once she has lost the price of marriage, her virginity. But unlike Greta, Lenchen has strengths which save her. She has spirit and independence, and is not cut off from the natural world. As her brother Heinrich says, she "was part of any animal she rode. Moved with its movement as if she and the horse breathed with the same lungs. Rode easy as foam on its circling blood. She was part of the horse. Its crest and the edge of its fire." This unity with life and movement makes her strong; she is not destroyed by the rejection of her by her mother and lover. She is a physical and creative force, and as the values of the community move from death toward life, her guilt ("all because of me the whole world's wrecked") is transformed into absolution and regeneration of the society.

Kip's role in the novel is that of Coyote's human counterpart. He has a unique gift of perception; Coyote calls him, "Kip, my servant Kip". But seeing implies responsibility; it is Coyote's lack of responsibility that makes his omniscience so frightening. Unlike him, Kip is tied to the human community and it is his perversion of his special gift, by trying to blackmail Lenchen, which leads to his punishment. He is not allowed to retain his place as seer and messenger if he abuses it. James, the most active agent in bringing about the change from old to new, blinds him with a whip. This is not the gratuitous act of violence it might seem, but comes only after many warnings from Heinrich, William, and

Theophil. Kip himself accepts responsibility for bringing it about: "I kept at him like a dog till he beat around the way a porcupine beats with his tail." Like Lenchen, the blinded Kip turns to Felix for help, and it is this which causes Angel to leave Theophil, who refuses to "see", and return with her children to Felix. Because she had seen things through Kip's eyes, she mourns his blinding: "Who'll see anything worth seeing now?" Angel is aware of the healing quality of Felix's spiritual gifts, but she returns to care for Kip and Lenchen because, as she says, "there's things to be done needs ordinary human hands."

THE CONFLICT between the older, repressed, death-oriented figures and their children resulted in Lenchen's exile, Greta's death, and Kip's loss of sight. Through James and Felix, however, a new way of life is made possible for the future. James is the physical father of the new order; he does what not even God could do—he stops his mother's fishing. His strength is thus established at the beginning: "This is my day." (p. 19) and although he is unable for a time to assert himself positively to take her place, his action has been decisive, and he is determined to break his mother's hold completely. He tries first to escape her influence by running away; he rides to the distant town, only to learn that distance is not the answer. The town is merely an extension of the wasteland he has left, and is full of its reminders. The first thing he sees there is the river, and "the dark figure of his mother playing her line out into the full flood." He spends his time in the town in the company of Traff, the man whose thick yellow hair reminds him of Lenchen.

After losing the money for his escape in an encounter with a whore, James thinks of Lenchen and their coming child, and "saw clearly for a moment his simple hope." From secret lovemaking, denial, and escape he moves to openness, determination, and a sense of the values in his life: "Whatever the world said, whatever the girl said, he'd find her. Out of his corruption life had leaved and he'd stepped on it carelessly as a man steps on spring shoots." The change which has taken place in him is rewarded; fate grants him a new beginning when he returns to find his mother's house in ashes. He experiences liberation and rebirth with this dramatic ending to his mother's power: "He felt as he stood with his eyes closed on the destruction of what his heart had wished destroyed that by some generous genture he had been turned once more into the first pasture of things." He resolves to build a new house, for himself and Lenchen. His transformation and assumption of responsibility most clearly exemplify what Margaret

Morriss has called "the religious ritual celebrating the re-entry of love into the wasteland."

As James creates a new world through his actions, Felix Prosper nurtures the growth of that world and takes his rightful place as its spiritual father. In the beginning he is inert and passive; his indolence has caused Angel to leave him, and he passes his days "sitting there like the round world all centred in on himself", his mind recalling fragments of the Latin mass, impotent and irrelevant. He considers chasing the old lady out of his pool, but cannot make the effort. His images are all religious; "St. Felix with a death's head meditating", "anointed", but they are only fragmented reminders of his abdicated role. He exists, he accepts: "Things came. Things went." And he turns away from drinking the cup of "her bitter going" which Angel left to him.

When he is needed, however, he begins to come to life. He takes Lenchen in and, not knowing what else to do, he blesses her. It is, he murmurs, "Introibo — the beginning." Then Kip comes to him and Felix, making a great effort, goes for Angel. Finally direct, he says "I need you" and to this, she can respond. He is useless in practical matters, but his union with her gives him strength so that he is able, when the time comes, to help deliver Lenchen's child. He also takes on his family responsibilities as he has never done before: "When a house is full of women and children, Felix said, a man has to get something for their mouths." His initial paralysis has been replaced by leadership; the return of Angel restores the satisfying balance between his vision and gentleness and her practical, intuitive wisdom.

In the end, Kip accepts his altered state and finds a home for himself with Felix, and Lenchen becomes a madonna, bearing new hope for them all. Even her bitter mother, who had supported the old order, finds that "there are things so real that a person has to see them. A person can't keep her eyes glazed over like a dead bird's forever." She repents, opens her heart, and is able to find a place for the new child.

The community experiences a collective miracle of unification, centering on Felix's house. It is marked outwardly by the birth of Lenchen and James's child, and inwardly by Felix's experience of transcendence as he watches the birth:

If only he could shed his flesh, moult and feather again, he might begin once more. His eyelids dropped. His flesh melted. He rose from the bed on soft owl wings. And below he saw his old body crouched down like an ox by the manger.

He is the spiritual father of the new baby (whom Lenchen names "Felix"),

just as James is the physical one. The victory of life and unity over the divisive force of fear is accomplished; a new order, more vital and more humane, has replaced the old.

The clarity and concentration of the dialogue and description in the novel are outstanding. The work appears simple because of the sparseness of the style and the primitive, circular movement from death to life which is simultaneously its structure and its content. It has a classical effect, a feeling of ongoing truth which is not bounded or limited to specific time or place or people, and this elemental nature is emphasized by the fact that, throughout the novel, the lines between man and landscape are blurred. Coyote, who makes fear articulate, is both animal and human, a figure of prophecy and adversity. He speaks last.

It is clear that the new order is not a simple replacement of the old repression with unrestricted freedom, but something more subtle and difficult: an acceptance of the dual nature of existence, and a refusal to let the presence of fear continue to dominate the community. Fear is still present, but it is no longer omnipresent. As the child's birth symbolizes hope, Coyote's final message is a reminder of the price of hope: life is both pain and pleasure, and if the pain is not accepted and dealt with, it will grow and overwhelm the community. Life is a double hook, and both sides are swallowed together or not at all.

When you fish for the glory you catch the darkness too. . . . if you hook twice the glory you hook twice the fear.

PRIAPUS IN THE DANSE MACABRE

Peter Thomas

ROBERT KROETSCH's three novels, *But We Are Exiles* (1965), *The Words of My Roaring* (1966), and *The Studhorse Man* (1970) reveal an increasingly confident literary personality. Talking to Peter Sypnowich of the practice of fiction, Kroetsch insisted upon total dedication through act of will:

I do agree you have to give your life to it. That's what Canadians shy away from — the act. This surrender of the will — the Americans did it to us, the weather did it, the English did it — is a good old Canadian characteristic.

This assertive view shows itself in the novels as a species of vitalism: Kroetsch's heroes are compulsive actors, doers, drawn into the paradoxes of apocalyptic romanticism, especially in sexual terms. Reviewing *The Words of My Roaring*, Clark Blaise quoted Blake — "the road of excess leads to the palace of wisdom" — a view which he found "happily confirmed" in that novel. Despite the pretension of its title, the anthology *Creation*, recently edited by Kroetsch, illustrates this central obsession with the creative and self-destructive aspects of the assertive ego. But Kroetsch has been aware from his first novel of the duality in his romance of the extreme situation. The drive to freedom is also a quest for death. Whatever the egotistical assertion achieves, it is an ambiguous triumph. This is extended, furthermore, into the artist's relations with his created world. In his Introduction to *Creation*, Kroetsch quotes Heinrich Zimmer in *The King and the Corpse*:

The involvement of the gods in the web of their own creation, so that they become . . . the harried victims of their creatures, entangled in nets of not quite voluntary self-manifestation, and then mocked by the knowing laughter of their own externally reflected inner judge: this is the miracle of the universe. This is the tragicomic romance of the world.

The "harried victim" of his own "creatures", the artist is mocked by what he makes. The act of creation is a tragicomic revelation. The "externally reflected inner judge" refers directly to what Kroetsch calls in an interview with Margaret

Laurence “this *doppelgänger* thing”; the romance of assertion, and the grandeur of defiance, are always mocked by the “inner judge”. In the same interview with Margaret Laurence, he reiterated the theme:

Tragedy looks a bit pretentious now. At least to laugh is . . . absurd? A ferocious hope, maybe?

Further, and with direct reference to *The Studhorse Man*, he set the terms of his fictional mode:

Comedy tells you that there is no cause and effect, that chance operates against it. The studhorse — it's not moral or immoral.

What is surprising, in view of the assurance of these remarks, is that Kroetsch has evolved so rapidly from the manner of *But We Are Exiles*, where “this *doppelgänger* thing” was a grim wrestling-match indeed. Kroetsch's priapic hero has been transformed from the principal in a claustrophobic, inward-turning personal catastrophe, to the fool in a cosmic comedy.

THE THEME of *But We Are Exiles*, is drawn, as the epigraph suggests, from the myth of Narcissus. In the opening scene, Peter Guy, pilot of the *Nahanni Jane*, a Mackenzie River working-boat, is peering over the bows into the water. He seeks the body of Mike Hornyak, the boat's owner, drowned when he leaped overboard, burning, after an explosion. At first, Guy imagines something emerging to “entangle him”, apparently “his own face” which offers to “kiss” him. This implicit identification of Hornyak with the image of Guy's self-love becomes clear as the novel progresses, with the *doppelgänger* theme given one of its familiar variants as the narcissistic mirror-reflection.

The action of the novel covers two journeys. Forced to abandon the search for Hornyak, the *Nahanni Jane* proceeds down-river to the sea with its cargo before turning to make the home-run to Yellowknife. This return is complicated by worsening weather conditions, since the delay of the search has taken the boat into the dangerous late fall. Unexpectedly, Hornyak's faceless body is discovered on an island by two Indians, who tow it in a canoe to the *Nahanni Jane*. Rather than take the corpse aboard, the crew place it, still in the canoe, on an empty barge they are pulling. Thus Guy is “tied” to Hornyak as he contrives to pilot his boat through crisis to safety.

Even in outline, Conradian analogues suggest themselves, particularly *The Secret Sharer*. The quest for the Other, the river journey motif, and, in the pilot

role, the typical Conradian theme of freedom-through-mastery may be noted. These structural analogues do not, however, end here. Guy is implicated in Hornyak's death (he handed an unmasked light to the latter as he went below to inspect the boat), and the pattern of crime, guilt, and expiation is self-evident. Moreover, the crew are at first quietly pleased by Hornyak's death (they despised him), but as the boat experiences more and more difficulties they turn on Guy and lay blame. This, with the pilot-role, the "tying" of the corpse, and the Everyman symbolism of Guy's name, inescapably recalls "The Ancient Mariner". Hornyak also has "a tattoo of a ship in full sail" on his arm. With the presence of Kettle Fraser, Hornyak's wife on board, one crew member complains of her "showing up like some kind of a haunting spirit that won't let us alone".

It is not Kroetsch's indebtedness here which concerns me. It is possible that *But We Are Exiles* was his personal Battle of the Books, but, more generally speaking, it is the moral opposition the analogues suggest which throws most light on his development to *The Studhorse Man*. For the third analogue is with Kerouac's *On The Road* or even, perhaps, the frenzied car-drives of *All The King's Men*. The Conrad/Kerouac opposition is between disciplined self-mastery and the ultra-romantic dream of total Experience — that other myth of "freedom" which consists of the repudiation of all law save the egotistical assertion.

Hornyak's appeal is emphatic:

"Chaos, boy. Stay young and hang loose." And Mike fed more gas to the wild horses under the hood of that black Rolls.

And the flat country then. Dusty and dry. Dry and dusty and hot. Wheat country. And the first elevator. There at Dufresne, alone and reaching, like a great damned phallus, like one perpetual hard-on.

This assertion, the willed chaos, finds in Sex its field of metaphor. As Kettle says of Hornyak: "He consumed me the way he consumed everything. You lived for him, Peter. Either you lived for him or you stopped living." Kettle speaks as Echo, fading in the self-sufficing fire of ego. The phallus is, of course, Hornyak's emblem (as his name implies): an instrument, the adage insists, without a conscience.

But to "kill" the ego-drive, as Guy seems to do, is too simple a solution. For Hornyak also poses the question of freedom which surfaces throughout the novel. The energy and vitalism of self-love retain their attraction, since they repudiate guilt. Guy's "freedom" is freedom to endure ("Running and searching. That was it.") and to find in the pilot's role the release of mastery. Even this, however, may be seen as a form of masochism, or at least puritanical self-indulgence, and

another kind of egotism. The ambiguity of this yearning to be free and alone in Guy's terms is expressed by Kettle's father, who refuses ever to leave the North. "A man is free here. You ever heard the word? He is so free that nothing else in the world is ever as good again. Never. But it's like a screwing jail, this place." The return of Hornyak makes Guy "burst back to life" — only to recognize his own form of self-love: the puritan's tight-lipped pride. Kettle clarifies the dilemma in her plea to him (revealing, as Echo, that in loving both Hornyak and Guy she recognizes the two faces of Narcissus) "Break the mirror for me. Break it, break it please, smash it, Peter. Listen to me, smash it." Guy must accept oneness with Hornyak, and the conclusion of the novel symbolizes this paradoxical fusion of identities. Racing against time, the *Nahanni Jane* loses headway in a blizzard on the Great Slave Lake and the crew decide to cut-away the barge carrying Hornyak's corpse. In the worsening conditions, Guy is pitched on to the barge and cannot return to the *Nahanni Jane*. Thus Narcissus challenges Tiresias's prophecy in the novel's epigraph ("so that himself . . . he know") by approaching the canoe and Hornyak. The faceless condition of the body (echoing *The Secret Sharer*) is a revelation to Guy of his own emptiness; he climbs into the canoe, under the blanket which provides the only warmth on the barge, and thereby "joins" with the image he has tried to reject. Narcissus dies in the knowledge of his own sterile infatuation; the egotistical assertion, for all its dynamism, is a kind of death. The vitalist is acknowledged as a frozen, headless corpse.

THIS LAST IMAGE permits a leap forward to Hazard Lepage, the Studhorse Man himself lying frozen on the slab in the Coulee Hill beer parlour, for Kroetsch has remained faithful to his obsessions. But the shift in tone, from introspective agony to comic picaresque, is also indicative of increased control and confidence as Kroetsch defines his mode.

The Words of My Roaring offers few easy literary analogues. The questing hero undergoes a significant revision, however, as the scene is shifted from the Mackenzie to rural Alberta. While the mythic structure of *But We Are Exiles* and the large natural symbols of river, sea, and annihilating snow can hardly be ignored, the texture of the prose, even the frequent thought-stream passages, is essentially realistic. But the prose is itself a product of Guy's consciousness: being repressed, cryptic, and unable to respond adequately to the power of the Mackenzie setting. Almost as if he sensed the lost opportunity of his first novel, Kroetsch expressed the expansive, potentially poetic Hornyak-consciousness in

The Words of My Roaring, abandoning Guy's taut limitations. In Johnnie Backstrom, undertaker of Coulee Hill, the priapic hero is now comic:

My name, let me say once and for all, is Johnnie Backstrom, and I am six-four in my stocking feet, or nearly so, a man consumed by high ambitions, pretty well hung, and famed as a heller with women.

Against Hornyak's consuming triumphs we may now measure Narcissus as anti-hero. The death-lust of the ego is expressed, comically, by Backstrom's profession (at which, as the novel opens, he is failing). The paradox of will-to-live as drive-to-death is symbolized by Backstrom's big black hearse (itself a version of Hornyak's arrogant Rolls). It is this hearse which Backstrom uses for drunken, randy excesses, and for the purposes of the election campaign — providing the main action of the novel — in which he is a candidate. The *doppelgänger* theme is here reversed in its operations. Driving home from a beer parlour in the hearse, Backstrom injures his friend, Jonah Bledd. Industrious, a model of consistency and responsibility, a good family man of few words, Jonah embodies the life of disciplined self-control — being a weaker, less dramatic shadow of Guy. Losing his job because of the injury, Jonah's sense of order and justice is shattered; his anxieties lead him to suicide, by drowning in a lake. Backstrom's guilt is explicit: "In a way it seemed to me that I had killed Jonah," while at the same time, "I was feeling as if I had drowned." "Hornyak", then, has killed "Guy" — the moral register which controlled, at least somewhat, his apocalyptic yearnings. The motif of death by water persists in Kroetsch's fiction to become central in the symbolism of *The Studhorse Man*.

Free of Jonah's restraint, only one figure stands between Backstrom and Hornyak's "chaos". This is Doc Murdoch, his rival candidate, who officiated at his birth, loved his mother, and tells the people, "only maturity can serve our needs." The ego-conflict of *But We Are Exiles* is now extended to the struggle of the prodigal against the just father. Backstrom's "platform" consists of the single, absurd promise that he will bring rain to the drought-stricken prairies and save the crop. Reason, the slow unfolding of human trust, and patience, are opposed by a kind of magic-man in cap and bells. The clown and his magic — are these truer to the nature of Backstrom's profession, death, than the physician's faith in human intellect and measured experience? Backstrom again echoes Hornyak: "Sometimes I think that chaos is the only order. The only real order."

Probably the most definitive single scene in the novel (and one of Kroetsch's

finest to date) shows Backstrom attending a rodeo and witnessing the death of a clown in the arena:

The body mangled and ripped by those gouging horns, the innocent figure mutilated, rolled and trampled in the stinking dust. The spirit struck into frantic despair; I saw it all right.

The image of the broken clown converts Backstrom, for the first time, into a figure of eloquence and power. He has his text in the absurd violence of the scene which, by extension, becomes the justification for his own clownish defiance of all order. Jonah Bledd's name suggests only too clearly the bleeding victim with his faith in moral design. When rain *does* fall on the eve of the election, the clown appears confirmed in his "wisdom".

But Backstrom's relations with Murdoch work against a simplistic conclusion in the triumph of chaos. On election-eve Murdoch is called out to the complicated labour of an outlying farmer's wife. Her child is still-born, and Backstrom must bring a coffin. As Backstrom and Murdoch ride together, the former implicitly accepts the subservience of his role (the dealer in death) to the latter's. Murdoch has always represented moral authority to Backstrom: "All my life when things got tough I went running to Murdoch" — but the egotistical assertion denies Doc's kind of love. Backstrom leaves, "driving hard for the old chaos." Though he is capable of guilt, and at first wishes to concede victory to Murdoch, the last scene of the novel shows Backstrom driving towards an election-eve meeting under a compulsion to go on competing. In *The Studhorse Man* there is reference to John Backstrom, MLA.

As in *But We Are Exiles*, the sexual theme expresses the life-forcer's will to assert most explicitly. But while Kettle Fraser's role as Echo only emphasized her essential insubstantiality, Helen Murdoch, daughter of the Doc, is given depth. She is the virgin-queen Backstrom must possess ("I hated her innocence"); as they make love repeatedly and nightly in the Doc's much admired garden the symbolism is clear: the desecration of beauty by primitive energy. Caliban has enraptured Miranda under the eyes of the good and wise father. Yet Backstrom, unlike Hornyak, is dignified by guilt and by insight into his own desperate course. It is Helen who makes fitting comment on his condition — for Woman must preside over Priapus's defeat, as she has served his triumph:

I've watched you, Johnnie. You talk. You hunger and thirst. You strike and thunder and roar. You're never still a moment. But in the end you smash.

The virgin and the clown, Priapus mocked by death, the drive to freedom as

drive to oblivion — Kroetsch's themes clarified in *The Words of My Roaring*, enriched by the comic mode which dispelled the neurotic intensities of his first novel.

It is impossible to escape the impression, too, that *The Studhorse Man* was not recognized, lying like a chrysalis in the shadows of its antecedents. At first, the note is supercilious, when Backstrom admits: "I'm not ashamed to say that somehow or other I enjoy the smell of horse-shit once in a while." But as he drives "for the old chaos" along Route 313, he is permitted a glimpse of "his" fictional evolution:

I saw two horses in a yard, a gelding, its tail putting up a vague resigned resistance to all the swarms of flies, and a stallion: a big stallion, pale blue, ignoring the flies, pawing at the post to which it was chained.

The mighty blue stallion, Poseidon, which Hazard Lepage, hero of *The Studhorse Man*, leads about the country (with a gelding), is in a natural line of progression towards the ultimate, simple, mastering phallus — symbolic of creative mastery. The transition from Guy (with the implication of a tethering rope) to Hazard, the "free" victim of chance, is clear.

IT IS SELF-EVIDENT that Kroetsch is fascinated by the sheer license of fiction — not only in accepting the "tall story" tradition, for which Backstrom is a natural subject, but also as release from the puritan prose of the Guy-consciousness. The limitations of the roaring-boy hero within a realistic frame are, at the same time, themselves obvious. There is just so much to be found in that surrogate rebellion (inoculated by comedy) which the picaresque offers, unless it accepts its own anarchic logic. Within the realistic frame (however flimsy) the picaresque hero is confronted by the representatives of *social* order in due succession. But there is no progression, no expansion, of the terms by which he is defined. He is, indeed, restricted by the very custom and social convention against which we see him. The picaresque is limited by the laws of chance, not "probability". Furthermore, the "pure" picaresque hero is truly heroic in so far as he carries the total moral burden. He is not a representative of society (and therefore "obligated"); his only order is his quest for purpose or his flight from persecution. Yet he exposes the irrationality of his context by revealing its frenzy to destroy him or its inability to do so. "Society", in these terms, is bound by its own causality and structure. The improbable, the untethered, unrealistic picaresque is its unadmitted dream of release.

Hazard Lepage, the hero of *The Studhorse Man*, takes Kroetsch far from the repressed prose of his first novel to what might be called, using Robert Schole's term, the "fabulating" mode. The fabulator "asserts the authority of the shaper, the fabulator behind the tale" and "delight in design, and its concurrent emphasis on the art of the designer, will serve in part to distinguish the art of the fabulator from the work of the novelist or satirist. Of all the narrative forms, fabulation puts the highest premium on art and joy." Furthermore:

... The really perceptive writer is not merely conscious that he is using mythic materials: he is conscious that he is using them consciously. He *knows*, finally, that he is allegorizing. Such a writer, aware of the nature of categories, is not likely to believe that his own mythic lenses really capture the truth. Thus his use of myth will inevitably partake of the comic.

It is this last point which distinguishes, I believe, the mode of Kroetsch's most recent novel from his first. Self-conscious use of myth is one thing; self-conscious self-parody in the use of myth is another. In this Kroetsch has moved from the dramatic fable to the complex and essentially comic "fabulation".

The Studhorse Man is narrated by Demeter Proudfoot, a madman who chooses to spend his time in the asylum seated in his bath-tub. His name, and the device of the "tale told by an idiot", proclaim the assault on realism which persists throughout. "This portentous volume" (as its own last words describe it) is strewn with a kind of haphazard (the pun is intentional and functional) allusiveness, so that an air of intellectual activity, if not of cohesiveness, is established very quickly. While the Narcissus myth provides the central thematic thread of *But We Are Exiles*, the myths of Demeter and Poseidon (the name of Hazard's fabulous blue stallion) are fragmented and distorted schemes of reference in *The Studhorse Man*. Their order is mocked as it is utilized. What is consistent is a wholesale pattern of recurrence, an unabashed use of coincidence and analogy so that a *sense* of order is implied despite the lack of a binding metaphor. The texture of *The Studhorse Man* is rich and various; what may be suggested here (selectively, for the novel deserves fuller treatment) is the manner in which Kroetsch gathers up the threads of his past fiction in this most recent work.

Hazard Lepage has one aim: "I am breeding the perfect horse"; his quest is for mares for Poseidon to serve. But Hazard has a "preposterous fear of death . . . especially death at sea" as a result of the warning given to him by an old woman in a flooded farmhouse in France during the fighting at Passchendaele Ridge (his father was killed at Dieppe). Substantially, the novel turns on the pun of *mare* (sea), which Hazard fears as death while seeking compulsively for the "mare"

of his need. The Rolls, the black hearse, and now the stallion that is both death and life. At the end of the novel, Poseidon kicks Hazard to death. In a brilliant late scene, Hazard is literally brought back from the dead by Martha Proudfoot, his long intended, in the refrigeration-room of the Coulee Hill beer-parlour. The central thematic pun is made explicit:

Martha was champion against our promised end. Death was a nightmare presence bent on snuffing Hazard into a longer darkness; it was the crone and succubus, the ancient fiend turned female that in the night of dream has fatal intercourse with men. Yes, and the moon was a cold bright disc on the sky: Mare Frigoris, Mare Hiemis, Mare Incognito.

Where Hornyak and Backstrom had served the priapic authority of their own egos, Hazard achieves a kind of grandeur (despite his own formidable bedding) by leading everywhere on foot the animal whose phallic majesty so diminishes his own. Hazard bows before "the huge and penetrating rage of the stallion's passion to possess"; his own condition, part-parodied as it is, is potentially tragic:

He was the man from whom each farm must have its visits; yet he must eat alone, travel alone, work alone, suffer alone, laugh alone, bitch alone, bleed alone, piss alone, sing alone, dream alone . . .

Caught between "the stallion's passion to possess" and Mare Incognito, Hazard is fated to flee the sea and seek the mare and find they are the same thing.

Everywhere Hazard goes, the ambiguous dream "mare" calls him. Fleeing from pursuers, he collapses in a railroad car upon a shipment of bones:

And he was embracing the bones, gently, blindly, embracing the hard bones, dreaming the flesh, embracing already a dreamed woman, the soft large breasts that no man could drive from his dreaming.

Breasts and bones: the doubleness of existence in hazard — and between Hazard and Martha (and her mares) stands Tad Proudfoot, her uncle. Tad's function throughout (as the name implies) is to be Adversary, the authority who must deny Hazard's quest:

That old son of a bitch of a Tad . . . he told me he'd give the mare for nothing if I promised never to have it bred. Figure that one out.

Mocked by the father-figure, Hazard himself expresses the eternal creative rebellion. Advanced on his quest, he takes up with Eugene Utter, the image of "old chaos" itself, whose most significant act is to burn down to the ground a school-house in which he and Hazard intend to shelter, naked and frozen from crossing

an ice-strewn river. Utter has no "quest" except the revelation of chaos, the act of denial, the repudiation of reason. "We are free men at last", he can say, standing by the smouldering ruin. Doomed, as he seems to be, to live *in extremis* with Utter at his side, Hazard's search has itself caricatured the social images of permanence and ordered rule. By a process too complicated to summarize briefly, he adopts an RCMP uniform while himself fleeing from the law — and in this condition finds temporary sanctuary in a Home for Incurables, where he meets an assortment of aged decrepits, including Torbay Proudfoot, the "oldest surviving member" of the clan. Expressing by his uniform "the eternal violence of law and order" Hazard plays cards with the assembly and wins every trick, until he realizes that Torbay will not try to win. "I goddamned well want to live for ever too," the latter insists. The Incurables are those who hold on to life as minimal existence. Their degradation is expressed by the activities of Stiff and Hole, fornicating publicly, a wrestling heap of filth and wasted flesh. The sexual motive must be the drive to master and to seek, "to breed the perfect horse," if it is not to be a perverse expression of horror of life.

Hazard flees from the Incurables in a clergyman's dress, no more effective against the true chaos than the police uniform, as Kroetsch "fabulates" a complex fictional world in which History and "Society" are mocked by chance and irony. In a very funny early scene, Hazard takes refuge in the provincial museum, housed in the Legislative Building in Edmonton. Just before he enters he comes across the spectacle of Poseidon rising in splendid anger against a bronze statue of a rearing horse. The spectators insist on Art's triumph over life: "The artist has done it. In bronze. Forever." Art, too, mocks Hazard's search for perfection in the living flesh. It is, however, an artist who comes to Poseidon's defence. Ludicrous though the whole scene is (Kroetsch has a genuine flair for farce), the import of P. Cockburn, curator of the provincial museum, and an artist herself, choosing Poseidon and Hazard before the bronze, is clearly another repudiation of formal law. Taking Hazard within, P. Cockburn succours him upon an antique bed upon which three wax figures stare: an Indian chief, a buckskinned early explorer, and a red-coated Mounted Policeman. Canadian History? Hazard repudiates this encapsulated order, too — this mummifying of the living truth. Characteristically, his response to the brooding stare of History is crude and emphatic: "I screwed the ass off her."

Hazard's concern is with the *source*, not with the structures of time. It is significant that Poseidon came to him as a gift from an unknown Indian, whom Hazard saved from drowning. Out of the original land, a gift from the original

men, and, in the drowning motif, a reminder that the fabulous stallion must himself lead Hazard to death in the unknown waters. His clergyman role parodies Hazard's religious meaning, ministering to the great horse. It is here that Kroetsch most expresses the fabulator's disbelief in "his own mythic lenses": for Hazard remains *in service*, the clown who serves the king, finally destroyed by Poseidon's hoofs. Hazard has no vision of the creation myth in which he acts:

'The stallion Eternity
Mounted the mare of Time,
'Gat the foal of the world.'

(W. B. Yeats, "Tom at Cruachan")

Hazard's fall from mythic pretensions (even such as farce and parody allow him) comes before his death. "Saved" by Martha from Mare Incognito, he is repudiated by his chronicler, Demeter Proudfoot, for compromising his quest. "You have betrayed your own cause." In the last scenes of the novel, Demeter steals both Poseidon and Martha's five mares and attempts to hold out against all comers in Hazard's farmhouse. The madman preserves the dream — the "uttermost" of them all. In the final irony of the book, Eugene Utter and Martha take up together and Poseidon becomes "the busiest creature in all of Alberta" in the new industry of PMU (pregnant mare's urine) used in the production of oral contraceptives. The creation myth concludes not with a bang but a whinny.

In tracing Kroetsch's progress from fable to fabulation certain conflicts appear. They are embodied — and there is some self-mockery here — in the person of Demeter Proudfoot. The observer sitting in his bath is surely derived from the famous example of Diogenes the Cynic, who took up residence in a Tub best to display his contempt for luxury and the sensual world. For Kroetsch's priapic heroes are seen (after he broke the mirror of Hornyak) as essentially absurd questers compelled by the sensual itch yet denied the consummation they so passionately wish. For all the energy and joy of Kroetsch's fictional world, it is realized by a mind which distrusts its own compulsions. As the name Demeter suggests, furthermore, the goddess of fertility and growth becomes, in *The Stud-horse Man*, the cause of Hazard's death and, by extension, the reducer of Poseidon's myth to prophylactic technology. It is a "cynical" conclusion.

E. J. PRATT: *Rationalist Technician*

Frank Davey

LITTLE HAS BEEN WRITTEN about E. J. Pratt's handling of language and poetic form. His early reviewers and critics (Brown, Pierce, Norwood, and Collin) noted mainly his "vivid rhetoric", "surge and swing", "muscular lines", "energy and clamour", plus the epic point of view of his narrative poems. Later critics (Sutherland, Dudek, Sharman, Frye, Buitenhuis, Smith) have become overwhelmingly preoccupied with the thematic implications of his work. Even Frye's recent comments on Pratt's use of the epic mode have been directed more toward explaining certain limitations in the intellectual content of the poetry than toward illuminating its craft.¹

Only A. J. M. Smith has attempted any detailed examination of Pratt's imagery. Although he too is more concerned with implication or content than with technique, his few technical comments are illuminating. At one point he tells us, "The qualities of the writing are speed, tautness, objectivity, and sharpness."² At another, "This is the poetry of wit."³ As most students of Canadian poetry know, wit, objectivity, tautness are all qualities Smith has sought in his own poetry. Smith has, of course, found similar qualities in the work of many poets he admires. Nevertheless, in Pratt's case I believe he is extremely close to the truth. In fact, I suggest that Pratt's concepts of poetic form and language are precisely of that rationalist kind most familiar to Canadian readers in the work of A. J. M. Smith.

An examination of Pratt's work reveals that he shares Smith's concept of the poet as a detached, dispassionate observer, that he believes in the myth of poetic objectivity. He appears to view the universe as rationally ordered, and to see the poet's task as consciously imparting a similar order to the creative work. Above all, Pratt, like Smith, can be seen to stand outside rather than inside his poetic materials, shaping them through sensibility and intelligence, rationally confronting "problems" of convention, language, and form.

Pratt's shorter poems readily betray these beliefs. They are nearly all fitted smoothly into received verse patterns. The point of view is that of the essayist or commentator.

The snarl Neanderthal is worn
Close to the smiling Aryan lips.
The civil polish of the horn
Gleams from our praying finger tips.
(“From Stone to Steel”)

Let the mind rest awhile, lower the eyes,
Relieve the spirit of its Faustian clamour:
An atom holds more secrets than the skies,
Be patient with the earth and do not cram her
With seed beyond the wisdom of her soil.
(“The Good Earth”)

There is little sense of subjectivity in them, even when the pronouns “I” and “my” replace the usual “we” and “our”. The pronouncements are made as ones of fact rather than feeling.

His [death's] medieval grace is gone —
Gone with the flame of the capitals
And the leisure turn of the thumb
Leafing the manuscripts.
(“Come Away Death”)

A number of these “essay” poems are made to appear “poetic” through ornamentation with imagery and metaphor.

Where do you bank such fires as can transmute
This granite-fact intransigence of life,
Such proud irenic faith as can refute
The upstart logic of this world of strife —
(“The Mystic”)

The imagery here is not endemic to the thought; it is applied arbitrarily by an authoritarian craftsman deliberately forging a specific effect. In some “essay” poems, such as “The Baritone”, a portrait of Adolf Hitler, Pratt creates elaborate analogies which provide a synthetic interpretive framework for the burden of the work. The result is clearly a poetry of the performing intelligence, of wit; it presents what is technically propaganda — subjectivity masquerading as objectivity.

He ascended the rostrum after the fashion of the Caesars:
 His arm, a baton raised oblique,
 Answering the salute of the thunder,
 Imposed a silence on the Square.
 For three hours
 A wind-theme swept his laryngeal reeds,
 Pounded on the diaphragm of a microphone,
 Entered, veered, ran round a coil,
 Emerged, to storm the passes of the ether,
 Until, impinging on a hundred million ear-drums,
 It grew into the fugue of Europe.

Such decorative and argumentative use of metaphor also becomes one of the principal devices of the long narratives.

A few of these short poems achieve the economy, the impersonality, and the fascination with pattern of Smith himself — notably “The Shark”, “The Drag Irons”, and “Frost” — although in most of them lapses into conventional abstractions and rhetorical syntax give a most uneconomical appearance. Nevertheless, even these lapses betray a form of rationalism. The rhetoric is another sort of received form, the superimposing of an intellectualized structure on reality in the faith that such a structure will fit. The abstractions show a mind convinced of the objective reality of classification and generalization, a belief very important to a poet who also writes epic narratives. In the epic such formulaic classification (“Hector of the shining helm”) and abstraction (“*eorlic ellen*”) allow for quick identification by the poet and instant recognition by the reader, so that both can pursue the narrative line without interruption by anything like literary ambiguity. In Pratt’s early lyrics they suggest only a sentimental belief in a regularized universe.

Here the tides flow,

 . . . with a lusty stroke of life

 That they might run
 Within the sluices of men’s hearts,
 Leap under throb of pulse and nerve,
And teach the sea’s strong voice
 To learn the harmonies of new floods,
 The peal of cataract.

(“Newfoundland”)

Beneath the facade of cliché, metaphor, and rhetoric are certain large assump-

tions: that life is struggle ("lusty stroke"), that man is mechanical ("the sluices of men's hearts"), that the universe is possessed of increasing order ("to learn the harmonies of new floods").

THE FACT THAT many of Pratt's "lyrics" are actually short narrative poems again points out his rationalist stance. There are two approaches possible in the narrative: the subjective, in which the narrator can be within the story (*The Seafarer*, *The Rime of the Ancient Mariner*, or in prose Richardson's archtypical *Pamela*) or the objective, in which he is excluded from it (*Beowulf*, *The Rape of Lucrece*, *The Rape of the Lock*, or Fielding's equally archtypical *Tom Jones*). Of all of Pratt's narratives only "The Iron Door" is of the former type, and even in it Pratt casts himself as a passive observer and focusses the narration on what happens before him rather than on what happens within him. The remainder of Pratt's narratives are of the objective kind, that in which the writer stands apart from his materials and in which he aspires toward Smith's ideals of impersonality and detachment. These narratives, like all of Pratt's shorter poetry, have very little explicit emotional content. There are no intimate relationships between characters, just as there are no expressions of intimate emotion in the lyrics. These characters are viewed from a distance, given identity only by their roles in the plot — a hero dog, an anonymous life-saver, a recalcitrant "truant". All become generic — the dog standing for its "breed", the truant for mankind.

It is not surprising that when attempting longer poems Pratt turned to the epic mode. In longer poetry the epic is the natural correlative to the impersonal lyric. The epic poet is totally detached from the story he is telling. He deals with it from a god-like stance — impersonally, making little attempt to involve the reader emotionally with its characters. The plot of the poem (comparable to the "pattern" of the lyric) is more important than its characters. The latter, in fact, are usually kept from having any large personal significance by a studied avoidance of psychological verisimilitude in their characterizations. They are viewed externally, superficially, and identified usually by formulaic, synecdochic, or metonymic tags ("Apollo of the silver bow"; "Diomedes of the great war cry"). Or they are characterized by their birth and genealogy, the process involving that essential of rationalism, deductive logic.

In the epic, the myth of objectivity which possesses the impersonal lyricist is joined by the myth of omniscience: the poet must appear to know the story in

its *absolute* form. The poet becomes an authority, responsible for his culture's history and obligated to maintain at least a pose of infallibility. The epic world is orderly and one-dimensional; it is conscious of few enigmas about its own character. It is rationalist to the point of believing that men are identifiable by tags and banners, that there is only one story implied by any one event, and, above all, that this story is knowable by man. The fact that the most that any so-called "objective" writer can achieve is subjectivity in the guise of objectivity is simply overlooked.

Two of Pratt's first three long narrative poems are mock-epic ("The Witches' Brew" and "The Great Feud"); the third ("The Cachalot") has a number of mock-epic elements. The mock-epic is even further removed from objective reality than the epic itself. As in the epic, its conventions are fixed and dominant, and bear no necessary relationship to the actual materials of the poem, but outside the conventions the poet is free to manipulate the materials into whatever shape best serves his personal and formal conceptions. The form requires no material, historical, or psychological realities. It is witty, fanciful, wilful, and synthetic. It possesses a reality fabricated in the human mind as opposed to a reality discovered in the circumstantial world. Described phenomenologically, the mock-epic offers a forged consciousness.

In each case Pratt presents reportorially scenes no human could observe — "The Great Feud" is set in the Pleiocene; "The Witches' Brew" and "The Cachalot" are set for the most part underwater. The reportorial mode is total. Despite "The Great Feud" being subtitled "A Dream of a Pleiocene Armageddon", neither it nor its companions contain any suggestion of authentic dream consciousness. The octosyllabics are terse, direct, and mechanically rhythmic. The point of view is clearly objective.

And thus it was throughout the whole
 Sea-range of the Australian zone
 The fear of racial doom was thrown
 Heavily upon the piscine soul.
 A futile anger like a curse
 Only made confusion worse.
 ("The Great Feud")

The imagery of these poems is the imagery of the inventive intelligence:

The bellows of his lungs might sail
 A herring-skiff — such was the gale
 Along the wind-pipe; and so large

The lymph-flow of his active liver
One might believe a fair-sized barge
Could navigate along the river;
(“The Cachalot”)

As long as Pratt is dealing with mythological creatures and arbitrary plots, and a deliberately superficial poetic mode, his manipulateness can be delighting despite the resultant inconsequentiality. But in the documentary narratives Pratt’s synthesizing habits are more troublesome. Their subjects are historical events; their agents are individual human beings with separate and complex identities which cannot be summed up in a deft image or a clever analogy.

Pratt appears to have done considerable research on the events of all these documentary narratives. Carl Klinck tells of Pratt’s sailing on a Canadian destroyer in preparation for writing *Behind the Log*.⁴ A number of sources, including Klinck and Dorothy Livesay,⁵ report his spending at least several days aboard the United States Lines’ *Roosevelt* before beginning *The Roosevelt and the Antinoe*. Klinck remarks that “he examined, with the technique of a detective, every deck, every log and barometric reading, and every person available where the liner docked in New York.”⁶ *Brébeuf and his Brethren* is based on the thirty-volume *Jesuit Relations*; *Towards the Last Spike* on newspaper and other records of the CPR’s construction. In all this research Pratt seems to have been prepossessed with the material and technical aspects of his subjects. Northrop Frye recounts:

In search of a monosyllable that would convey the hardness of rock, he ransacked a department of geology until he extracted the word “schist.” While he was working on *Behind the Log*, anyone in a naval uniform he met would be backed into a corner and forced to reveal what he knew (or, more frequently, did not know) about the anatomy of a ship.⁷

Pratt shows no corresponding interest in non-quantifiable or non-factual information. The only reality which interests him is the knowable one — that of miles, tonnage, names, quotations, that which can be weighed, cited, documented, or otherwise rationalized. There is no mystery or ambiguity in these documentary narratives. “This strangely reasonable poet,” as Klinck terms him,⁸ writes as if personality can be summarized in a few phrases, moral qualities in a genealogical metaphor, motivation in a single analogy. His research into his characters appears to stop on the threshold — with, in the case of Captain Smith of the *Titanic*, a list of ships commanded, misadventures encountered, and commands issued. Material reality is assumed to contain, if not be, the whole.

The Titanic and *Towards the Last Spike* are excellent examples of Pratt's rationalist method in action. In each case the point of view is that of the detached, omniscient observer. In *The Titanic* he ranges throughout and around the ship, seeing the birth of the iceberg, knowing the contents of the ship's hold, overhearing conversations in the saloon, witnessing physical combat in the gymnasium, a poker game in a lounge, the officers' activities on the bridge. In *Towards the Last Spike* he pretends to oversee Parliament, the construction sites, John A. Macdonald's thoughts, William Van Horne's dreams. The poet's private responses to these various events are concealed. In actual fact the majority of these events have been fabricated by the poet and passed off as actual. Klinck's account of Pratt's "reasoning concerning the poker game in *The Titanic*"⁹ makes clear the shrewd calculations involved in such a fabricating process. Pratt's rule seems to be that if an event is not totally knowable (and no event is), one must fake total knowledge. The existence of ignorance, ambiguity, or mystery is not to be admitted.

In both works Pratt's diction reinforces the overwhelming tone of confidence established by the omniscient point of view. The standard Pratt theme that nothing need be impossible to reasoning man is paralleled by an implicit assumption that nothing need be impossible to the careful poet. He can appear to know his subject absolutely. Research can give his diction two certainties: concrete detail and numerical exactitude. Invention can give it a third: dogmatic metaphor. The poet who can witness every event on a ship sinking ten years in the past is thus also one who need only declare a modifier or announce a metaphor to have these become arbitrarily, through his own authority, "true". This boldness of diction, metaphor, and analogy was suitable to the crafted gaiety of the mock-epics, and inspired his early critics to those comments about "infinite gusto", "boisterous writing", "energy and clamour." But in later poems such as *Towards the Last Spike*, where the reader can use his own experience of literal reality as a partial check on the fitness of the poet's figures, this temerity can lead to the inappropriate impression of extravagance and whimsy.

The most obvious characteristic of the diction of both these poems is that it is overwhelmingly specific—an important quality for a poet in creating the impression that he is totally in control of the substance of his narrative. Pratt's research has been scrupulous in gathering together the physical trappings of his subject: the *Titanic*'s "tungsten chandeliers", "Chinese lanterns", "columned smoke", "burnished tile", "fiddleys", "bunkers", and "boiler rooms"; the CPR's origin in "rolling mills and the saws that shaped "poles and sleepers", its prairie roadbed of "black alluvial mould", its "shovel gangs", "spiking gangs",

"fish plates", and "double jacks". Where his research could not have sufficed, he has synthesized details and presented them as document. In *The Titanic* the wrestling holds and boxing blows demonstrated in the gymnasium ("Russian Hammerlock", "Polish scissors", "German crotch", "left hook", "right uppercut which Jeffries took from Johnson") are probably of this kind; the numerous passages of dialogue undoubtedly are. In *Towards the Last Spike* the thoughts attributed to George Stephen, the passage telling of Van Horne's scraping at a frosty window with his jackknife, the passage in which Macdonald seizes a telescope, and the passage beginning "Van Horne took off/ His Coat" appear of dubious authenticity. A historian could probably find many more.

The second important characteristic of Pratt's diction in these poems is that it is consistently enumerating — again a characteristic which helps the poet toward a tone of confidence and knowledgeability. We are told that the *Titanic's* funnels have "thirty feet of bore", that her length is "from gudgeon to the stem nine hundred feet", that her engineering staff number "thirty-five", that her captain has "thirty years of service", that she has "seven decks of steel", "three electric lifts", that her tonnage is "sixty thousand tons of sheer flotation", "fifty thousand gross". Just before the collision, Pratt writes,

The ocean sinuous, half-past eleven;
A silence broken only by the seven
Bells and the look-out calls, the log-book showing
Knots forty-five within two hours. . . .

When the ship is sinking, we are told that number three boat, with "sixty-five capacity", is launched with only twenty-four aboard, that number one, "her space is forty", is launched with only twelve, that number ten is launched with a "load of sixty" who collectively weigh "four tons" and takes "sixty seconds of descent" from davits to water.

In *Towards the Last Spike* Pratt uses diction of a similar numerical specificity. Dollars, miles, the duration of speeches, the length of work shifts, the age of rocks, the thickness of strata are all given precise quantity or measure. Although Macdonald, Van Horne, Smith, and Stephen, the major figures of the poem, are cast as romantic visionaries who make their dreams dominate the obstinate weights and dimensions of material reality, it is to a large extent by relying himself on these weights and measures that Pratt attempts to make both dream and dreamer tangible to his readers. Thus Macdonald and his fellow railway builders appear to succeed despite measurable reality; Pratt as poet succeeds because of it.

Even when attempting to characterize these dreamers directly, Pratt resorts to a rationalizing technique: metaphor — which is the third and most outstanding characteristic of his diction. Metaphor in Pratt's work tends to be a restricting device. The subject of the metaphor is compared to a term or set of terms either less complex than the subject itself, or possessing a complexity irrelevant to the subject. The effect is to simplify or rationalize the subject, to make it appear definable and comprehensible when it has been neither defined nor comprehended. The subject is presented as if "dealt with" when in fact its own particularity and individuality have been totally avoided.

The most striking example of Pratt's presenting metaphoric whimsy in the guise of historic understanding is the well-known "oatmeal" passage of *Towards the Last Spike* — one of several metaphors by which the poet pretends to understand his CPR dreamers.

Oatmeal was in their blood and in their names.
 Thrift was the title of their catechism.
 It governed all things but their mess of porridge
 Which, when it struck the hydrochloric acid
 With treacle and skim-milk, became a mash.
 Entering the duodenum, it broke up
 Into amino acids: then the liver
 Took on its natural job as carpenter:
 Foreheads grew into cliffs, jaws into juts.
 The meal, so changed, engaged the follicles:
 Eyebrows came out as gorse, the beards as thistles,
 And the chest-hair the fell of Grampian rams.
 It stretched and vulcanized the human span:
 Nonagenarians worked and thrived upon it.
 Out of such chemistry run through by genes,
 The food released its fearsome racial products:—
 The power to strike a bargain like a foe,
 To win an argument upon a burr,
 Invest the language with a Bannockburn,
 Culloden or the warnings of Lochiel,
 Weave loyalties and rivalries in tartans,
 Present for the amazement of the world
 Kilts and the civilized barbaric Fling,
 And pipes which, when they acted on the mash,
 Fermented Lullabies to *Scots wha hae*.

Critics may delight in the wit of such a passage, yet it remains despite all its

intrinsic qualities a sentimental and spurious treatment of its subject. Elsewhere Macdonald is metaphorically portrayed as the merchant wooer of British Columbia, which is in turn portrayed as an aging maiden. Van Horne is usually painted as a military conqueror, although also variously compared to a bobcat, Paul Bunyan, and the Flying Dutchman. Donald Smith is compared to "Moses, Marco-Polo, Paracelsus," in addition to being characterized as

A Scot with smoke of peat fire on his breath —
Smith? Yes: but christened Donald Alexander
And loined through issue from the Grants and Stuarts.

All such metaphorical and genealogical characterizations are merely referential to the reality of the man characterized. They substitute a rational concept in the place of that more difficult thing, actuality. The characterizations of *The Titanic* are similarly oversimplified by the use of metaphor. The various financiers aboard are summed up as "Gray-templed Caesars of the world's Exchange". A young boy who surrenders his place in a lifeboat is said to pile

The inches on his stature as he gave
Place to a Magyar woman and her child.

The immigrants aboard are given a particularly prejudicial image by Pratt's use of metaphor:

In steerage — seven hundred immigrants!
Smith thought of panic clutching at their throats,
And feared that Balkan scramble for the boats.

In each case the subject has been unfairly treated; the metaphor has said far less than needed to be said while pretending to say all.

ALL OF THESE CASES of characterizing metaphor can be loosely grouped with a larger species of metaphor in Pratt: interpretive metaphor. In the narrative poems such metaphor is Pratt's usual way of dealing with difficult aspects of actuality. We find such a metaphor at the beginning of *Brébeuf*:

The winds of God were blowing over France,
.....
The air was charged with song beyond the range
Of larks, with wings beyond the stretch of eagles.
Skylines unknown to maps broke from the mists
And there was laughter on the seas.

Here the simplifying images of soaring nature enable Pratt to avoid dealing directly with the potentially troublesome topic of religious inspiration. *Towards the Last Spike* contains the most spectacular such metaphor in his work: the reptile image he gives to the Laurentian Shield. Pratt appears to become more fascinated with this metaphor than he is with the actual building of the railroad. As a result the reader is shown very little of this part of the railroad's construction. Instead he reads of a reptile sleeping, folding, curling, drowsing, and stirring; reads of its "rock and mineral mattress", its "spotty carboniferous hair", its "scales", its "drowsing coils", its "higher vertebrae", its "deep layers and arteries", its "table-clothes of sphagnum moss", its "counterpane of leather-leaf and slime". Most important, he never does see this section of the railroad completed, or learn how Van Horne overcomes the final barrier of muskeg. The metaphor causes Pratt to evade the literal building. Despite his usual show of numbers and particulars — shovels, pick-axes, black powder, abutments, trestles, "three engines", "seven tracks" — he has in fact substituted an interpretive rationalization in the place of the actual event. The struggle between the lizard and man may be Pratt's interpretation of the event, but it is not, as Pratt pretends, objectively *the* event. The event was both the metaphor and much more.

What is typical of this metaphor is that it is tangential to actuality. It represents a movement by the poet away from the matter of the poem (which would have its own rigid requirements) toward an intellectual fabrication which can be almost as arbitrary as the poet wills. It imposes on the matter of the poem an interpretation preconceived by the poet which may or may not be a property of that matter. Pratt is thus enabled to create his own Van Horne, his own Macdonald, or his own Captain Smith under the cover of presenting historical fact. Further, the non-metaphoric aspects of his diction, its enumerating and specifying qualities, as well as providing the poet with a non-mysterious and intelligible working surface, serve to mask his metaphoric caprices with a veneer of factuality.

Metaphor is such a ubiquitous property of Pratt's diction that throughout his work it appears as an entrenched writing habit. Many of these metaphors are of the casual or colloquial sort that one is hardly aware of when writing or reading.

Water was swirling up the slanted floor
Around the chair and sucking at his feet.
(*The Titanic*)

More developed kinds appear as habitual means in Pratt for avoiding the delineation of human personality. Military metaphors are especially frequent. Passengers

on the *Titanic* are said to rally from flight "as if [stiffened by] the rattle of a drum." Her diners mass before the saloon "like storm troops before a citadel." In *Towards the Last Spike* almost every participant is characterized at some time in military terms.

But here this was a theme less vulnerable
To fire, Macdonald thought, to Blake's gunfire,
And yet. . . .

Here he [Van Horne] could clap the future on the shoulder
And order Fate about as his lieutenant. . . .

The men were fighting foes which had themselves
Waged elemental civil war. . . .

Into this scrimmage came the fighting men. . . .

. . . their weapons were their hands
And backs, pickaxes, shovels, hammers, drills,
And dynamite. . . .

Still other metaphors appear to be attempts to make physical reality more colourful and interesting than it might otherwise appear. The reptile metaphor for the Laurentian Shield certainly appears touched by this motive. In the following passage in which Macdonald reflects on the task of building the CPR, several metaphors appear chiefly decorative:

But this would be a longer tug
Of war which needed for his team thick wrists
And calloused fingers, heavy heels to dig
Into the earth and hold — men with bull's beef
Upon their ribs. Had he himself the wind,
The anchor-waist to peg at the rope's end?
'Twas had [*sic*] enough to have these questions hit
The waking mind: 'twas much worse when he dozed;
For goblins had a way of pinching him,
Slapping a nightmare on to dwindling snoozes.

Occasionally Pratt's fondness for such decoration causes the metaphors to become badly mixed. Here the *Titanic's* adversary iceberg is transmogrified from calf, to ship, to island within six lines.

Calved from a glacier near Godhaven coast,
It left the fiord from the sea — a host
Of white flotillas gathering in its wake,
And joined by fragments from a Behring floe,

Had circumnavigated it to make
It centre of an archipelago.

Later a *Titanic* distress rocket is an arrow, a spire, and a parasol within three.

An arrow of fire,
A fourth sped toward the sky, its bursting spire
Topping the foremast like a parasol
With fringe of fuschia, . . .

In these instances Pratt's inventiveness has overreached itself. Had he confined himself to perceptual responses to actuality, no such confusion could have occurred. Instead, by responding intellectually, he departs from actuality's inherent order, and enters the separate world of human invention — a world which is not only separate and arbitrary but fallible.

I believe it unquestionable that throughout his career, in both lyrics and narratives, Pratt was an impersonal, manipulative, synthesizing, rationalist craftsman. He is certainly not an anomaly in Canadian poetry, and not, as Earle Birney once suggested, "old-fashioned".¹⁰ He is squarely in the cosmopolitan-traditionalist stream of A. J. M. Smith, Robert Finch, P. K. Page, James Reaney, Jay Macpherson, and Eli Mandel — a stream guarded since the fifties by the criticism of Northrop Frye. It should be seen as no accident that among the most enthusiastic of Pratt's later commentators have been Reaney, Smith, and Frye. Reaney's defence of Pratt's narrative methods is a simple statement of a poet's authority and license — "The poet . . . can take imaginative leaps that the historian does not have to take." "The poet is allowed a view of another reality."¹¹ Of course a poet can do these things, but not, as Pratt does, in order to pass such leaps and views off as objective fact. Later, Reaney praises Pratt for "purposeful distortions"¹² of history, for exaggerating it "sky high",¹³ for creating scenes which "ring true poetically".¹⁴ All these are praises of the fabricating consciousness which superimposes its own structure on reality and decorates that reality with synthesized effects.

There is, it should be noted, a remarkable congruity between Pratt's themes and his techniques. As I have argued in an earlier article,¹⁵ he is throughout his work an apologist for the Pelagian view of man — that view in which mankind can, by social co-operation, discipline, vigilance, the application of reason, and the suppression of individualism, overcome any difficulty. That is, corporate man can be the rationalist craftsman of his own destiny. In his writing Pratt adopts the point of view of the impersonal spokesman for mankind, adopts group values,

and writes social epics. He represses overt statements of individual sensibility, masking these as objective statements of fact. In technique he regards his materials as impersonally as the Pelagian regards the universe — as things to be specified, counted, or altered as the intellect requires. As a result, more so than the work of any other Canadian poet, Pratt's poetry becomes dedicated to the celebration of human ingenuity and craftsmanship. Its themes honour rationalist hopes, its form exemplifies rationalist methodologies. Even its limitations are faithful to the character of the Pelagian/humanist dream.

NOTES

- ¹ "Silence in the Sea," in David G. Pitt (ed.), *E. J. Pratt* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1969), pp. 124-138.
- ² "Some Poems of E. J. Pratt: Aspects of Imagery and Theme," in Pitt (ed.), *E. J. Pratt*, p. 142.
- ³ P. 148.
- ⁴ Henry W. Wells and Carl F. Klinck, *Edwin J. Pratt* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1947), p. 52.
- ⁵ "The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre," in Eli Mandel (ed.), *Contexts of Canadian Criticism* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1971), p. 278.
- ⁶ *Edwin J. Pratt*, p. 52.
- ⁷ "Editor's Introduction," *The Collected Poems of E. J. Pratt*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Macmillan, 1958), pp. xvi-xvii.
- ⁸ *Edwin J. Pratt*, p. 52.
- ⁹ P. 46.
- ¹⁰ "E. J. Pratt and his Critics," in A. J. M. Smith (ed.), *Masks of Poetry* (Toronto: McClelland and Stewart, 1962), p. 94.
- ¹¹ "Towards the Last Spike: the Treatment of a Western Subject," in Pitt (ed.), *E. J. Pratt*, p. 76.
- ¹² P. 78.
- ¹³ P. 77.
- ¹⁴ P. 79.
- ¹⁵ "E. J. Pratt: Apostle of Corporate Man," *Canadian Literature* 43 (1970), 54-66.

CLOSING DOORS

Audrey Thomas

CONSTANCE BERESFORD-HOWE, *The Book of Eve*. Macmillan.
MARIAN ENGEL, *Monodromos*. Anansi, \$7.95.

WHEN NORA slammed the door on her doll's house she was young, beautiful and presumably in good health. Not that it wasn't a courageous gesture — it was, it was. But one sensed that whatever she decided to do she would probably be all right. (And her husband was well and prosperous; there were maids, and the faithful old nanny to look after Nora's doll-children, just as she had always done.)

In contrast, we meet the heroine of *The Book of Eve* after she has closed the door. ("On the stairs came his thin voice, 'Eva!' I closed the front door on it.") The novel is told in the past tense — Eva remembers both actions that led up to, and actions that came as a consequence of, her sudden decision to drop out of marriage and the middle-class. This in itself is interesting (I have always wanted to know what happened to Nora), but what makes Eva's departure really astonishing is that she is sixty-six years old, has just received her first old-age pension cheque, and has a bedridden and (seemingly) helpless husband who is crippled by arthritis. In this case the husband takes the place of Nora's children, but there is no kind old nanny to carry on when the

heroine so suddenly and categorically opts for life over mere existence. In the few hectic moments she devotes to her packing, Eva is very clear-eyed about the comic aspects of her romantic flight.

What I packed first (the whole thing took only ten minutes) was *Wuthering Heights* and a poetry anthology from my bedside shelf; but I didn't forget the grosser animal and also took along my blood-pressure pills, glasses, hairbrush and warm old-woman underpants.

Is this possible? Would a middle-class ageing lady really do such a thing, or doing, make a success of it — as Eva eventually does. (As Marian Engel's heroine remarks in another context, "the important thing is *willing* suspension of disbelief.") Ten years ago it might have been really difficult to believe in Eva. It's easier now — we're coming to accept and welcome the women with long, grey or greying, un-permed hair, often un-made-up, in trousers and without those "foundation" garments so essential to our own mothers' sense of propriety. Sixty-six is pretty late, it's true, but nevertheless a possible improbability. And for Eva what lies ahead cannot be worse than what lay behind.

It would have been different if my life

before Bert got arthritis had been full of colour and interest and the richness of love and loving. But if you don't mind my saying so [she's composing a letter to God] I got a damn small share of those things, so small that coming up to my seventieth year I couldn't help feeling both cheated and panicky.

Guilt she does not feel (maybe the older you are the *less* guilty you would feel about making such a decision?) and she tackles her new life with "a quite objective interest in what would happen next."

What happens is that the way down (a basement suite in the poor section of Montreal) proves to be the way up. Eva, alone for the first time in years, explores old loves and griefs in the nighttime and scavenges for bits and pieces she can pawn during the day. She becomes very ill and she has to fight her own deep depression (we can never slam the door on ourselves) as well as the Montreal winter. The book is brave and comic, and there are some good vignettes of the other misfits whom she meets at the boarding house. (And a very nice scene with her chic-hip favourite grandchild who has been "slumming" in a pawnshop. The very young are embarrassed when the elderly break out of their moulds. "Like, Gran, aren't you wondering now sort of who you are?" "Like no," I said coldly.)

What I didn't like about the book was its happy ending. Not that Eva doesn't have a right to be happy. And she doesn't go back home, a sadder but a wiser woman, like the awful heroine of Doris Lessing's much publicized but in many ways much inferior new novel. But she does find a boy friend, a *lover*, superb cook and refugee. I guess I really would have liked to see her end up making it on her own, as a shining example to all the

rest of us "sisters", maybe. Johnny Horvath just misses being a stock character (broken English but has read Goethe, has the "European sensuousness" or what James might call "appreciation"). He teaches Eva how to really live — and to laugh. It's rather too pat. Never mind — it's a book worth reading. Men won't like it very much (notice that beautiful actresses always play Nora) but that's all right too. There will be more and more novels of this sort as women, even old women, examine and reject the roles they have been conditioned to receive gratefully, like heirloom silver, from society.

Do you realize, I wonder [she says in her letter to God], what submerged identities women like me can have? How repressed and suppressed we are by a life that can give no kind of self-expression? . . . To live locked up. Never spontaneous. Never independent. Never free, even to use those four-letter words we all know, because the chief duty of females, we were taught, was to practice the restraints of civilization, not explore its possibilities.

Monodromos is also a quest novel, in a way, and as *literature* is perhaps superior to *The Book of Eve*. But then I am a sucker for exotica, and when Marian Engel starts one of her "lists": "Lemons, fat-rinded oranges, bay on the branch (Daphnis), tomato paste on paper squares, Jerusalem artichokes, purple French artichokes, onions, potatoes, carrots, tin toys, frozen octopus from Greece, dead hanging sheep on hooks, rice puddings, Indian custard like rosewater junket, Armenian pancakes spread with meat and sumach . . . cheese pies, pumpkin pies, and curled sheets of dried apricot paste that look like sheets of fly poison put out in summer in a pie plate; water jars with vestigial penises and breasts, pin-headed penny banks like the Venus of

Willendorf with the slot in the wrong place — and so on and so on and so on,” I am completely hooked. And yet that is one thing that disturbed me about this novel; the place [Cyprus] is so much more interesting than the people Ms. Engel chooses to write about. Maybe, after Durrell, it's pretty difficult to write about that section of the world. Where are Justine, Pombal, Scobie, Nessim, Pursewarden? There is no one character in *Monodromos* strong enough to carry the weight of the power of the island itself. The heroine, Audrey, is thirty-six, Canadian, and living in London, working for a sort of import-export private investigating firm when she has word that her estranged husband Laddie is in trouble and needs her to come to his rescue. This reversal of male/female roles is very nice, by the way, until we learn (1) that Laddie never sent the wire and (2) that Laddie is an ageing homosexual. She leaves the damp of London and her ailing lover Max and goes not really to Laddie's rescue but to sun and a change of scene. “You say you go for the weather or to see the landscape,” she says, “but without people you do not survive.”

As luck will have it, she meets a whole crew of interesting people, but they are not really very interesting to the reader. Laddie, who is desperately missing his titled lover Eddie (who has in turn run off with a new lover and left a pile of debts behind) can't stand the sight of his ex-wife whom he passes off as his sister. The relationship between the two is very well done. All the old anger and humiliation is there in Audrey's relationship with Laddie. They throw up old failures in one another's faces; they want to hurt and they do.

When Audrey finally takes a summer

lover (the father of one of his piano pupils) Laddie is delighted. Mr. “X,” well-to-do, with a wife in Switzerland, would like Audrey to meet the wife when she returns, though of course once this happens they cannot be lovers any more. Very sophisticated stuff, and a far cry from Eastern Canada. Audrey herself knows this — her innocence is dangerous. Towards the end of the book she says:

I crawl back to bed feeling hollow, hollow, hollow. I have been insolent in my innocence, I think. I have shaken a hand I ought to have kissed. I have fussed about with the surface of things. I have behaved badly. I have been wrong. That has nothing to do with anything.

There is nothing to understand. There is no understanding.

Still this is a beautiful book. With the heroine one explores the round town, the beaches, the personalities of the inhabitants and of the expatriates who live there. The history of the island is told in a series of asides (to the audience and to Max) and reading them makes one want to go there: the heat, the beauty, the great mix of races and religions. Yet the heroine herself remains only an eye — albeit an educated eye. We really don't care very much what happens to her. She is a sort of personification of the CANADIAN CONSCIOUSNESS. The old, old world defeats her and she returns to the more familiar world of Britain when “for a long time I haunt olive merchants, speaking to them in borrowed words.”

One reviewer said *Monodromos* was a “travel book”, and this is absolutely right. Cyprus lives and breathes and takes on depth through the heroine's observations. It's a brilliant book and one I highly recommend. Yet at a human level it failed to engage me as its inferior, *The Book of Eve*, did.

ORIGINAL PEOPLE

Douglas Barbour

PETER SUCH, *riverrun*. Clarke, Irwin. \$5.95.

RUDY WIEBE, *The Temptations of Big Bear*. McClelland & Stewart. \$8.95.

IT'S A PRETTY GOOD YEAR that brings us not one, but two good fictions about this country's original people. This has been a good year.

I agree with Stephen Scobie's suggestion in *Maclean's*, that *riverrun* is a kind of lyric counterpoint to Big Bear's epic music. Like Wiebe, Such uses the available historical documents with great insight and empathy. His sweepingly impressionistic presentation of the last Beothuks is successful on the whole, and deeply moving towards the end. Such has been accused of overwriting in *riverrun*, but I feel his lyric intensity hauls the reader into his characters' minds and *mores*, their special vision of the world they move through. It is a deeply religious vision, and Such's accomplishment is to make that vision come alive in his prose.

riverrun details the complete destruction of a people from the inside. Throughout, the pain of the ending is implicit, yet when it comes it is tragically intense.

Soon I alone will be left to carry the burden of the People's presence in the People's forests. What shall I say when the trees and waters ask me? Where have you lost them, Shawnadithit? Where have you lost your People? . . .

I'll sing you a song of your People. Of how you were a beautiful woman of the People, and how you bore two daughters who became the last of the People, how you were the mother of one daughter especially, Shawnadithit, who was left behind with no one to sing for her at the hour of her own death, who went unremembered, the last of the People in the whole high land of the

long lakes and speaking rivers that run to the sea forever, bearing no longer the living People through the frogback rapids, bearing only the dead leaves of the woods in autumn.

It is *riverrun's* achievement that it is that song of remembering Shawnadithit longed for so despairingly. Such useless singing is so often what makes art.

The Temptations of Big Bear does for his People what Such's remembering does for the Beothuks, and more, much more. Rudy Wiebe's first three novels were good, but *Big Bear* represents a quantum jump beyond their achievements. He has created in the Plains Cree chief, Big Bear, a character who is truly alien to most of his readers, and yet he has simultaneously built up such a complete and massive vision of this man's perceptions, we are drawn into full acceptance of his point of view. Wiebe's achievement here is to convince us that the white man's view of things is strange and somehow wrong, and that the Indian's perception is the truer one.

Rudy Wiebe tells us in a note that "No name of any person, place, or thing . . . in this novel has been invented." It has been built on a factual base. Yet he adds that "Despite that, and despite the historicity of dates and events, all characters in this meditation upon the past are products of a particular imagination"; for *Big Bear* is a true fiction, a literary creation; yet a "meditation upon the past" is the best definition of this work that could be

given. Taking us with him, he enters, through his prose exploration of past events and experiences, the very texture of the lives of his characters, Indian and white. Moreover, he, the meditator, is always there, hovering over his creation/re-creation of a lost world, mediating between our world and it, occasionally offering philosophical insights concerning the few artifacts from it which have survived (a photograph of Big Bear, for example), and how they affect him, how he perceives and experiences them. Yet the level of meditation is but one of many layers in this richly textured palimpsest.

For this is an exciting and arresting narrative, gripping in its violence and passion. As we follow Big Bear in his attempts, first to preserve the freedom of his People, then just to preserve them in peace as the whites inevitably take over the land he loves, the land of which he says, "Who can receive land? From whom would he receive it?", and, finally, in his doomed attempts to prevent the young braves from going to useless war, we are brought to understand just how profound this "savage's" comprehension of human nature is.

The novel is not told from Big Bear's point of view alone, however: Wiebe has created a whole gallery of substantial and fascinating characters, each of whom "tells" some part of the story. As a result, the range of events which is covered in this novel is presented in all its complex variety. Various whites, as well as other Indians, are viewpoint characters in different sections, and each is presented with great empathy and understanding. Slowly but surely Wiebe builds up a complex, kaleidoscopic vision of the whole period the novel covers, a completely felt

and minutely registered version of the prairies at that period.

Big Bear talks occasionally of the power of words, and he speaks as a man of wisdom and power. Rudy Wiebe knows that power; and recognizes a correlative power as well, that of voice: on one level this novel is concerned with the relative human validity of different voices. This is why he makes us "listen" to so many characters "talking," each one with a different voice.

Many of these voices are granted their own set-pieces, small tales within the larger narrative, necessary tiles in the grand mosaic of the whole book. John McDougal, missionary, Edgar Dewdney, Department of Indian Affairs, the sardonically reasonable "Canadian Volunteer", all tell their stories in unique personal idioms. As well, there are the sections presented from the points of view of Big Bear's sons, or from that of the vital and intelligent young woman, Kitty McLean, who learns more than she may realize from her contact with Big Bear. Another major set-piece is the terrifying kaleidoscope of many voices which is the Frog Lake massacre.

Towering over all these voices, however, is Big Bear's awesome, oracular presence. Whether it's his speeches to the other chiefs, his ruminative participation in the last buffalo hunt, or the incredibly moving funeral song for his second son, Twin Wolverine, counterpointed, in one of the most technically daring scenes in the book, to the passionate colloquy between his son and daughter-in-law, Kingbird and Sits Green On The Earth, concerning the parenthood of an about-to-be-born child, Big Bear's voice is the resonant centre about which the whole narrative turns. Wiebe has created a style

for this incredible voice that fully wins our belief in its greatness and power.

Nevertheless, a number of Eastern reviewers have attacked Wiebe's "style" in this novel. It should have been further edited, says one; it is too difficult to no purpose, says another. But, the style is both the man and the book and its meaning is all that the words say. Maria Campbell has suggested that if one accepted the Indian belief in spirits, then one would have to believe that Big Bear's spirit spoke through Wiebe when he wrote the book. I take this as the highest tribute she could pay to an author who has articulated the whole spectrum of Indian life and faith, their sense of their place in the universe. Wiebe has granted us a

vision of our own past that tells us not only where we have come from but a great deal about where we are now.

I don't think we can ask much more of a novel than that it create for us a world which is so achingly real it becomes our world while we read. Big Bear's voice always speaks that world, a world of difference elsewhere in which we may perhaps see ourselves anew even as we see, perhaps for the first time, the People as they must have been. *The Temptations of Big Bear* is a richly human, mythic, religious work. Those readers who pass it by will be the poorer for their act, for it is a book that will enlarge and enrich the imaginative lives of all who read it.

THE PINNACLE OF PERIL

B. Rajan

A. S. P. WOODHOUSE, *The Heavenly Muse. A Preface to Milton*. Edited by Hugh MacCallum. University of Toronto Press.

A. S. P. WOODHOUSE's influence as a scholar and educationist does not need to be underlined in Canada. There can scarcely be a Canadian school of consequence in English that does not owe something to the Woodhouse legacy. As a publishing scholar, however, Woodhouse seems to have shared with other Canadians a reluctance to commit himself to the cold performance of print. The result was that *The Poet and his Faith*, published in 1965 — the year after his death, has been the only book so far to stand in his name. It is a slender book which gives little indication of the quality of a mind distinguished in its judgements by weightiness, deliberative force and a remarkably full and fully-shaped know-

ledge of the seventeenth-century theological and political background.

Woodhouse's deepest commitment was to Milton and ten years after his death that commitment is represented by a book dexterously edited by Hugh MacCallum from published papers, revised versions of published papers and material in manuscript. *The Heavenly Muse* can be regarded as the advanced draft of a book that was never completed and as some of it is more than a generation old it is naturally not always abreast of the current state of scholarship and current enthusiasms in interpretation.

Woodhouse described himself as a follower of the historical method at a time when the New Criticism was at the

height of its influence. The view of the poem as a self-sustaining language object standing apart from history is not really a view which New Critics would endorse but it serves to define an extreme to be avoided. In a different way the mythic approach can excuse itself from history and Woodhouse was no lover of the mythic approach. The intermediate area can comprise the history of ideas, theological, political and literary history, bi-literary criticism, *œuvre* criticism, and the scrutiny of mind, milieu and moment as they come to fruition in the work of art. All these possibilities are authorized by Woodhouse and together they constitute the territory where most schools of English discover their *raison d'être*.

Milton of course is the right kind of author to reward a traditional scholar amply endowed. *The Heavenly Muse* exhibits several of the results of this endowment; but it also sets itself apart from other scholarly books on Milton by being possibly the first book since Tillyard's *Milton* (1930) to cover the entire range of Milton's poetry and prose. (Books on Milton which are written as part of a series on "standard authors" are not covered by this conjecture). The splendid isolation of Woodhouse's book is a melancholy comment on the progress of specialization. But his overall approach does not have all the consequences one hopes for from it. Though "the bearing of one poem (or prose work) upon another" is specifically announced among Woodhouses' concerns, there is relatively little exploration here of the interrelationships not simply of concern, but of structure, imagery, décor and tactics that subsist between Milton's major poems. The crises of choice, the cumulative definition of man's responsibility and

freedom through varied settings, different agents, and the creative use of the genre as a style of insight are not matters that interest Woodhouse greatly, at any rate at this stage.

Among the responsibilities of the historical critic is "to detect the character and direction, the pattern as it were, of the poet's development" and "to fit the undated poems into this pattern". The first essay in Woodhouse's book sees the "pattern" in Milton's early poetry as beginning with a tentative commitment to sacred poetry in the *Nativity Ode*, proceeding through a subsequent vacillation between the secular and the sacred and culminating in a final commitment to the sacred of which "How soon hath Time ..." is the record. The more diffident hero of W. R. Parker's biography, is in contrast to this Milton firmly aware of his destiny, "smit" early with "the love of sacred song". Both "patterns" have evidence to support them and both affect the dating of certain problem pieces, notably *Ad Patrem*. The chronological exercise may not be capable of yielding definitive results as we learn from the controversy over the dating of *Samson Agonistes* (in which Woodhouse takes a position between the contending factions). Perhaps more important than this caution is the point that while "How soon hath Time ..." may be a decisive event in Milton's inward biography as Woodhouse reads it, it is not the most important of the early poems as *literature*. As an imaginative achievement, as an entrance into the world of Milton's poetry and as an early rehearsal of structures and strategies which the later work was to explore, it is *The Nativity Ode* which merits a degree of attention which it is not here accorded.

Among the more important offices of a historical critic is to recover "forgotten assumptions and expectations, aesthetic or intellectual", which bear upon our understanding of a poem. "The Argument of Milton's *Comus*", which Woodhouse published in 1941, and which is perhaps the essay which established his reputation as a Milton critic, is concerned with an "assumption" which Woodhouse found crucial to the understanding of both Spenser and Milton. This is the relationship between the realms of nature and grace, a relationship of continuity in the pre-lapsarian world but one which in the post-lapsarian world can range from discontinuity to sheer incompatibility, depending on the view taken of the damage done by the Fall. We can see another version of this relationship in the distinction between the orders of nature, mind and charity, developed by Pascal. A twentieth century version put forward by T. E. Hulme, was found influential by Eliot among others.

The chapter on "Comus" in *The Heavenly Muse* is based on the two articles which Woodhouse published on the Ludlow masque. Its terms of discourse remain important in any full understanding of the poem. Nevertheless it is in the chapters on Milton's political thought and on Milton's theology that Woodhouse's talents are seen at their best. His remarkable knowledge of tract literature and his capacity to cut through the proliferations of controversy to the principles which however confusedly, were at stake, join with a readiness for incisive judgements all the more striking because they are so fully informed. In particular, he notes that "liberty and order — an order at once rational and moral — are the twin poles of Milton's

thinking." Indeed liberty as Milton conceives it "may be not inadequately defined as *order self-imposed from within*." But if the individual is to be free from the "circumscription of strict laws" to work out the consequences of the "better covenant" written in his heart, the state must stand aside from all that appertains to his inward life. Milton's main concern is that the state *should* stand aside and his sense of the regenerate individual's relationship with it seems dominantly defensive. This is why Woodhouse can say that Milton "knew nothing of the great democratic experience, the experience of trying to persuade your fellows to be wise, and when you fail, of acquiescing in their unwisdom until you can persuade them." On Milton's "contemptuous dismissal of the will of the majority" when it appears to endanger the rights of the elect, Woodhouse can be even more crushing: "he acquiesced in the principle which is the negation of all democracy and destroys it at the root: the principle of *might till right is ready*, the belief that you can establish justice presently by one more act of injustice now."

The Sonnet, according to Wordsworth, became a trumpet in Milton's hands, but the trumpet of his prose, as Milton himself recognised, sounded notes that were "dolorous" and "jarring". In the cooler element of poetry with his singing robes about him, the range of Milton's understanding can be more spacious. When the quarrel is with the self and not with others it is easier to ascertain what the quarrel really meant. *Paradise Lost* must ask not only why the revolution was betrayed but whether all revolutions are fated to be betrayed. A revolution is not a rebellion but many rebellions call them-

selves revolutions. To learn the lessons of history and to ensure that New Presbyter is not Old Priest writ large we must learn of rebellion in its history and its anatomy.

There is a sense in which *Paradise Lost* can be regarded as a huge preface to history so that the last two books are not simply its end but its climax, the purpose of its educational effort. Woodhouse might not have been unprepared to look at the poem in this way but this is not the treatment which survives. What we have is a relatively brief exposition of the theme and pattern of the epic followed by a more ample consideration of how the pattern is elaborated. It may be said at the outset that Woodhouse's understanding of what he calls structural pattern is predominantly generic and that the *gêner*e is predominantly classical — Virgil and Homer are the only models considered. Milton's main innovation in taking over these models seems to be the devising of a double protagonist, Christ-Adam. The result is that one protagonist can function in an epic and the other in a tragic perspective and that the true heroism of the superior protagonist can be defined against the false heroism of the antagonist (Satan) and the imperfect heroism of the inferior protagonist. These observations have their place in our understanding of the poem but its structural pattern is not really accounted for *via* the double protagonist or *via* the four areas of action which Milton substitutes for Virgil's two. In inheriting structures which are more than generic, the poem relates them to characteristic structures of its own and it is the interplay thus achieved which constitutes the poem's form or more correctly its world. Since the concerns of the poem are defined by the world in which those con-

cerns are engaged it can be said that the structure is the issue, or (to borrow Eliot's phrase) that the detail of the pattern is movement. These possibilities are not taken up by Woodhouse and it is not clear that he would have been interested in them.

In the chapter on *Paradise Regained* the recovery of "forgotten assumptions and expectations" could have been carried further. It is true that for Milton's contemporaries "the first temptation to distrust," was "balanced by the third to presumption, the extreme of defect balanced by the extreme of excess." But when *Paradise Regained* is read innocently rather than historically, the scene on the pinnacle is anything but a temptation to presumption. The innocent reading happens to be right. The pinnacle in *Paradise Regained* is a place of peril. For Milton's contemporaries it was a place offering an entirely adequate foothold from which one could retreat to a flat roof and then descend modestly by the staircase, having refused to perform an unnecessary miracle. One needs the additional "assumption" of what the pinnacle was, to define the full scope of Milton's innovative treatment, an innovativeness now obscured precisely because the climax "belongs" so decisively to the poem, as the fulfillment of its evolving logic.

In commenting on *The Heavenly Muse* the critic should be aware that the book is less than complete and that even if it were, no scholar would have both the equipment and the temperament needed to explore the variety of approaches demanded by Milton's work. Woodhouse's main strengths lay in knowledge of the background and the inheritance, a well-proportioned power of exposition

and a firm grasp of main principles. These virtues are apparent in a book which satisfyingly reflects Woodhouse's

teaching both in what it contains and in the way in which it has been put together by its editor.

THE PRAIRIE OBSERVED

Henry Kreisel

LAURENCE RICOU, *Vertical Man/Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Canadian Prairie Fiction*. University of British Columbia Press. \$8.00 hardcover, \$4.50 paper.

DONALD G. STEPHENS (editor), *Writers of the Prairies*. University of British Columbia Press. \$5.50, paper.

THE THREE prairie provinces are among the most sparsely-populated regions of Canada. Even today, the population of Manitoba, Saskatchewan, and Alberta combined is only about three and a half million. Yet this region has, almost from the beginning of its settlement, impressed itself on the literary imagination. It provided a vast and distinctive stage on which the destinies of the men and women who settled there played themselves out. And if the societies that were created lacked sophistication, they nevertheless had a kind of elemental grandeur. Even when they were restrictive and narrow, they seemed to call forth, as in Sinclair Ross' work, or in Martha Ostenso's, a passionate, indeed heroic, response.

Even a partial roll-call of the writers who have lived on the prairies, and have observed and written about life there, is impressive: Ralph Connor, Philip Grove, Robert Kroetsch, Margaret Laurence, W. O. Mitchell, Martha Ostenso, Sinclair Ross, Gabrielle Roy, Robert Stead, Adele Wiseman, Rudy Wiebe. There are of course many others, but these are the writers whose work forms the principal body for critical examination in two books recently published by the Univer-

sity of British Columbia Press: *Writers of the Prairies*, a volume of essays edited by Donald G. Stephens, and *Vertical Man/Horizontal World: Man and Landscape in Prairie Fiction* by Laurence Ricou.

Taken together, these two books made it possible to claim that the writers of the prairies have created the most comprehensive and most distinctive body of fiction in Canadian literature.

Although there is, almost inevitably, some overlap in the materials, the two books are quite different in conception and execution. In a number of instances, Mr. Ricou refers to articles reprinted by Stephens, and indeed pursues and develops ideas that are only sketchily outlined by some of the critics included in the Stephens anthology. In this sense the two books complement each other.

Mr. Ricou's book is the first sustained examination of a clearly definable body of an important regional literature since E. A. McCourt's *The Canadian West in Fiction* appeared in 1949, nearly a quarter of a century ago. McCourt's book was a most valuable contribution to our understanding of a region that is generally badly understood (or perceived in simplistic clichés) by the majority of

Canadian intellectuals. But much has happened, since McCourt wrote, to raise the level of literary analysis in Canadian criticism, and Ricou's sophisticated methodology reflects this development.

Ricou's central achievement is that he has taken a metaphor ("vertical man, horizontal world"), and has attempted to exploit its possibilities to the fullest extent. Clearly, by concentrating on this one controlling metaphor, some breadth of vision is sacrificed. But what is gained is a sharply focussed analysis in depth.

Mr. Ricou isolates certain pivotal approaches, and then organizes his discussion around them. Thus he illuminates the way in which the prairie may be observed, from "the benign prairie" of Robert Stead, to the "implacable prairie" of Grove, and the "eternal prairie" of W. O. Mitchell. The method works and provides important insights.

A critic using Mr. Ricou's methodology runs some risks. There is the temptation to stretch the material that is to be examined in order to make it fit a preconceived thesis, to devise a scheme and then to search for the appropriate material to serve the scheme. Mr. Ricou has avoided that temptation. He has allowed the material to shape the thesis and to demonstrate that the controlling metaphor is both valid and illuminating. Of particular interest is his treatment, in a long introduction, of the writings of the early visitors and explorers of the prairie region, for their spontaneous and often artless comments reinforce the organic nature of Mr. Ricou's controlling metaphor.

Above all, Mr. Ricou is aware that setting alone "does not fundamentally alter the theme of fiction," which, as he says, must ultimately be concerned with

"man's consideration of his own nature in the universe." What he does show is that "the landscape, and man's relation to it, is the concrete situation with which the prairie artist initiates his re-creation of the human experience."

In certain respects, Donald Stephens' introduction to *Writers of the Prairies* would have served better as a preface to Ricou's book than to his own, for the "combination of landscape and climatic environment [that] determines the whole range of themes in the literature of the prairies," to quote from Mr. Stephens' introduction, fits Mr. Ricou's scheme, but does not really encompass the range of critical articles in the Stephens collection of essays. For one thing, though all the essays deal with writers of the prairies, they don't all deal with the prairies as such. Thus, Roy Daniells' fine essay "Glengarry Revisited" is a perceptive study of Ralph Connor's Ontario background, and beyond that, of the traditions of the Scottish Highlanders embodied in Connor's heroes; Frank Birbal-singh, writing on "Grove and Existentialism", argues that Grove's preoccupations, in spite of the setting of his novels, are primarily European. Hélène Rosenthal goes out of her way to abstract Adele Wiseman's novel *The Sacrifice* from its specific setting in Winnipeg; and Morton Ross' essay on Kroetsch examines styles of perception rather than landscape and environment.

Stephens also claims too much when he asserts that "the literature of the prairies makes peculiar demands on the critic, forcing him to involve himself more directly than usual with the creative process of the artist at work," and that "rather than remaining objective, the critic must become part of a land-

scape that is both fictional and real." In fact, most of the essays, such as A. T. Elder's essay on Stead, W. H. New's essay on Mitchell, and Sandra Djwa's essay on Ross, are cool and objective assessments of the writers whose work they analyse.

There was a time when it used to be said that Canadian literature could not withstand analysis that used sophisticated critical methodology. If this myth needs further exploding, both the Ricou and the Stephens books provide more ammunition. What the Stephens collection

makes very manifest is how much we are indebted to George Woodcock and to this journal, in which most of the essays first appeared. For it is to Woodcock's credit that he was one of the first to realize that such writers as Connor and Stead, long neglected, had still something to say to us, and encouraged and commissioned literary scholars to write about them. And Woodcock knew also that our literature was sturdy enough, and rooted enough, so that it would not be blown away by critical winds.

VIVRE EN CE PAYS

Max Dorsinville

MARCEL DUBE, *Textes et Documents*. Leméac.

———, *De l'Autre Côté du Mur*. Leméac.

———, *Le Temps des Lilas*. Leméac.

JACQUES GODBOUT et PIERRE TURGEON, *L'Interview*. Leméac.

ANTONINE MAILLET, *Les Crasseux*. Leméac.

———, *La Sagouine*. Leméac.

J'imagine qu'écrivant au gré de la contingence des êtres et des choses le critique ne saurait rendre compte de réalités autres que celles exprimées par des correspondances perçues par une sensibilité sienne et autre à la fois, établies au contact d'oeuvres et de moments privilégiés. Tant est-il que l'écrivain, comme le critique et autres hommes habitant un même espace et vivant une même temporalité, se reconnaissent dans une cristallisation dégagée de toute emprise étrangère à celle d'un air du temps vécu dans de communes frontières. Aussi le fait du hasard réunit trois auteurs d'allégeances littéraires diverses, et dont l'écriture par le biais de la comparaison littéraire et culturelle ressasse le destin de l'Amérique francophone. Voilà que par-delà les idiosyncrasies un levain littéraire

québécois paraît essoufflé et qu'un vent fort, gonflé de vitalité et de santé, souffle du côté de l'Acadie. L'historicité impose et situe le temps de l'écrivain.

Ce sont les années cinquante: règne du duplessisme, de la "grande peur", des collèges classiques, des horizons bloqués, des murs et des états de siège derrière lesquels des énergies jeunes et enthousiastes se meurent d'inanition quand elles ne se contentent de rêves par ailleurs jamais rejoints au jour du réel. C'est le monde de Marcel Dubé cerné dans toute son exactitude et son étendue dès ses premières pièces en 1950-53. Ce monde d'infinie tristesse, peuplé d'écorchés vifs aux noms divers, aux constantes sûres du rêve trahi, des impuissances et des compromissions, a l'unité de la vision du monde propre à Dubé et à la génération

littéraire précédente des Saint-Denys Garneau et des Anne Hébert: la nostalgie des jeux innocents de l'enfance se disputant à la douleur du quotidien de l'âge adulte. *Textes et Documents*, recueil de préfaces de pièces, de poèmes inédits, de nouvelles et d'une pièce radiophonique, permet de suivre la démarche de la sensibilité dubéenne de 1951 à 1973. A ce volume essentiel pour les chercheurs et chroniqueurs qui auront à faire l'exégèse de l'oeuvre complète du premier grand dramaturge québécois s'ajoute *De l'Autre Côté du Mur*, anthologie de cinq courtes pièces, la plupart inédites. On pourrait reprocher à l'éditeur d'avoir littéralement mis à sac des tiroirs qu'il eût, dans certains cas, mieux valu garder fermés. Plusieurs de ces courtes pièces (*Rendez-vous du Lendemain* [1972], *Le Père Idéal* [1972]) me semblent être des brouillons ou des textes qui furent peut-être refusés, tandis qu'une pièce telle que *Les Frères Ennemis* (1960), présentée à la télévision, souligne à l'instar de *De l'Autre Côté du Mur* (1952) la constance des thèmes, la récurrence des personnages-types et l'émotion indéfectible de Dubé. Cette dernière pièce partage avec *Zone* (1953) et *Bal Triste* (1950, première pièce de Dubé, encore inédite) l'importance de poser les jalons du monde organique dubéen. L'auteur avoue dans la préface de l'anthologie que si "*De l'Autre Côté du Mur* ... n'était qu'un projet [cependant] je prends conscience tout à coup que ce n'était qu'un premier croquis, que la première maille d'une longue chaîne, lourde à porter certains jours". *Le Temps des Lilas* (1958), ici en "édition scolaire pour l'enseignement du français langue seconde", annotée par Kelly Ricard, rappelle comment chaque pièce marquante de Dubé

est un microcosme renvoyant inévitablement au macrocosme où les Tarzan, Fred, Roméo, Joseph Latour correspondent structurellement aux Ciboulette, Denise, Florence, Marguerite et autres visages de l'adolescence ou de la jeunesse belle de générosité et d'amour malheureusement détruite.

Mais c'est un monde clos que celui de Dubé, monde d'une sensibilité jouxtant un stade historique où tout au Québec était signé de refus, parce que le Québec n'osait pas croire en lui-même. De plus en plus, il me semble que la critique exhaustive historique qui se fera de Dubé s'attachera à démontrer comment la grande tristesse de ce dramaturge fut celle de son pays subissant de profondes mutations alors même que les paternalismes officiels, devant l'évidence croissante des malaises et des défaites, maintenaient que rien ne devait changer au Québec.

Pas de tristesse chez Godbout, certainement pas dans le monde des patates frites et des hot dogs de l'île Perrot de *Salut Galarneau* (1967), pas dans celui de *Couteau sur la Table* (1965) habité par un Québécois errant, mais allègrement, dans l'américanité encerclée dans les étreintes de sa blonde maîtresse anglo-saxonne. Pas de tristesse non plus dans *l'Aquarium* (1962), premier roman du jeune écrivain dépêché professeur de français en Ethiopie, et retraçant un itinéraire à la Hemingway ou à la Graham Greene; c'est-à-dire celui d'un homme sûr d'habiter non pas *un* mais *le* monde à la mesure de ses ambitions. Godbout est son propre personnage, image pour image: l'homme des années soixante, McLuhanien, ouvert sur le monde et se voulant dégagé des emprises d'une tradition linéaire, livresque, obsédée par le

"cogito ergo sum"; bref, l'homme par excellence des *mixed media*. Poète, romancier, cinéaste et dramaturge putatif si l'on en juge par *L'Interview*, pièce radiophonique écrite en collaboration avec Pierre Turgeon, Godbout c'est tout cela.

Godbout poursuit dans cette pièce, qui est l'histoire d'un truand racontée sous forme d'entrevue accordée à un journaliste de la radio, certaines démarches surtout d'ordre formel amorcées dans son dernier roman, *D'Amour, P.Q.* (1972). Il s'agit de la question du langage et de la "littérarité". On sait que *D'Amour, P.Q.* est structuré par une dichotomie linguistique: d'une part l'entreprise de création romanesque exprimée dans un français universel, et d'autre part le sabotage de l'entreprise par des secrétaires-dactylos chargées de mettre au propre le manuscrit et qui contestent dans le langage *joual* de la génération des CEGEPS les fondements linguistiques de l'oeuvre. Le roman se termine par la conversion de l'auteur, d'Amour, à la culture de la contestation lors d'une entrevue radiophonique où il va jusqu'à renier la vraisemblance de l'écriture dans une époque dominée par la parole électronique. On voit bien comment *L'Interview* recoupe deux données précises du roman: le langage du truand est la parole de la classe laborieuse de l'est montréalais; et dans son immédiateté électronique elle se veut expression directe, vivante, et non "littéraire", de cette "réalité qui est la nôtre", dont parle souvent René Lévesque, cet autre produit des *mixed media*.

Mais à certains égards le projet est anachronique, ou du moins problématique, lorsqu'on songe aux attitudes qui le sous-tendent. La sensibilité est celle du groupe de *Parti Pris*, en ce qu'elle révèle

une obsession de se rapprocher du prolétariat par le biais du langage et de la thématique. Mais Godbout bute sur les mêmes arêtes qui mirent un frein aux exercices des Chamberland, Maheu et autres. Lorsqu'une littérature se voulant prolétarienne n'est pas issue d'une sensibilité elle-même prolétarienne, d'un milieu vécu et senti par l'auteur de *l'intérieur* (pensons à Michel Tremblay) celle-ci devient un exercice littéraire qui s'il ne témoigne pas d'une certaine nostalgie de la boue bien romantique du moins reflète le malaise certain d'écrivains d'origine et d'éducation bourgeoises, malaise d'une classe sociale d'ailleurs, à la recherche de valeurs soi-disant authentiques. L'histoire de Chico Tremblay, le truand, gunman à la petite semaine de la pègre locale, comme celle de Thomas d'Amour, sont des miroirs reflétant l'ambiguïté de l'écrivain à la croisée des cultures du collège classique et du CEGEP, de l'âge de l'écriture et des *mass media*, du langage international et du *joual* montréalais, et même d'Outremont et de la rue Papineau. Le choix de réconcilier les contraires par le mélange des genres est peut-être inévitable à l'âge électronique, selon Godbout. Mais cela donne une salade (je pense à *D'Amour, P.Q.*) qui déplaît autant à Jean Ethier-Blais, écrivant dans *Le Devoir*, qu'à Claude Jasmin, écrivant dans *Le Journal de Montréal*. Du moins c'est un exercice de style dans le ton de la culture Pop qui ne cesse de fasciner Godbout depuis quelque temps, lorsqu'on pense à ses longs métrages, *Kid Sentiment* et *IXE-13*.

Mais il y a là un signe d'essoufflement et une forme de décadence lorsqu'une littérature qui prend son essor dans les années soixante fondé dans une décou-

verte du pays natal et une reconnaissance de l'homme inscrit dans la durée historique — dont la symbiose est célébrée dans des romans et des recueils de poésie aussi puissants que *Prochain Episode* et *Terre Québec* — a recours à des thèmes et à des sources d'inspiration de partout et de nulle part. Bien sûr, la culture Pop que revendique Godbout ne connaît pas de frontières. Elle est produite par les gens qui de Paris à Liverpool, de San Francisco à Ste-Pie-de-Bagot, se reconnaissent à leurs cheveux, à leur musique et à leurs blue jeans dans cette "solidarité" dont parle Charlebois. A cette exception que Charlebois ou Dylan sait que les entrées se font chez Barclay ou Columbia et que les recettes sont calculées à la loupe après les spectacles à guichets fermés à L'Olympia ou au Madison Square Garden.

Là est le mérite des "crasseux", personnages de la première pièce d'Antonine Maillet, des laissés pour compte historiques, mais ayant une conscience innée des possédants et des possédés de ce monde, depuis que leur petit village du fond de l'Acadie est séparé entre gens d'En Bas et gens d'En Haut. Mais l'Acadie c'est plus. Telle qu'exprimée sous la plume prolifique de Madame Maillet, l'Acadie c'est la sagesse et la conscience séculaires du lieu de l'homme dans un temps et dans un espace oubliés ou violés par les autres nord-américains, oublieux de leur propre histoire. Les deux pièces, *Les Crasseux* (1968) et *La Sagouine* (1972), expriment le même monde d'Acadiens qui s'ils ne furent pas tous déportés en Louisiane ne connurent pas un meilleur sort pour autant. Tenus à l'écart du mouvement de la modernité, ils surent planter des racines profondes, et dans leur silence séculaire façonner un folklore et une identité qui dans l'oeuvre

d'Antonine Maillet viennent bousculer certaines idées reçues et remettre en question le rôle que Lesage et Lévesque réservaient, il n'y a pas si longtemps, aux minorités francophones hors du Québec dans un dessein sentant fort le colonialisme. Ces Acadiens ne sont pas Québécois, ni Franco-Américains, ni Franco-Ontariens, mais bien franchement eux-mêmes avec leur langage dru, truculent, archaïque, juteux, leur étrangeté à l'égard de leur coin de pays qui chez plus d'un Québécois de passage sème l'effroi. Un effroi apparemment provoqué par des étendues inconnues, comme perdues au bout de tout, loin des lieux rassurants qui vus de là-bas semblent être des métropoles.

Le Québécois de passage reconnaît dans le paysage acadien le Québec d'autrefois, pré-urbain, rural et traditionnel, et n'aime pas ce souvenir. L'Acadie pour lui c'est la défaite sinon la survivance menacée de partout; c'est la Nouvelle Angleterre de l'exil de plus d'un oncle ou d'une tante parlant un français bizarre. L'Acadie, c'est le Québec d'avant la "Révolution Tranquille", petit pays et petit peuple exposés à l'étouffement et subissant la hargne de ceux qui s'appellent aujourd'hui Jones tandis qu'hier ils se nommaient Gordon. L'archétype de l'Acadie est présent dans la mémoire québécoise de plus en plus refoulée maintenant que le rêve de l'Amérique est devenu le rêve québécois, cette américanité dont rêvent les héros de Dubé et que ceux de Godbout ont fait leur, avec les ambiguïtés que cela suppose. Cette américanité qui permet à Charlebois de constater que "Vivre en ce pays c'est comme vivre aux Etats-Unis" depuis que "la répression, la violence, la loi du plus fort" sont devenues un héritage commun.

Le Québécois n'aime pas l'Acadie, car il n'aime plus son passé. Mais l'Acadie est là dans l'oeuvre d'Antonine Maillet, défiant de sa santé un Québec lancé dans une course folle au progrès à la Baie James, à l'aide des I.T.T. et des superports pour les supercargos de Monsieur Onassis, ce Québec au stade du Consciousness II dont parle Charles Reich, sûr et arrogant de lui-même, mais sur la pente de la décadence si l'on en croit l'image réfléchie dans le *Réjane Padovani* de Denys Arcand. L'Acadie de Don l'Orignal, de la Sagouine, de Citrouille, de Michel Archange et autres personnages savoureux et authentiques est la conscience du Québec, le rappel de cette véracité que chantait hier encore Félix Leclerc et Gilles Vigneault.

Disons-le tout haut: si la littérature de l'Amérique française se cherche un deuxième souffle, c'est de l'Acadie qu'il vient, et c'est Madame Maillet qui poursuit aujourd'hui le grand dessein des meilleurs écrivains québécois des années soixante: celui de saluer et de chanter un pays dont on reconnaît être natif-natal. Mais ceci

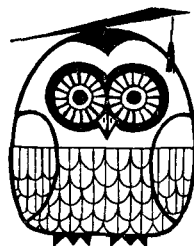
dit, il est des questions qui s'imposent. Quelle durée et surtout quelle continuité peut-on entrevoir pour une facture littéraire relevant essentiellement du conte? L'écriture qui se fait parole pour rendre compte d'une culture orale, l'écrivain qui s'efface devant le barde d'une collectivité où prime le sens communautaire, la langue parlée qui fait pâlir la langue académique, la vie donnée à des personnages fabuleux portant haut le symbolisme du cycle vital, la littérature qui se fait si peu littérature parce qu'elle est d'abord et avant tout conte, mythe, féerie, magie — n'est-ce pas là l'enfance de toute littérature nationale, celle de l'Irlande, de l'Ecosse, du Québec et d'ailleurs? Force est de constater que ce vent frais qui nous vient de l'Acadie porte en lui-même les germes d'une évolution la condamnant au sort de toute culture véhiculée par le livre. C'est donc dire que l'outil-symbole de la rupture du monde de l'oralité qu'est le livre dès lors qu'il est choisi comme moyen de communication et d'expression culturelles signale au départ la désintégration de l'univers folklorique acadien

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dont l'authenticité s'ancre dans cette oralité qu'évoque Madame Maillet. Don l'Original, la Sagouine, Michel Archange sont frères et sœurs d'Euchariste Moisan, de Menaud et de Floralie; comme Azarius et Rose-Anna Lacasse ils seront inévitablement plongés dans la modernité et produiront les fils et les filles auxquels nous renvoient Dubé et Godbout. Pour

l'instant, reconnaissons que ce village des *Crasseux*, si évocateur du village de *La Guerre*, *Yes Sir!* et autres villages de la mémoire collective, cette Sagouine qui est une Maman Plouffe "libérée", nous rappellent par le pouvoir de l'imagination que le monde est à base de correspondances. L'Acadie, c'est nous tous.

SUITCASE POETS

George Bowering

AL PURDY, *Sex & Death*, McClelland & Stewart, \$3.50.

EARLE BIRNEY, *What's so Big About Green?* McClelland & Stewart, \$2.95.

THERE ARE SOME POETS who hide personality, some who reveal it while ostensibly doing something else, and some who ask the reader to engage it because their work is to begin with expressive. Among the last group, in varying degrees, I would find Margaret Atwood, Michael Ondaatje, John Newlove and David McFadden.

Al Purdy is the extreme case. He now employs his personality, familiar (familiar as hell, Purdy would say) to his readership, as the main organizing principle of his poetry.

Purdy has not made any formal innovations in his verse since the volume called *Cariboo Horses*, 1965. He generally makes a poem of one stanza with no regularity of line, no normal punctuation save the upper-case letter at the start of a sentence, and hardly any use of the line for rhythmical meaning — that is, on the page a line that would reach primary juncture at its end looks just like a line that would be enjambed. It can lead to problems for the reader:

Africa of the rain forests the storybook

country
of Rider Haggard and Joseph Conrad
and breast-beating gorillas ignorant of
English
lions like yellow cadillacs

That is, there *are* English lions, but I don't think that Purdy wants them here. When Purdy reads aloud he never stumbles, but the other reader might.

So the reader is that way distanced from the speaker and the speaking of the poem; and distanced further by the usual first-person voice of the narrator, which makes of the reader a receiver rather than a conductor of the words. (Hence personality; and further, in the sense of "a personality.")

And many words. There are about 120 pages of poetry, on extra-tall sheets, little white space, and pretty long lines. A lot of Purdy, generally Purdy the traveller we have come to know in recent years. (In fact I am waiting for Purdy and Birney to meet by chance in an airport, if there is one, in Gulripshi.) In this volume we get poems on the trail across all Canada, on a troller off B.C., as well as datelines in South Africa, Italy,

Mexico, Greece, Turkey, Crete, Japan. There are poems, too, set in other places on the globe, though written during one of the poet's visits to Ameliasburg.

It is a strange poet, who resembles a journalist, a man satisfied with his talent, who goes through space, time, and the news, finding topics. A kind of New Journalist of verse. He is quite aware of that role, writing poems during assignments for *Maclean's* magazine, "covering" events such as RFK's assassination, or the Canadian occupation of Quebec, and publishing poems in such journals as *Weekend*, *Globe & Mail*, and *Star Weekly*.

One feels that some of the poems, such as the anecdotal "'Sizwe Bansi is Dead'", telling of an experience in a theatre in South Africa, should be made into short stories. But Purdy never writes short stories. It is a problem the reader cannot evade: Purdy's poems sound like prose sometimes. Hulme said that prose is a RR train that gets you to your destination, and that poetry is a walking tour with step-by-step observation of the here. Williams said that prose describes the given world and poetry invents a world to be discovered. On these terms, Purdy is not a prose writer. But the stuff doesn't always seem like poetry either.

Or it is loose poetry. It is certainly not artifact, in the Yeatsian sense. It is not compressed language, not redolent with pun and rime and metaphor and ambiguity. One's attention stays in the continuous present, but it is not a stacked present; the past and other and universal are not zipping past one's ears. If they are to be there Purdy will mention that he was led to think of them. No allusion, then, save the overt one. Purdy is telling stories and anecdotes, and he wants to

make sure the point is clearly taken. The arresting images are the only non-onward features, and they work best when they are not quite as bizarre as Purdy oft likes to make them. Consider this nice observation from a train window in Yugoslavia:

buried in snow
space folded on itself by mountains
where old kings with purple carbuncles
doze fitfully thru a dream of trains
Beyond the white village unfindable again
fields where cattle have traced a diagram
in snow of 24 hours of their lives

Poems such as "Athens Apartment" are really diary entries, and I think that that form, a journal, is what Purdy offers, a day-by-day accounting of his life and thoughts; and we ought to read his book that way. It doesn't then have to be described as verse or prose—it is a series of entries, and we too may enter without thought of purpose. The pieces (poems) are not, again, artifacts. Purdy took care of that problem, discarding artifact as principle, in *Poems for all the Annettes*, 1962.

That throws us back, logically, on personality. The test becomes not whether the poem is perfectly made (in an age when, imitating reality, art's old game, Warhol's paintings deteriorate in a few years, right on your wall), but whether the personality and story are interesting. They are to me, who like the idea for a while of the muse as a sensible next door neighbour with varicose veins in her legs and slightly messy hair.

The personality as familiar to the extent of being homely, offers in good company, relaxed speech, ruminative rather than contemplative or meditative, the more formal modes. In terms of rhythm, Purdy is a minimalist, as we all are when among friends. This friend has

come home and now he tells the story of his travels and observations; he is the complete nonreligious humanist whose main definition of human is Purdy, and we are expected not to be too much different.

We stay-at-homes are treated to many fine off-hand evocations of visual images, snapshots, often, by a tourist:

only a waterfall lost in the Canadian bush
which has had nothing written about it
except when autumn leaves drifting on the
foam
are crimson letters

He's a domestic poet, for all the travel, and you take him fast, like domestic champagne.

One does notice some changes in the personality. There is not nearly so much of the ribald, exaggerating fantasy Purdy now, perhaps a sign of growing age and seriousness, a willingness to become laureate. But one will still find vintage Purdy, trying to destroy the poetical, and the anti-poetical, which latter is discovered to be poetical — getting rid of this continuously, and getting thus to the moment, the bare naked moment, free from all threatening metaphor, keeping that circle of bay leaves off his head:

Chronos thy servant approaches
in a 71 Ford at 30 mph respectfully
with an offering of adjectives and green
birds
refrigerated verbs and medium cool nouns
wherefore then do the ex-dancehall owner
and my housewife chant ecstatically
in unison "Yea marvellous fantastic
tremendous"?
I mutter under my breath "Get ye hence
debased semantic carrion vultures
bastard offspring of a nonplussed
polysyllabic pictograph get lost"
"You're fulla shit" my housewife says
and I am relieved

"The Horseman of Agawa" will be

one of the main Purdy poems when they are all sorted out decades from now. Looking with his wife at the 200-year old Indian rock-painting under the cliffs of Lake Superior, the poet is back into one of his richest themes, the destruction wrought by time, and the amazing survival of human works through time, and the closeness of the present artist/viewer to the original one. Purdy's response is typically to express his feelings while guarding himself against the accusation of being a *sensitif*:

the Ojibway artist stood there
balanced above water like us
and drew with his fingers on the stone
canvas
with fish eggs or bear grease to make the
painting permanent
pitting fish eggs and bear grease against
eternity
which is kind of ludicrous or kind of
beautiful I guess

But it is an unusually sensitive and beautiful poem, and cannot be described. It is a great accomplishment, for here Purdy manages without compromising his bluff posturing to make beautiful and true metaphor convincing about the actuality not of sex and death, but of love and history.

About the title: Purdy says he called the book that because he had discovered that what an early Vancouver manuscript-rejector said is true — his poems are all about sex and death. Actually six of the poems are about sex, and five of those are not at all "sexy." Fourteen are about death. Two are about both. Thirty-eight are primarily about neither, but rather about such subjects as race, politics, exile, history, ageing, money, booze, and art. But then Purdy has his hedge: "For in my book, sex and death must always include love and life."

In the making of *What's so Big About*

Green?, Birney must once again have driven Jack McClelland and his printers batty. This new collection continues in the anti-book tradition of *Rag and Bone Shop*, featuring such vagaries as a see-through poem, boxes of print, differing type sizes, unusual spacings, and especially noteworthy here, two-tone print, in this case black and green.

Looking back at earlier books, one notices that Birney has always been interested in visual effects on the page, and in the carrying over into the poem of found objects such as tourist brochures, wall-signs, *etc.* But in the last decade he has moved bodily into the area called the interface, between poem and visual art.

One wants to remark that his moves through the interface are often academic, somehow at the spectator's vantage point; but then there are his "Alphabeings", the creatures, animals and others, crudely drawn with the letters that make up their names. Now that is something that every ten-year-old kid has done, and there Birney plunges, into the risk, the dare. Aw, my kid could do that. So why is that a criticism? Indeed.

But I still feel that all this is not really the avantgarde. Birney is usually, in these japes, doing something exciting and playful for his own amusement, and that is okay. But the reader is not similarly energized. The reader is having a story without a storyteller, and he and Birney might wave at one another, as the boy in the swimming hole and the driver of the passing locomotive might wave at one another. If you remember that, you'll know it's a nice experience.

So one looks through the book, enjoying some parts more than other, the way you did with your Christmas stocking. Personally, I don't like a certain mixing

of visual and sound, the making a poem about a mountain appear mountain-shaped. Is one supposed to contemplate it? I think that once that has been done, with for instance Herbert's altar, it's done. What more can further shaped poems offer but more shapes? And we already have those shapes anyway.

More interesting is a concrete poem that makes one pay attention to the design of the print, or the design the print makes anew. Rather than copying a design already more interestingly made by a skyline or a mountain or a falling airplane. Even with concrete poetry one does better to imitate than to copy nature.

That is what Birney does magically (?) with his black and green. A curious thing happens — sometimes when you tilt the page the black type seems to turn green, especially if you've been looking at green, the alternative. I mean this is right now happening even with the black ink (I think) I am using to make these notes. Often in a poem that is nearly all black, the line you are presently reading seems to turn green before your eyes, while the others in the periphery remain black.

There's the thematic contention of the book taking place. The book takes place. The green of life and nature versus the black of industrial (industrious) greed and death. The dialectic or rather struggle is of green vs. greed, both energetic but not to be confused. But in the shifting light they are.

What a peculiar book-review to be writing! I feel like asking the printer of *CL* to — (no, no, Birney, hands off!). On the cover of the book there is a picture of laughing Birney standing like a giant

with his bearded head poking up through a triangle in a geodesic dome.

Still, with all the fun of the other, its essential head-clearing, I prefer Birney the logopoeic. Compared with Purdy, he has very clear line notation, not for a syncopated or moment-oriented rhythm, but the sure sense that comes when clause and line find their junctures equal:

The first deer must have come in a
tremble
to drink at that Lake
noses wrinkling at the stink
Only their taut ears to tell
if a cougar moved in the tree-limbs

That is a stanza from the title poem, a fine six-page piece that tells of the pre-historic rise and approaching fall of nature's green. Portraying the coming to the lower mainland of B.C. by the white men, it offers these terrific lines:

They slashed in roads
ran power lines over the balding ridges
sawed the big firs into suburbs
ground small pines into Sunday
Supplements
& multiplied that old mephitic stink
into a general sulphite wind

It is a very engaging ecopoem, ecological conservation being a lifelong Birney pursuit. In fact the whole book takes that highly pertinent but surprisingly seldom-treated subject as its purpose. I remember being deeply impressed and moved by Birney's reading of the title poem at a symposium in Calgary in Feb. 1973. I also remember his black prediction about the future of the ecosphere. So the ending of the poem shows men removing the green of the west coast and returning the place to the condition of lavaic pre-vegetative earth, to get us, as a yahoo in the poem's drama says, "in step with all the other planets". Profound and final boosterism, eh? The poem operates in a

bitter ironic mode, not a common thing in these days when it might seem likely.

Most of Birney's central cares and main tricks are to be found exemplified in the collection. There is the satiric poem with the half-found ironies, "Messyjest for a Kinageing Kitchmess". His political protest poem, "I Accuse Us", is better than Purdy's because the points are made quicker and without the blurring slowing phrases such as Purdy's "and I wouldn't be surprised . . ." *etc.*:

Yes sir we're the biggest seller
of napalm & phosphorus
the U.S. ever had
though of course we howl
every week on television
when the bastards drop it all
on somebody's kids
Don't think we haven't got a conscience —
who sent a whole children's hospital
to South Vietnam? O sorry no
that was the British

"I Accuse Us" was Birney's Centennial poem.

There is a found poem, made from Rudyard Kipling's 1890 views on Vancouver. There is the most complex tone poem I have ever heard — English syllables compiled and scored to imitate all the sounds heard in the train from London to Swindon. Birney gives an alarming reading of it. There is that transparent poem, which apparently reads from one side only, and the reason for that is rather opaque, and the poem is hard to read or to see through, the letters being scattered in a circle, and it's hard to get around that or to get a line on it.

There is an amusing sequence of dialect adventure poems, in which we are treated to a view of the agonies of an official Canadian poet touring the Australian universities. Birney finds that the dopes in Australia are very much like the dopes back home, boosters and profes-

sors, kid-athlete mothers and drinkers. A bonus for the author is that there he gets to practice his mocking dialect verse in Strine.

But finally Birney's great concern is the dying earth. He does not offer any hope or method of salvation. He has been here long enough to see the changes wrought on the earth, sea and sky of Vancouver. He is Canadian enough to take the geology as theme and its aeons as scope (as did Pratt and Scott), but he is far enough into the century Laurier promised us to see how "puny" men could not only subdue but obliterate the wild. It is as if

the Group of Seven paintings could include an oil slick or some sawed-off hill-sides. "The Shapers: Vancouver" is another good eco-poem, in which as always we are shown a comparison between the Indians who were married to the land here, and the whites who murdered them and raped it. The poem is made of the high-performance vocables we have come to expect of its author:

in the screaming chainsaws
we hushed the old dreamers
in the hullabaloo of bulldozers
dynamite dynamo crane dredge combustion
buried them deeper than all computation

LOWRY BY DAY

W. H. New

DOUGLAS DAY, *Malcolm Lowry*. Oxford, \$10.00.

BECAUSE MALCOLM LOWRY embroidered and invented so much of the private life he wrote into his novels, it always comes as something of a surprise to realize how ordinary much of his real life was. His English upbringing was conventionally middle-class; his distaste for the English public school system was probably not unusual among boys who have suffered it; and if his alcoholism was an unpredictable illness, his choice of alcohol as a means of escaping emotional problems was by no means extraordinary. Yet the combination of his experiences led him to become a quite extraordinary writer, one whose emotional engagement with daily events heightened their significance for him and expressed itself in an elaborate and sometimes overripe prose style. Rejecting his background, Lowry travelled through Europe, Mexico, Canada, and parts of Asia and the Caribbean, yet tried con-

stantly to please the parents from whom he was increasingly alienated. If he worked out in his books an order that he could never adequately grasp in his life, we have also to note that his unrest, too, entered his fiction. His books are witty; they have imaginative breadth; and for the most part they remained incomplete. His vision and his realities were recurrently at odds.

When Conrad Knickerbocker died, Douglas Day took on the difficult task of differentiating between fact and fiction in Lowry's life and writing the "official" biography. He travelled to England, Spain, Mexico, and Canada in Lowry's footsteps; he interviewed numbers of people who knew Lowry and could recollect him in vivid detail; he had access to a number of Margerie Lowry's private papers; and in producing a brightly readable volume, he found himself confronted inescapably by the difference between the

man and the fictional character. His choice, under these conditions, was to focus on Lowry the alcoholic, Lowry the syphilophobe, Lowry the latent homosexual, and (the inference is Day's) Lowry the suicide. Certain grotesque and horrifying stories come to light in such a catalogue — the fact that Lowry was considered for a lobotomy two years before his death, for example — and such incidents are told with reportorial smoothness. But they tend to draw our attention away from Lowry's strengths to his weaknesses, and though Day attempts to elucidate the relationship between them, he remains, as a biographer, more fascinated by his subject's idiosyncrasies than respectful of his subject as a writer or a human being.

Day does admire *Under the Volcano*, of course. Indeed, he goes to great lengths to summarize the work and trace the course of its composition. But such efforts to make his biography a "biocritical" study seem to interrupt (or even in the Mexican section, to replace) the biographical narrative more than to add to it. Perhaps in part because he can express no praise for any of the rest of Lowry's work — thereby displaying a curious insensitivity to the strengths of *Hear Us O Lord* — his basis for interpreting the man is founded in his response to a single book. The Consul's personal hell in *Under the Volcano* is, as it were, magnified into Lowry's total life.

Even the structure of the biography works to this end. In emulation of the form of *Under the Volcano*, Day has chosen to tell the last events first, to have his readers understand Lowry's life by the manner of his leaving it. Such a form in the novel serves the function of reinforcing the themes of death, percep-

tion, and re-creation; it helps establish Lowry's use of circular patterns and his notion of serial time. But in the biography the arrangement throws an emphasis on the alcoholic and uncreative Lowry rather than upon the passionate writer, and that remains the filter through which we glimpse the man alive.

There are strengths in the book. Explorations into Lowry's childhood and education led Day to dispute some of Knickerbocker's published findings; he acknowledges Suzanne Kim's fine work on Lowry's early publishing; he extends our knowledge of Lowry's career as a songwriter; and (himself fluent in Spanish) he adds substantially to our understanding of Lowry's relationship with Conrad Aiken and of his months in Spain and France during 1933 and 1934. Yet the years in Mexico, unfortunately, remain mysteriously shadowy. If prototypes are found in Cambridge for *October Ferry's* Peter Cordwainer story, no original emerges in Day's Mexican searches for the evil influence, Stanford, in *Dark as the Grave*. More puzzling as a deficiency, Day treats Lowry's years in Canada with a perfunctoriness that seems especially curious when one considers that they were Lowry's happiest and most productive. Though Day relies repeatedly on interviews for his information, he interviewed remarkably few Canadians (among whom Earle Birney, who knew Lowry well and has edited some of the manuscripts, is not to be counted), and he seemed to find those he did interview largely uncommunicative. Lowry's last years and his years of young manhood thus come across as the dramatic frame around bland years of creativity, rather than a prelude to and decline from a fragile pinnacle of success.

It seems as though there is a basic failure here to appreciate what Canada meant to Lowry. Certainly it was a "hostile", ugly, philistine world to him when he first arrived; it never altogether lost those attributes. But it also, he realized later, had a stern blue wilderness beauty. It was an ephemeral paradise against which he could measure his taste of hell, and it was as much of a key experience as Mexico in enabling him to construct his mythic landscape. What was involved in that landscape was a Jungian sense of a balance between opposites: Canada and Mexico were never separate from each other in Lowry's fictional world. Day acknowledges that, in his comments on Lowry-the-artist. But when he turns to the man, his American fascination with Freud reconstructs a Lowry in whom id and ego were at war:

Years of clinical psychiatric study have demonstrated quite convincingly that a condition like protaxis . . . has its origins in the very earliest stages of character formation: those which are subsumed under the general rubric of *orality*. In this developmental phase, the key transaction is 'self-object differentiation' . . .

Fortunately the ponderousness with which these oral fixations are asserted is out of character with the rest of the book. But the interpretation asks for one side or the other of Lowry's personality to win, never for there to be a balance between the two. A balance, however, was what Lowry constantly looked for; it is what Canada came to represent for him, and what his most equable characters managed, however impermanently, to find.

One comes away from Day's pages fascinated by the portrait that emerges there. A difficult and subjective man, the Lowry of the book was never free from fear. Words were his grasp on sanity, drunkenness his release from the pressures of knowing himself, lying his way of constructing a new identity. He lived under enormous pressure and he died alone. The achievement of the book is to obtain from its readers both an overwhelming pity and an overpowering disgust for a man undergoing such daily trial.

FREEDOM TO DEPART

ROBERT KROETSCH, *Gone Indian*. new press, \$6.95.

ALTHOUGH Robert Kroetsch is primarily a western writer, he is intrigued by the North. It was the setting for his first novel, *But We Are Exiles*, and now, in his fourth book, he attempts to encounter fully the significance of this half-real, half-hallucinated northern landscape, this unknowable region where the world is reduced to its basic elements and beyond that to a final void. In *Gone Indian* Jeremy Sadness, an American graduate student, arrives in Edmonton (one of those gateways to the North) in search of a future in the Canadian West, drawn by the Canadian North. He comes seeking the wilderness and in quest of a new identity (he is fascinated by Archie Belaney, that civilized Englishman who transformed himself into "the truest Indian of them all", Grey Owl), but he is ultimately in flight to something much more frightening: "I am looking for nothing. The primal darkness. The purest light. For the first word. For the voice that spoke the first word. The inventor of zero."

Gone Indian is the concluding work in Kroetsch's Out West trilogy, which has now moved from the depression thirties (*The Words of My Roaring*) through

the forties (*The Studhorse Man*) into the seventies. Each of the novels in the trilogy deals with the passing of an era, a moment of crisis which forms one more chapter in the history of the Apocalypse: each examines the particular myths by which its society defines itself, wittily interweaving other mythic structures drawn from the larger western tradition, and—in *Gone Indian*—blending in Indian myth as well to form a complexly layered whole beneath a deceptively simple surface. The title changes that this final book of the trilogy went through suggests the several ways the novel works. The original title, *Funeral Games* (Kroetsch says he abandoned it as "too Graeco-Roman"), invokes Book V of the *Aeneid*, where the funeral games for Anchises celebrated by Aeneas and his men serve as a kind of societal passage rite marking the death of the old Trojan order and the turning toward the yet to be created Roman world. Within the novel the Notikeewin winter games serve a similar function: by diverting Jeremy from his job interview at the University of Alberta they divorce him from the competitive urban culture he has left in the northeast, and thereby prepare him for his final plunge into the North. Kroetsch's second working title, *Falling*, emphasizes the personal aspect of the novel: Jeremy's perception of his life as perpetual falling/failing, and his final realization that falling toward death is an inevitable part of life and that falling is the payment for flying. Finally the title *Gone Indian* (with the intentional ambiguity of "Gone") catches a number of the dominant themes in the book: the North American fascination with and search for the Edenic, pastoral world; the novel's ironic play with urban man's

romanticization of the Indian and the lost culture he represents; and finally its very serious play with the Indian trickster myth, especially the figure of the sleeping giant who is represented by the wounded, unconscious Roger Dorck. Dorck, whose presence is felt throughout the book (in the opening chapter Jeremy mistakenly acquires his baggage at the airport), represents not only the phallic potency that Jeremy lacks, but also the creative unconscious that Jeremy would release.

These various levels of the novel work together to say something about the society that Kroetsch visualizes as coming to an end in the seventies: the competitive, technological, highly rationalistic order which has rendered Jeremy impotent. Carnival — the ritualized breakdown of order — frees Jeremy from the work ethic but thrusts him into a new world of contests and competitions. Jeremy enters a snow-shoe race and wins; in Dorck's absence he is made to judge the three finalists in the Winter Queen beauty contest. However Jeremy's racing victory brings him only another disaster; he learns more from watching an Indian choose not to win a dog-team race, seeing there the absurd arbitrariness of a world in which "the difference of six feet, after those fifty miles, made one man a loser" and observing the "magnificent indifference" of the dogs to their loss. Jeremy relates this perception to the final transformation of Grey Owl: "The hunter who would not, finally, hunt. The killer refusing to kill." The senselessness of competition becomes similarly apparent when Jeremy discovers the beauty contest is unjudgeable ("I have never in my life seen three people who looked so exactly like each other as those three girls."), and that he, trained by the academic world to

judge ("[I] wanted to write in the margins of those lives: Awk. Frag. Emph. Cap. Fig.") is the man least suited to the role for he is himself in flight from judgment — from the debilitating judgment of his dissertation advisor (Mark Madham, who is also the narrator of the novel), from the castrating judgment of his wife, and from his own ceaseless, self-deprecatory evaluations. The beauty contest intentionally evokes the judgment of Paris, that rigged decision that began the destruction of an entire civilization, but Jeremy revises the archetype by refusing to accept the alternatives as defined, thereby freeing himself from the demands for performance that had rendered him physically and spiritually impotent.

In the novel's conclusion the sleeping Dorck rises at last, signalling Jeremy's own freedom and his recovered vitality. But it is an ambiguous, partly ironic, freedom that Jeremy attains — the freedom to depart into that Northern void at last, to embrace the inviting silence, perhaps to find a new life, perhaps to perish there.

Gone Indian is a fine book, providing a fascinating conclusion to Kroetsch's vision of the development of the Canadian West as emblematic of twentieth century social change. It is a book which should be read at least twice to penetrate beneath its surface, but that is a compliment to Kroetsch as story teller.

RUSSELL M. BROWN

A CANADIAN NOVEL

C. J. NEWMAN, *A Russian Novel*. New Press.

HEMINGWAY once said that his writing was good enough to give him confi-

dence in a contest with Flaubert but that he was not ready to enter the ring with Tolstoy. C. J. Newman, in *A Russian Novel*, has entered the ring not only with Tolstoy but with Dostoevsky and Solzhenitsyn. It was, of course, no great act of humility for Hemingway to find himself less impressive than Tolstoy. Newman's novel is a more complicated matter in this respect, for the reader is constantly being reminded of novels much more impressive than the one he is reading. *A Russian Novel* has quotations from Dostoevsky as epigraphs to four of its five books; it includes several passages (for example, a description of the Moscow Ministry buildings lighted up at night for quota-filling workers) similar to passages in Solzhenitsyn's *The First Circle*. The novel is dedicated to Solzhenitsyn, "for his life and work".

David Miller, a Canadian writer and editor, persuades his publisher to send him to Russia so that, while collecting material for a book on the Russian novelist Vinogradov, he can take the slim chance of somehow smuggling out of Russia and into the hands of his publishers a suppressed manuscript, another *First Circle* or *August 1914*, perhaps. The plot develops around Miller's relationship with Vinogradov's young wife (an unconvincing relationship resembling those in a James Bond story for elapsed time between "hello" and love-making and a Jules Feiffer cartoon for excruciating self-consciousness), his interviews with others who have been associated with Vinogradov and his experiences with Russian security measures. The significance of the book, however, derives from Miller's real reason for going to Russia—a vast sense of moral inferiority as a North American, a Cana-

dian, who has never had to suffer or risk anything for freedom and literary creativity, which are meaningless until paid for.

The novel opens with the death of Miller's mother, a Russian who emigrated to Canada but never lost the capacity and willingness to suffer throughout her life that Miller sees as a Russian characteristic. His mother is like, in her suffering if not her complexity, the heroes of Tolstoy and, especially, Dostoevsky, whose novels have established for Miller what complete and genuine moral existence is. Considering the examples of his mother, the great nineteenth-century Russian novelists and the courage of Solzhenitsyn, Miller feels impoverished, deprived of the opportunity for a heroic or simply meaningful life by a "moderate" and "mundane" Canadian society in which commitment to people and ideals is buried under consumerism, tolerant mediocrity in government, a press so free that courage is eliminated from the list of qualities a good writer must have.

When Ratin, a kind of prophet, who is later imprisoned as an enemy of the state, thrusts a manuscript into Miller's hands, Miller keeps the manuscript, defying the orders of Stolyapin, his official host, and the police. His reflections on his own act articulate the central moral dilemma with which Newman is concerned:

... He wondered if Stolyapin could hear, just as he did, the effect, in his voice, of long years of moral erosion that undercut the value of his taking a stand, since he lacked the authority to imagine the worst that might result from it. Was this because he was a Canadian, he wondered, and so he had always enjoyed the fruits of the American system without having had to acquire the ruthlessness, the arrogance, and

finally the blood-guilt in which that system had been created? Or was it something more personal, something that came from his own life, from hard decisions deferred?

Miller sees, in the evils of Soviet repression, the conditions for testing human courage, endurance, commitment to other people, the honesty of writers. In effect, because of his personal and national sense of immaturity, he envies the Russian people their clear challenge to be their best selves and Russian writers their opportunities for heroic expression of politically unacceptable truths. In short, Miller is a card-carrying romantic. One can understand his emotional dissatisfaction with his country's *via media* and his longing for scenes where true tragedy is possible, but there is something decadent about his visit to Russia (he himself realizes the contradiction involved in conning his publishers into paying for his chance to have more *real*, less capitalistically inane, experiences). "His trip to Russia was to be, for him, an exercise in entering into all sorts of situations he had allowed himself previously to be excluded from, as his life narrowed down around him." The equivalent would be, I suppose, something like Solzhenitsyn's asking to be put in a prison camp so that he might experience the heights and depths of human nature, test his own strength and write a fine novel about it — on the proviso that he could be released any time things became too difficult.

The story is told in the third person, but the angle of vision is so nearly Miller's own that the book is autobiographical in effect. There is almost no distance between author and central character, so it is difficult to decide whether Miller is intended to be accepted

as admirable (which he is not) or as the misguided pursuer of a rather strange brand of holiday excitement (which he is). If the latter is the case, the novel leaves us convinced that, though you may earn money and counter the regrets of middle-age by adopting another country's political evils as your own enemy, you are not apt to save your immortal soul.

This is "a Russian novel" in the further sense that it includes long passages of dialogue in the simultaneously emotional and cerebral manner of Dostoevsky's and Solzhenitsyn's works. Newman's greatest success is in some of these dynamic and engaging passages. On the whole, however, the book takes no risks stylistically. It is journalistic, competent; there is nothing as lyrical as, say, the magnificent "Ark" chapter of *The First Circle* or as movingly simple as the style of *One Day in the Life of Ivan Denisovich*.

Newman's reach has exceeded his grasp in this novel, but his failure to do justice to the complexity of the moral issues he raises is more interesting than the facile cleverness or refined despair of so many contemporary novels.

DAVID EVANS

WEST INDIES: HERE AND THERE

AUSTIN CLARKE, *Storm of Fortune*. Little, Brown \$8.95, (cloth).

HAROLD SONNY LADOO, *No Pain Like This Body*. Anansi. \$8.50 (cloth), \$2.95 (paper).

AUSTIN CLARKE'S NEW NOVEL *Storm of Fortune* is the second volume of a trilogy begun with the 1967 publication of *The*

Meeting Point. It picks up from the mid-crisis ending of the first book to develop further the intertwined stories of the group of West Indian friends coping with immigrant life of Toronto in the Sixties. Much of the novel's focus is still on Bernice Leach, middle-aged live-in maid at the wealthy Forest Hill home of the Burrmanns. It dwells further on Bernice's uptight relationship with her erratic mistress, and with the loneliness and insulation of the Barbadian woman's three years in this "savage" place with its riches, its snow, and its decided coolness to black people. Also forming a continuing picture of the below-the-stairs world of *The Meeting Point* are Bernice's best friend Dots who is a Rosedale maid, the latter's husband the unemployed rascal-lion Boysie Cumberbatch, her newly-arrived sister Estelle who causes complications through Sam Burmann, and the lusty German maid Brigitte from the Gasstein's across the road. In both these novels it is as if the flat characters of a Dickensian world have come into their own at last, playing their tragi-comic roles in a manner which owes much to Clarke's extraordinary facility with the Barbadian dialect his characters speak and think in: "much like Shakespeare and not too far from the Bible," he told Graeme Gibson lately. Rather in keeping with this is a splendid scene in *Storm of Fortune* in which Bernice bristles with indignation when searching in vain for a particular passage in a purloined *New English Bible*:

"And what the hell this book mean by saying *who followed the new way*. Which way that is? Are they telling me something 'bout a road or a street, or something like that?"

No, "This isn't the way the Bible does

say things, man!" Nor do these characters find the new way of their present lives an easy one to follow. There are the memories of "village days of youth and freedom within the poverty and sunshine and sea" and there is the loneliness of Toronto where to be made aware that you are the only black person on the underground is a recurring desolation. For the Canadian reader to see himself through the barely suppressed smouldering of these dark eyes it is a jolting experience, but it is also a relishing one when Dots, Estelle or Boysie make the occasional score for their side, for example Dots against the studied indifference of a head nurse:

"Get up, get, man, and attend to we! Be-Christ, we ain't waiting. We tired waiting!"

To a degree, the waiting and frustration and spoiled dreams predominating in *The Meeting Point* are over in *Storm of Fortune*. The novel begins sombrely enough with the first of its three parts entitled "Violence and Fear at the Base". Bernice is still the deceptively simple combination of warmth, spite, priggery and decent pride. She is the hardest to dislodge from the habits of recent years, but in all of their lives turning points gradually emerge for what seems like the better. Dots is the first to make a deliberate effort to throw off the servitude and insulation of Rosedale and its like. She tries to incite Bernice with her newly-found philosophy of happiness in Canada:

If you could push a heavy bundle-buggy o' groceries with a couple thick porterhouse steaks in it, with a case o' beer, and if your refrigerator full up with food for Sarduh night, your blasted foots cocked up on a chair and you sitting down in front o' that thirty-inch television watching coloured television, child, *you is people*.

But in this country, if you don't possess them material thing, you ain' people. You ain' nobody. That is all that counts in this place.

While the full implications of this remain for a future novel, this one does provide a sense of the amazing gusto with which these people can live when freed to do so. Even Boysie, after an hilariously abortive attempt to be a janitor at the Baptist church house, starts out on his own as a cleaning contractor. This makes it possible for him to host the exuberant wedding part for Henry and Agatha at his own apartment, an occasion, however, counterpointed by the tragic potential of its inevitable racial implications and leading to the pathos of Henry's still mysterious death at the end of the book. Austin Clarke is not writing specifically racial novels as such, but he is bound to explore the impact of racist situations and he has chosen a rich variety of ways to dramatize them. These range from the super-intellectuality of the curious naive student-bride Agatha, to the truly moving insights of Estelle who sees in her own situation a version of the ancient slave-concubine condition of her island forebears, and to Bernice's uproarious account of a "paint-in" party at the home of her new employer—a scene which more than rivals Richler's comic view in *Atuk* of intellectual Toronto at play.

The narrative line is no more complete than it was in *The Meeting Point*, and even if it should be rounded out in subsequent work, story sequence per se seems to matter less than that this novelist should continue to create his Brueghel-like canvasses with their rich and contrasting detail and mood.

Quite a different novelistic imagination is at work in Harold Sonny Ladoo's brief

and spare first novel, *No Pain Like This Body*. In subject matter there is a rough parallel to be found between this book and Clarke's earlier *Amongst Thistles and Thorns* (1965) insofar as both deal with childhood experience in the West Indies. However there is an impressionistic quality to Ladoo's picture of a turn-of-the century east Indian community which contrasts with Clarke's more matter-of-fact realism. This is a novel of greater formal unity than *Storm of Fortune*; it too anticipates a future sequence to include life in Canada, yet its characterization is less tangible and it reproduces a simpler and less compelling English dialect.

The harsh little story tells of a few days in the lives of a family living on the edge of the Tola settlement on Carib Island during the August rains. Its events are seen primarily from a child's view, revealing the terrors of a small boy's illness and death with its attendant folk-rituals and superstitions. "Dese chirens going to come man and woman in Tola" is the pathetically persistent cry of the agonized mother toiling for the meagre existence the rice-fields supply. Ladoo's choice of the rainy season as setting intensifies the dismal struggle for mere existence against the menacing power of the elements. This Eden gone awry is the purlieu of the unpitying God of the sky who, to the children, never winked, slept or ate but "just lived in heaven and stared at the earth all the time." The rain falls "like fat white worms invading the earth from above," the wind is "as a claw from the shapeless darkness" and clouds are "like a black spider with a huge body".

Atmosphere, and the primitive emotional response to it, are all in this little book. There is the temporary brightening

of the dark little house for the traditional wake with its gathering of neighbours, story-telling and rum. Human existence emerges in its simplest yet most powerful extremes. "Trobble is for everybody," but only the strong may survive it. Twelve year-old Balraj frantically tries to save his beloved crappo fish; old Nanny beats her drum with all the love and strength at her command to save her grief-frenzied daughter from the hidden dangers of the forest. Their chances of success seem negligible, but amazingly the life force persists, embracing all the violent oppositions and contradictions of a world which yet hints, as in the Hindu terms, of a unity in its total design.

DIANE BESSAI

PREFERABLE PARADISE

W. O. MITCHELL, *The Vanishing Point*. Macmillan. \$9.95.

THE TITLE of W. O. Mitchell's new novel alludes to the pictorial device by which converging lines, meeting at a "vanishing point" on the horizon, create the illusion of depth; and the novel itself is concerned with the lines men draw for themselves and for others in their desire to impose order, purpose, direction, on human life. That this is at best an illusory goal is the conclusion reached by *The Vanishing Point*, which describes the uneasy relations between an Indian band and white administrators on a reserve in the Albertan foothills. The representative of white authority is Carlyle Sinclair, a thirty-six year old widower who acts as both schoolteacher and agent on the Paradise Valley reserve; despite the indiffer-

ence of the members of the band, Carlyle establishes a degree of order among the children under his tutelage, and wins a grudging respect from their elders. After nine frustrating years, his efforts to bring the Stonys into the twentieth century seem to have met with at least one success: one of his pupils has passed her examinations, and begun her training as a nurse at the city hospital. Early in the novel, Sinclair travels to the city to visit the girl, Victoria, only to find that she has disappeared from the hospital, and in all likelihood taken up the life of prostitution so often the fate of Indian girls in the city.

Mitchell deals sympathetically but unsentimentally with the problems which confront white administrators of Indian affairs. By white standards, the Indians of Paradise Valley are slovenly, lazy and unhygienic; but every effort by officialdom to improve the situation is vitiated by ignorance or misunderstanding of native culture and tradition. Though Sinclair is himself an instrument of white government, he is not blind to its follies; he hates the Ottawa bureaucracy, "the slow and narcotizing routine — the impersonal red tape that formalized hunger and sickness and death." But the Indians anger him too, by their reluctance to abandon the old ways, and their refusal to adopt white standards. Yearning to reach them, Sinclair seeks a bridge like that which connects the reserve to the highway and the world outside, "some sort of suspension bridge that could carry hearts and minds across and into other hearts and minds." Through his love for Victoria, he learns that a man must build such bridges himself by accepting his responsibility for his fellows, not by seeking to dominate them. At the end of the

novel, Sinclair joins the reclaimed Victoria in a ritual Indian dance; he has ignored official advice not to become personally involved; and he has lost the desire to alter the Indians' self-image, learning instead to accept them for what they are.

The message of *The Vanishing Point*, that all men are brothers and thus accountable to each other, is one to which no reader will take exception, though some may wonder how Carlyle's belated discovery of this principle is going to affect policy decisions in the Department of Indian Affairs. The sentiments which Carlyle expresses, or which are expressed through him, do not lack conviction or appeal; but Carlyle himself, primarily a vehicle for the author's ideas, never really comes to life as a character. His creator endows him with a very active interior life, granting us frequent entry into his inner thoughts and fantasies, as well as his recurring childhood memories; but the insights we gain do little to explain why Carlyle feels or acts as he does. That his Aunt Pearl produced white stools, or that his best friend caught diphtheria from him and died, suggest possible sources of guilt and alienation, but these reminiscences seem at best tenuously associated with his adult motivation. The early death of his wife in childbirth might be expected to have serious consequences, and perhaps explains his feelings for Victoria; but that part of his past is hardly dealt with at all. The problem arises in part from Mitchell's desire to work obliquely towards the creation of character, conveying personality in spurts of dialogue, fragments of memory or description, the meaning of which become clearer as the novel progresses; but the piecing-together process takes a long time,

and in Carlyle's case doesn't seem complete — he remains flat and featureless. The object of his devotion, the "little lost lamb" Victoria, is even less clearly realized; although we learn something about her from Carlyle, and hear her speak on occasion, she is a colourless and indistinct figure throughout. It may have been the author's intention to show her only through Carlyle's eyes, first as a symbol of the teacher's mistaken beliefs about the future role of the native Indian, then as simply a young woman reaching out to him with her love. Either way, Victoria is little more to us than a name.

The reader may also be puzzled by the novel's fluctuations of tone, and the several shifts of narrative viewpoint. The serious and the comic are complementary moods, and may exist side by side without any sense of incongruity; but the comic elements of *The Vanishing Point* do not always contribute to the novel's essentially serious purposes. It seems hardly appropriate, for example, to turn the death of Esau Rider, Victoria's father and the dignified symbol of a past era, into a grotesque farce involving a faith-healer's delusions of power and a prostitute preening herself in her outfit as Miss North-West Fish and Game 1954. A further diffusion of effect occurs when the novel leaves Carlyle Sinclair for lesser figures like the wily Indian Archie Nicotine, or the Reverend Heally Richards, a bush-league evangelist with an eye to the big time. These characters are amusing and well-drawn, but they assume a prominence in the story which is out of proportion to their rôles; lodging the point-of-view in Archie or Richards only blurs the narrative focus, and diverts our attention for too long from the novel's central issues.

The Vanishing Point is on surer ground in portraying the white officials who run Indian Affairs: Fyfe, the regional director, who sees all Indians as "terminal cases to be made comfortable as possible within the terms of the reserve system — the budget and the Indian Act — and the civil service machinery"; the bumbling Reverend Dingle who for twenty years has "indulged himself in a sort of absent-minded masturbatory loving-kindness that has borne no fruit"; Sheridan, the Indian agent, who has worn himself out in thirty-five years of administrative service, only to reach the hopeless conclusion that "an Indian does as he damn pleases." Sanders, the doctor whose area includes Paradise Valley, is one of the few to recognize that it is the system itself, "the reserve-system slough — tepid with paternal help", which is sapping the strength of the native Indian. At the same time, the reserve does serve to protect the Indian, to maintain, however unsatisfactorily, a way of life which in many respects seems preferable to that led by the white man; Paradise may no longer be perfect, but its native inhabitants, poor and diseased as they may be, are more admirable, more enviable even, in Mitchell's view, than the pale-skinned, half-dead souls which dwell in the world of department stores, greenhouses and gas stations.

HERBERT ROSENGARTEN

A SMALL MERCY

Selected Stories of Duncan Campbell Scott, ed. Glenn Clever. University of Ottawa Press.

GLENN CLEVER includes a surprising bibliography on Duncan Campbell Scott

in his new selection of Scott's short stories. The surprise lies in the range of angles from which Scott has been viewed — Scott and the Indians, Scott and music, Scott and landscape, Scott as travelling companion. Also surprising is the absence of focus on Scott as story-teller. Scott's publications in the form spanned sixty years — from 1887 to 1947. His tales ranged from idylls through melodrama to domestic comedy. Yet no-one has traced the interplay between the stories and the poems, or watched the evolution of fictional taste and technique in this major writer, or the impact on him of his friends, his editors, and his audiences.

The Clever bibliography, unhappily, does not list the original place and date of publication of the stories. Nor does it add a list of the many uncollected stories. The order of *Selected Stories* is Clever's, and the seven-page introduction does not explain his principles of inclusion, omission, or sequence.

From the *Village of Viger* volume, 1896, Clever selects four stories that pander to a taste for allegorical sentimentality ("Bobolink" and "Paul Farlotte") and for courtship plots (rollicking in "The Wooing of Monsieur Guerrier," icily manipulative in "No. 68 Rue Alfred de Musset"). He excludes the Viger stories of darker tone, such as "The Tragedy of the Seigneurie" and "The Pedlar". He thus soft-pedals Scott's latent sombreness, and wrongly suggests that Scott's antagonists do not embody "real malevolent evil".

True enough, the Viger volume is generally veiled in prettiness, the "pale light through the willows" by the River Blanche. Perhaps the glow came from Scott's personal happiness in the 1890's, in a "circle of affection" as husband,

father, friend, reinforced by a circle of admirers of his poetry and his prose.

The *Witching of Elspie* volume, 1923, shows a major change of tone. It is tempting to explain the shift from village idylls to wilderness scenes of primitive suffering and endurance as the result of changes in the author's life. The deaths of Lampman and of Scott's daughter and the accretion of heavy official duties in the Department of Indian affairs did darken the imaginative screen. But the shift can also be imputed to a continuing exploration of changing styles in the short story, and also to an intensified awareness of Canadian motifs. Years later, the *Canadian* would reprint one of those stories to back up its definition of a "Canadian" story: "'The Vain Shadow' tells of actors who are not native to this land, yet they move against a sombre background of loneliness and isolation, so that there springs from them actions that, under other circumstances would be unaccountable. It is the moving of the spirit of the land itself. This, . . . rather than its setting, makes a Canadian story."

Clever, the modern editor, does not give any comparable explanation of the term "Canadian." He does, however, select from the *Witching* volume excellent examples of Scott's new wilderness range in setting and in mood: "Spirit River" and "Expiation." Clever adds the attractive folkloric "Winning of Marie-Louise," with its Canadian variants of the ritual testing of a hero. ("Labrie's Wife," good as it is, might well have been by-passed, as already accessible in Rimanelli and Ruberto's *Modern Canadian Stories*, as well as in Knister's *Canadian Short Stories*. On the other hand, *Witching* might well have furnished other selec-

tions, perhaps in place of the also over-anthologized "Paul Farlotte.")

Ryerson, in 1945, reissued *The Village of Viger* with attractive wood-cuts, and went on to do a similar volume of Scott's odds and ends: late and early stories, poetry, essays, collected in *The Circle of Affection*, 1947. Clever reprints the title-story, an embarrassing late bit of sentimentality. A. J. M. Smith once referred to the "tremulous and feverish quality" of some of Scott's verse: the phrase fits "The Circle of Affection." If Clever's idea was to illustrate Scott's late use of the modern realities of Ottawa, "Flashlight" might have made the point better. From the early stories in the *Circle* volume Clever chooses "Charcoal." (This story first appeared as "Star-Blanket" in *The Canadian*, 1904: an intriguing change of title!) In a setting somewhere between Montana and the Kootenays, as Clever says, "The free prairies Indian staggers in the tragic snare of encroaching civilization."

It is not "Charcoal," however, but the late story "Clute Boulay" that is placed at the end of Clever's *Selected Stories*. "Clute Boulay" is a powerful culmination of the wilderness vein of the middle years, but it adds some sense of survival. After the horror of its action, Clute goes "as an animal does who is satisfied. He went into the deepest forest, and for a long time he could be heard crashing through the underbrush." But as in the poem "At Gull Lake," Scott concludes "after the beauty of terror, the beauty of peace": "stars in the tranquil heaven looking down at stars in the tranquil water." He adds to the catastrophic end the small consolation that Agatha survives, and so does Thomasine, daughters of the two matings of the old fierce lawless Clute.

To return from a re-reading of all Scott's stories to a consideration only of those selected by Clever is to feel a sense of disappointment and loss. A collection, rather than a selection, is what we need. Clever's introductory notes are clear and orderly but many of his comments seem perfunctory: settings — pastoral, or else wild and lonely; characters — "mostly plain and simple folk"; openings — mostly descriptive. (The last point needs sharp checking against Scott's later method). Clever's analysis of syntax and rhythm, on the other hand, is intriguing, with its references to the "long swells of almost anapaestic flow, the cadence generally running in groups, each of four to five main stresses, spread over some twelve to thirteen relatively unstressed syllables." More cryptically, Clever refers to the "13, 25, 70, and 40 rhythmic peaks" in the four phases (sic?) describing aspects of the setting of "Paul Farlotte."

Like Scott we should be grateful for small mercies. If we don't get a clarification of Scott's total performance from this little volume, we at least get an enriched experience of some of his best stories.

ELIZABETH WATERSTON

A MAGIC HOUSE OF ICE

CHARLES G. D. ROBERTS, *Selected Poetry and Critical Prose*. Edited by W. J. Keith. University of Toronto Press. Paperback. \$5.95.

THE CONFEDERATION Poets have tended to narrow down in critical esteem from a quartet to a duet. Carman and Roberts are dismissed as derivative lightweights; Lampman and Scott are discovered to

have depths and complexities hitherto unsuspected and are elevated — together with Isabella Valancy Crawford — as the true precursors of a national poetry. And there is enough in the way of individuality and scope of feeling about Lampman and Scott and Crawford — and perhaps enough genuine poetic superiority — to make such a view at least plausible. For one remembers so many shallow, lilt-ing verses by Carman, so much Tennysonian or Arnoldian pastiche by Roberts, that it is easy if one is not an aficionado of early Canadian poetry to dismiss each of them with the credit for a single poem, to think of Carman as the author of "Low Tide on Grand Pré" and of Roberts as the nostalgic elegist of "The Tantrammar Revisited", and to leave them at that.

W. J. Keith's new collection in the University of Toronto Press's Literature of Canada series — *Selected Poetry and Critical Prose* of Charles G. D. Roberts — is unlikely, indeed, to change the view of many readers who have already reached such a conclusion that both Lampman and Scott are subtler and more versatile poets than Roberts and to that extent better poets also. Keith himself, in fact, implies a limited esteem for Roberts as poet when he remarks that "his stories of the wild represent his most satisfying — because most original — contribution to literature". Yet he also suggests that a long period of studying Roberts has led him to revise his originally dismissive judgments of certain poems, and the selection he now presents is obviously intended to display Roberts at his best from the viewpoint of a late twentieth century reader.

To a great degree Keith is successful in his aim. He departs from the methods of

selection by mood and subject which Roberts used in presenting his own poetry, and adopts a chronological method, choosing what seem to him the important items from the thirteen individual volumes of poetry, from *Orion*, and *Other Poems* in 1880, down to *Canada Speaks to Britain* in 1941. Importance in this sense clearly has two meanings; it includes poems which Keith considers the best of Roberts' works, but also poems whose inclusion their popularity, or the author's own evaluation, or some other factor distinct from the editor's own taste, has made indispensable for a selection chosen with the historical as well as the critical eye.

Thus, any reader who is not a Roberts enthusiast — and few of them can remain — will find many flat and tedious poems that seek conventionally to evoke conventional responses. Too often, Roberts is seen playing his self-chosen role as Canadian laureate. And too often he is emulating the poets he admired, and presenting imitations of Arnold and Shelley that are creditable but no more. Yet the effect of reading the Keith selection, with its clear demonstration of the fluctuations of Roberts' poetic achievement (he quotes approvingly Pacey's description of it as "a rapid development, a sudden decline, a long silence, and a late revival") is to show Roberts as a more interesting poet than he appears in the uncritically assembled original volumes or in the poet's own selection.

Keith's fresh arrangement, indeed, has thrown into relief poems not usually praised among Roberts' achievements. There is, for example, "Actaeon", published in 1886, which for its final ominous lines alone deserves to be remembered among Victorian narrative verse:

... but when sense grew clear
Once more, I only saw the vacant pool
Unrippled, — only saw the dreadful sward,
Where dogs lay gored, or moved in fretful
search,
Questing uneasily; and some far up
The slope, and some at the low water's
edge,
With snouts set high in air and straining
throats
Uttered keen howls that smote the echoing
hills.
They missed their master's form, nor
understood
Where was the voice they loved, the hand
that reared;
And some lay watching by the spear and
bow
Flung down.

And now upon the homeless pack
And paling stream arose a noiseless wind
Out of the yellow west awhile, and stirred
The branches down the valley; then blew
off
To eastward toward the long grey, and died
Into the dark, beyond the utmost verge.

And, curiously counterpointing it, there is the fragment of Indian myth encapsulated in "The Departing of Clote Scarp", with its final scene of the god-hero departing in despair at the evil deeds of men.

And when the beasts could see his form no
more,
They still could hear him, singing as he
sailed,
And still they listened, hanging down their
heads
In long row, where the thin wave washed
and fled.
But then the sound of singing died, and
when
They lifted up their voices in their grief,
Lo! on the mouth of every beast a strange
New tongue! Then rose they all and fled
apart,
Nor met again in council from that day.

Instead, of course, they went off to enact the mutual violences that Roberts describes in his animal stories.

Among the other poems, though "The Tantramar Revisited" stands up in its majestic nostalgia and "The Iceberg" is

an interesting attempt to break free of conventional form and also an interesting anticipation of Pratt's "The Titanic", it is the sonnets in *Songs of the Common Day* that most attract the modern ear, with their intense visuality, their immediate sense of episode and scene. Even here the diction is at times over-archaic — there are too many murmurs and plaints and ancient memories — but often the success in creating a concrete, apprehensible image — of salt flats or cow pastures or clearings — carries the antique word or sentiment in its flow, as, for example, in this sestet:

The wastes of hard and meagre weeds are
thronged
With murmurs of a past that time has
wronged;
And ghosts of many an ancient memory
Dwell by the brackish pools and ditches
blind,
In these low-lying pastures of the wind,
These marshes pale and meadows by
the sea.

There are single imagist lines in these sonnets that no poet could better, such as:

The crying knives glide on; the green swath
lies . . .

and passages like the octet to "Winter Fields" that are as good as much of Hardy and make one lament that Roberts so rarely wrought his best:

Winds here, and sleet, and frost that bites
like steel.
The low bleak hill rounds under the low
sky.
Naked of flock and fold the fallows lie,
Thin streaked with meagre drift. The gusts
reveal
By fits the dim grey snakes of fence, that
steal
Through the white dusk. The hill-foot
poplars sigh,
While storm and death with winter
trample by,
And the iron fields ring sharp, and blind
lights reel.

I finished reading this selection with a heightened esteem for Roberts' poetic powers, but also aware that only occasionally were those powers bent to their highest tension. It was still impossible to deny that, compared with Lampman and Scott, he remained a poet unfulfilled.

Appended to the selection of poems is a group of Roberts' critical essays — hitherto uncollected — which mostly appeared round about the turn of the century. His taste was conservative; even when he talked of "characteristically modern verse", he chose Joaquin Miller to praise in preference to Whitman. But he did have a prophetic sense of a distinctive Canadian literature emerging (expressed as early as 1883 in his lecture on "The Beginnings of a Canadian Literature"), and he went so far in 1886 as to admonish fellow Maritime writers (in an article entitled "The Outlook for Literature") to avoid provincialism and think in Canadian terms. Thus, in his ideas on poetry at least, he was a true Confederationist. And here and there in his poems a genuine Canadian voice hesitantly makes itself heard, in "Songs of the Common Day" especially, but occasionally elsewhere. Who, after all, but a Canadian could have written a poem that so clearly made a habitation out of the very rigours of our land as Roberts did in the poem "Ice" where he seems so aptly to answer Voltaire with his acres of snow?

When Winter scourged the meadow and
the hill
And in the withered leafage worked his
will,
The water shrank, and shuddered, and
stood still, —
Then built himself a magic house of glass,
Iris'd with memories of flowers and grass,
Wherein to sit and watch the fury pass.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

CRAWFORD REPRINTED

ISABELLA VALANCY CRAWFORD, *The Collected Poems*. Introduction by James Reaney. University of Toronto Press. \$12.50 hardcover, \$3.95 paperback.

THE ORIGINAL EDITION by John Garvin of Isabella Valancy Crawford's *Collected Poems* has long been out of print and virtually inaccessible to all but the most persevering and lucky reader. It would have seemed a cruel fate to Crawford herself that her work should have become almost the exclusive property of academics, since she struggled for years to gain the attention of a wider public. The publication of this reprint promises a wider reading public for the poems of this enigmatic figure.

Aside from the poems themselves, the most interesting feature is the introductory essay by James Reaney; Reaney is, of course, the man whose pioneering essay on Crawford in 1959 was largely responsible for the renewed interest in her work. As Reaney suggests, there seem to be two distinct schools of Crawford critics. The earlier group, roughly contemporary with Crawford herself, is typified by the enthusiastic and slightly breathless praise of Katherine Hale and Ethelwyn Wetherald. They praise Crawford's lyric gift, her lightness of fancy and above all her fortitude in trying so desperately to succeed in the most difficult circumstances. The second group, including Reaney himself, Northrop Frye, and Dorothy Livesay, focuses its attention on Crawford's subtlety and the mythopoeic powers of her imagination. These critics dismiss the qualities praised so much by the earlier group as either Victorian gift

book rhetoric or irrelevant to literary study. Indeed, the pronouncements of the two groups are so disparate as to make one wonder at times whether they are even dealing with the same poet.

This division of attitudes emerges nicely in Reaney's introduction as he quotes liberally from the popular English and Canadian journals of the day, on the one hand, and from his own earlier essay on the other. However, while there is some attempt to reconcile the two views, there is something basically unsatisfactory with the suggestions that all would have been right had Crawford had the benefit of a discriminating readership, and that the literary values of Crawford's day are radically different from our own. The point is, whether Crawford devotes past and present like it or not, Crawford's was a very uneven talent. Some of her work is of the Victorian gift book calibre and no appeal to extra-literary considerations can excuse it. Poems such as "Love in a Dairy", "Said the Thistle-Down", and "Said the Daisy" are embarrassing. Equally important, however, is that the poet was capable of such fine lyrics as "Said the Canoe", "The Lily-Bed", and "Between the Wind and Rain" as well as the magnificent narratives. The poetic imagination did not always rise to white hot temperatures, but when it did it produced the work that has attracted the attention of the Reaneys, the Fries and the Livesays.

Reaney rightly cites some of the biographical problems connected with Crawford studies, such as the general uncertainty about the dates of the several family moves and the date of the death of Dr. Crawford. (According to the cemetery records in Peterborough it occurred in early July of 1875.) But there are other

more puzzling and potentially more fruitful issues to be resolved. There is, for example, the notation in the cemetery records that Emma Naomi, Valancy's sister, was born in Wisconsin. Family records indicate that a younger brother, Stephen, was born in Ireland. The two records, if accurate, suggest that the Crawford family originally emigrated to the United States, returned to Ireland and *then* came to Canada. There is also the question of residence in France. This assertion arose very early, appearing, as Reaney notes, in some of the obituary notices. While almost certainly false, it has been re-asserted from time to time and needs to be resolved. These and other puzzling questions need to be answered. As Reaney notes, one need is that for a definitive biography.

The most serious omission in Reaney's otherwise fine introduction (or 'collage', as he calls it), is the failure to deal with the most puzzling and irritating literary question of all: the relationship of John W. Garvin to the text of the 1905 edition. There is a fair amount of evidence to suggest that Garvin assumed more than the duties which editors normally take on. Whether or not it is possible to determine the exact extent of Garvin's influence, the basic issue must be confronted.

The Crawford material, held by the Douglas Library at Queen's University, exists in the form of manuscripts, some old newspaper clippings, and some old galley-proofs. None of these sources is complete in itself and therefore none can serve as a check on any of the others to determine total textual accuracy. The best of the three sources, naturally enough, is the surviving manuscript material which seems to be in Crawford's own bold, decisive script. The next best

source is the newspaper clippings, published during Crawford's lifetime. Finally, there are the remaining galley-proofs of the 1905 edition. All three sources are replete with emendations, additions, and deletions. The changes take the form of partially re-written lines, different words inserted, and portions of the poetry which are simply struck out. In some cases it seems clear enough that the correcting pen was Crawford's. In other cases the situation is not so clear. Some other person's pen has made some of the corrections. The question is, whose pen was it? As an example of some of the changes made, there is the poem entitled "A Battle." The 1905 version of the poem contains the line, "... her fingers drip/ Pale, silvery tides." The newspaper clipping which served as the source published the line as "... and from her fingers drip/ Pale tides of silver," which is better poetry than the amended version. And yet it is the amended version which has been passed on to posterity.

As others have discovered, and as Dorothy Livesay has shown, Garvin was not above re-arranging Crawford's work to suit his own aesthetic sensibilities. For example, "The Dark Stag", a lyric which in North American imagery recounts the classical myth of the slaying of night by the forces of day, is really part of a much longer incomplete narrative poem. Several other well known Crawford lyrics similarly belong to longer narratives from which they were removed to be published separately in Garvin's edition.

It seems clear that some precise bibliographic work needs to be done. In addition to the need for a definitive biography, there is an even more pressing need for a definitive text.

S. R. MACGILLIVRAY

AN HONEST VOICE

DALE ZIEROTH, *Clearing*. Anansi. \$6.95 cloth, \$3.25 paper.

IN "PRAIRIE GRADE SCHOOL", the opening poem of *Clearing*, Dale Zieroth returns to the crumbling place of his education, where he spent his time "memorizing rules that were intended/ to last for life." Though the school has physically disintegrated, "nothing seems changed". Yet the school "remains/ useful only as landmark" for those who return, the homecoming sons of farmers who have changed as much as the school. The rules have not lasted; indeed, as part of their education, students were also made aware of inevitable mutability. Zieroth remembers how here he discovered that he "controlled nothing . . . growing afraid/ for the first time of ordinary trees."

This volume is subtitled "Poems From A Journey" and the poems record the poet's travels from his prairie home, his life in the city, his return to his past, until he moves on further west to the mountains. The poetry is an attempt not simply to regain control over his life by evoking his prairie past, for he has known since his schooldays that nothing is fixed enough to be subject to control, but rather to revisit places in order to dredge up memories so that he can try to understand how inexorably the simplicities of his early life have turned to complexities and how everything, like the prairie school, has broken down.

As he looks back, he remembers the problems of small town life: the collapse of farms, the lack of amenities, the failure of harvests. The young "stand waiting/ with their hands made fists in/ pockets

that are empty"; they wait to take their chance to leave this prairie isolation — "north of here is nothing" — for they wish to travel two hundred miles south to Winnipeg, as that "is where the world begins."

But cities offer no solution. Groups of people in the city move endlessly "like a defeated army". The poet senses at times that perhaps he does have some measure of control over his life, but he discovers that it is a false sense, for monotony returns, each day filled with "stony senselessness that changes nothing". And the mind tries to cohere around a vague search for a political answer, an "angry ideology of random targets and stones". One poem details the collapse of the city, another repeats the disturbing knowledge of the discrepancy between the rich and poor in the city in rather clichéd terms, though ironically in the same poem the young revolutionaries wishing to revitalize society can in their turn think only in clichés drawn from reading their political mentors.

Zieroth turns to personal relationships as perhaps the only viable answer. For him, love may be able to bring unity to a life the poet feels is sliding away from him. He searches for a solution in a world where things "have no core" but only his wife and friends can offer anything. The return to his old home on the prairies, while it stirs reminiscences, only confirms that you can't go home again, even though now he perhaps understands his family more.

Still, the simplicities of a past life cannot be revived, so he moves on, reaching down to the myths of the land, finding some peace and acceptance with his wife in the mountains. The book closes with a sequence of poems which relate a growing

awareness of his place within the mountainous land, although, writing for his wife, he finds that "we have not left the old pain/ behind, we have merely/ found inside it a clearing that is calm." Gradually the sense of belonging increases till the book closes confidently: the last line is "first promise of home".

Zieroth writes in an uncluttered, almost prosaic way, relying on occasional short similes as almost his only rhetorical device. The style, however, has a cumulative effect, convincing in its honest attempt to root through the past, to root out the meaninglessness and finally to root down into a life discovered and accepted on its own terms.

There is a group of Canadian poets one can call unacademic and unliterary, a group writing a genuinely oral poetry which each poet has welded together out of his own life and reading without resorting to any theoretical notions about what constitutes a true spoken language within a poem. Poets such as Al Purdy, Alden Nowlan, Patrick Lane, Red Lane, Tom Wayman, Milton Acorn, the later Earle Birney, perhaps David McFadden, and in some of their poetry, Andy Suknaski and Bill Bissett make up this group. And Dale Zieroth belongs with them. The writing of this group, worked out by trial-and-error in their poetry, is paralleled by such poets in the United States as Rexroth, Snyder and Bukowski (with perhaps a side glance at James Wright) and is a truer oral poetry than that stemming from the mystic breath-analysis of Olson and Creeley.

Such a method of writing poetry has its dangers: it can lose its focus in extraneous detail, it can be alternately coy and brash, it can present platitude as philosophic solution, it can over-dramatize, it

can offer the trivial and the serious without distinction, but at its best it presents openness to real experience and maps the responses of an honest mind.

Zieroth at times certainly has these lapses, and his sense of doom seems sometimes to be too heavy for the details he includes in his poems. The poems about personal relationships are not always successful: they are rather repetitious in their analysis and often the language is not responsive enough to the emotional range he seeks to express. Still, the volume in its entirety presents a genuinely honest voice, showing the fascination of a poet's mind with his own past, trying to make sense of the present and finally resolving the bewilderment in a vision that takes in the personal and the outer landscape.

PETER STEVENS

CANADIAN ESSENCE

A. G. BAILEY, *Thanks for a Drowned Island*. McClelland & Stewart. \$5.95.

A. G. BAILEY inherited poetry as part of the cultural tradition in Fredericton that centred in the first quarter of this century around Christ Church cathedral and the University of New Brunswick and which glorified its most famous exponents, Sir Charles G. D. Roberts and Bliss Carman. In his own early books, *Songs of the Saguenay* and *Tao*, A. G. Bailey reflected this heritage. As a graduate student at the University of Toronto, however, he became aware of the new poetry of Eliot and Pound, and this awareness shaped the future direction of his sensibility and technique. At first, the influence of Eliot

proved too overpowering, but gradually by constant experimentation, A. G. Bailey evolved and matured a distinct style of poetic presentation that embodies both the personal dimension of experience and the social dimension of scholarship in history and anthropology, a blend that is quite unique in our literature. His is a difficult poetry in which the rich ore of meaning lies deep and has many ramifications. Take "Ideogram", for example:

spacialsque trumpets corrode
the haute peaks of the world
with spiral blasts to remember Reason
who gambled with Freedom for a
pennyworth of salt,
forsaking the sun, tumbling about the clouds
to rivet without fail, to fail
clutching his bosom with remembrance

nimble feet we had, dancing
to the crisp tune of crustaceans
and so we came to grips with the godhead
deifying the joints, whirling
on a spoke of the sick wheel

Like so many of A. G. Bailey's poems, "Ideogram" is concerned with process — in general, the dialectic opposition between quality rooted in time and place and quantity rooted in space and movement is expressed in this poem; the particular instances lie in the eighteenth century Europe (first stanza) and nineteenth century Europe (second stanza). Given these hints, the poem loses much of its obscurity, the gamble "with Freedom for a pennyworth of salt" is of course the French Revolution initiated by reaction against the *gabelle* or salt tax — a revolution in which the "sun" (the heir of the "Sun King", also Apollo) is deserted, and in which Reason is certainly taken for a ride and a tumble in the clouds and left to clutch "his bosom with remembrance". The "nimble feet" of the second stanza refer to the mental exercises necessary to cope with the discoveries of men like

Lyall and Darwin ("the crisp tune of crustaceans"). These discoveries led of course to the central problem of the nineteenth century intellectuals, how to "come to grips with the godhead", a problem resolved by deifying a kind of limited specialization and accepting the Jeansian view of existence, our role in time as being synonymous with our role in space — a point of reference on the revolving arm of a galaxy (the milky way), the stars of which are rushing away from each other toward irreversible entropy — in another sense, the Eastern "sick" wheel of material existence.

I have dwelt perhaps too long on a brief poem, but it is characteristic of the compactness, the aptness and originality of illustration, the absence of clichés, and the mental and emotional range and grasp of the poetry of *Thanks for a Drowned Island* in general.

My own appreciation tends to lie most with those difficult poems that I understand best conceptually. I thrill to the cosmic irony of "Shrouds and Away" and "Hochelaga", to the beautiful imagery of "The Unreturning", to the wistful longing for what might have been embodied in "Border River", and to the sense of the purposeful mystery of history incarnate in "Angel Gabriel"; nevertheless, one poem which defies rational exposition is the crown of the collection. "The Winter Mill", it seems to me expresses better (because less pinned down to specifics) than any essays by Margaret Atwood or Northrop Frye the essence of what I like to think is Canadian:

The winter mill will not return this
often
a granary for months of ill at
ease.
Nor will the thaw engage to round and
soften

the burden of its coffin; from the
knee
to thigh and upwards cold as any fish
hook
will it look to sweep a mist from sunken
eyes,
nor gather to its heart its cherished
april.
Of it with book and pen record these
cries.
The winter ambit has us with its
finger,
and muscle hardens when it seems to
break
like tooth once bitten and forever
ache.
And there's no stoic tethers soul to
eye
with batting of this scene that only
waits.

FRED COGSWELL

MAGICAL MUSIC

SUSAN MUSGRAVE, *Grave-Dirt and Selected Strawberries*. Macmillan.

PAULETTE GILES, *Waterloo Express*. Anansi.

ALMOST ALONE in the magic forest, Susan Musgrave blends her own weird voice with those of nature personified. Sounds of the rain forest echo poems in her skull, boiling with the witch's brew; moss and seaweed and trees twisted into toads. In her third book, *Grave Dirt and Selected Strawberries*, nature, refracted off fairy lenses, assumes all the classic human disguises, goes through all the jigsaw possibilities of one living landscape.

The book is divided into three sections; "Grave Dirt", the personal voice, "Kiskatinaw Songs", ritual voices, and "Selected Strawberries", the babble of the conventional wisdom. All emerge from the same Pandora's box, cedar lined with moss, pine needles and rotten fish.

Musgrave's wilderness is magical and she is a character in her own fairy tale,

the wizard of poems which spring from her intercourse with tides and seasons in the dark woods.

Her heart is a bone
laced by the
moon's pull.

The magnifying glass she presses to the forest floor enlarges into grotesques the central issues of her own life as a woman in the macrocosmic world of humans who have shaped their own impulses into myth. Her landscape is burdened with the traditional struggle of things animal and vegetable for survival. Moss copulates under the glass and becomes metaphor. Humour is the leaven of these strange couplings. The poet is a woman bleeding through all the seasons of the moon, but managing to laugh at the crazy lunar mysteries. Grave dirt is fertilizer for the new generation.

We never touched
though his sea-blood
warmed with mine.
Sand and salt
burned —
the sweet smell sent my
moon's heart
coughing its sad laugh.

In "Kiskatinaw Songs", the personal voice becomes the song of the shaman, and witch becomes witch-doctor. The songs of experience become legend. Almost as if the words were to be carved in bark or written in damp sand, they are pared to the bone. The language comes out of the forest and the antique mouth of the West Coast Indian. The poet is only the medium.

Listen to me.
Now I must go away.

Lest we take it all too seriously, the fragile transformation of event into ritual is finally parodied in "Selected Straw-

berries". Strawberry, everyone's splendour in the grass, threatens to become mouth and gobble her whole mythical world. Tired of the discipline of metaphor, the poet dumps the whole spice-box of words. Strawberry becomes all the shibboleths as she rattles through the catalogue from nursery rhyme to Greek tragedy, "Strawberry at Colonus". Squished, it sends blood in all directions.

While Musgrave examines the universe from a fixed point, Paulette Jiles flashes words through train windows. Every poem in her first book, *Waterloo Express*, is a frame in a travelogue. The poems are points in the locus of a journey which takes the character everywhere in search of an author.

Snatched loose from my baggage and
address, goodbyes falling
away in flakes of dead skin, you'd say I
was a high
pariah, sleepless and nowhere to go.

The secrets of each new landscape are released with terrific energy as the poet tears through earth and air in the search for herself. She becomes the vehicle she rides, burning steel and cresting waves, learning and looking. In the process, she leaves the feminine stereotypes behind. She has taken over the traditional territory of the masculine romance figure, understanding earth and water, which have no dominion over her. She is always ahead of the seasons.

There is a price to be paid for freedom. The people who stand like signposts on her life's highway have been left behind and there is some pain in the history that is crammed like baggage in her brain as

She evaporates through the window
her skull roughened by thoughts
of revolutions and circuses.

Jiles is a lyric poet tumbling songs off

the high wire where she skips alone. The dizzy music is checked only when she stumbles on the similes she has failed to heat into metaphor. The fantasy is aborted when we collide with "like", the clumsy reminder that we are only riders of the subway and not astronauts. There is no time in Jiles' fast ride for ordinary machinery. The images have a life of their own.

In visual terms, the poems are like the paintings of Marc Chagall. Gorgeous disconnected figures float by on wisps of cloud and magic carpets of flowers. All the paraphernalia of life's circus is assembled in a giant mobile moving in the wind.

So much nervous energy is consumed in the effort to organize and move through the jumble of images. It is given off in the music of exposed nerves. The sounds of ordinary life, selected, become surreal, a neurotic accompaniment to the poetry.

Over your voice my mind
snaps taught as a sheet in a high wind.

In the process of trying on countries, people and suits of clothes, Jiles has become a troubadour. Music is her real author. It is the sound of the footsteps that keeps her walking.

The holes in my shoes speak up; they are
the underground
eyes of my feet and have observed the ways
and means of the road with the
patience of the Newfoundland jackass.
Now that I am mending their laces,
how close they are to my heart.

Always she is listening, trying to find some meaning in strange voices; the scream of wheels on track, the noises of loving and dying, and the wise conversation of birds.

LINDA ROGERS

THE SOUND OF NEMESIS

JACK LUDWIG, *A Woman of Her Age*. McClelland & Stewart. \$7.95.

SOME YEARS AGO Jack Ludwig wrote a short story about a rich old Jewish matron who descends from her Westmount mansion to make periodic forays into the Yiddish world of her girlhood. A loveable crone, apparently she haunted Ludwig's imagination to the point that he had to write a novel around her.

Mrs. Goffman is long and spindly, unsentimentally aware of the ravages eighty-five years have wrought on her lean shanks. But she is still proud of her ancient reputation as a flaming radical and she has, as the psychiatrists say, ego strength. She is carelessly rich — apparently she has fourteen handbags stuffed with money. From time to time she wishes that she had some worthwhile way to spend the rest of her life — like studying law, for instance — instead of whizzing past the panorama of life in her chauffeur-driven car, occasionally getting out to mingle with the masses. She believes, you see, — or Ludwig would have us believe — that she has some vital rapport with an American draft dodger, a young mother with a baby, and a kosher butcher who still secretly has the hots for her. But don't mistake her for Pippa passing, unknowingly changing the lives of those she encounters.

All right, we have a character emanating vitality in search of — what? Granted, it's old-fashioned to expect a story-line any more, although permissible to hint at the possibilities of one. If we simply have the flux of life bouncing on Mrs. Goffman's sensibility, we might as well read

Mrs. Galloway. The conventional solution would be a series of flash-back memories revealing something of how the old romantic is now sitting in her limousine. Whether Ludwig contemplated this method and discarded it because it had been done so many times before, one simply doesn't know. In any event, as readers, we might as well discard curiosity because it's never going to be satisfied. I may be a deviationist but it seems to me that the one bread-and-butter demand a good novel has always elicited is curiosity, and if the reader's curiosity isn't catered to in some measure he is going to feel unfulfilled and disappointed.

But back to Doba Goffman and all that vitality. Have there been any significant relationships in her life? Well, there was her husband who died at 55 after refusing surgery. A clue that Mrs. Goffman didn't share some of that vitality with Mr. Goffman? Who knows — since he disappears in a paragraph? But that was a long time ago, he's dead, and apparently Ludwig intends to concentrate on the present.

We then switch to her sexy ex-daughter-in-law, Shirley, who appears as an A No. 1 Bitch who, word has it, had a former lover — why did he have to have a bad case of acne? — down in the kosher district. There is a hint of a suggestion that she was with Maxie the night her husband Neville jumped from his Westmount bedroom window. Moreover, she never sees Mrs. Goffman nowadays. Significant?

Then there is another ageing son, Sidney, who lives with his mother and is a limping pack of frustrations. With his homburg pulled down over his ears, he must be a dull companion for the bouncing Doba. In one hilarious scene — not unlike the set-piece at the progressive

school in Richler's *Cocksure* — Sidney fantasizes the rape of his over-weight secretary.

Things are now becoming very confusing for your Common Reader. Have we really been reading carefully enough? Have we been taken in by rumour, trickery, or fantasy? Did Neville leap from that window because he couldn't consistently make it? Did Shirley leave the house that night with the baby because she was terrified of Neville's schizoid paranoia? And that knocking at the door in the middle of the night which a dishevelled Doba rushes to answer. "If no one was there, it would not be the first time." The sound of Nemesis. Could it be that our darling, loveable, old Mrs. Goffman is just another castrating Jewish mama? Oh dear.

PHYLLIS GROSSKURTH

ON THE VERGE

***** PIERRE BERTON, *Klondike*. McClelland & Stewart, \$10.00. This is a reprint, with considerable additions and revisions, of what has become something of a classic of Canadian non-academic history. It has stood up surprisingly well in the fifteen years since it was first published, and remains unchallenged as the best history of the last great gold rush. Berton felicitously combines the flexibility of journalistic writing with sound research and a good overall sense of historical composition. The result is a broad vista of events fascinatingly populated.

***** MARCEL TRUDEL, *The Beginnings of New France, 1524-1663*. McClelland & Stewart, \$12.50. The completion of volumes in series rarely follows the intentions of publishing programmes, and *The Beginnings of New France*, which is No. 2 in the 18 volume history of Canada known as the Canadian Centenary Series, is in fact almost the last to appear. But it is worth waiting for. In con-

structing it, Professor Trudel has in fact condensed a series of three works covering the period from 1524 to 1663 which had previously been published in French, and has added material from other books and new material. The material — translated by Patricia Claxton — has not appeared before in England, and the work of condensation and insertion has been skilfully done; the reader who comes new to Professor Trudel's work would not be aware of it if he were not forewarned in the preface. Both author and translator get off to a somewhat halting start, but they build up steam quickly, and the result is a fluent, balanced and very enlightening introduction to the early history of New France, setting it firmly in the context both of world events at the time and also of the native societies into which the French pioneers intruded.

**** ABRAHAM COWLEY. *The Civil War*, edited by Allan Pritchard. University of Toronto Press. \$10.00. Abraham Cowley's uncompleted heroic poem, *The Civil War*, was long thought lost, possibly destroyed by Cowley with the exception of the fragment entitled *A Poem on the Late Civil War* which was published by an obscure bookseller in 1679 and later included in a number of Tonson's miscellanies. Recently, however, Allan Pritchard of the University of Toronto discovered, in the Cowper family papers entrusted to the Hertford Record Office, a manuscript of the whole poem as it was abandoned by Cowley in 1643 after he realized that Royalist fortunes had taken an irremediable turn for the worse at the Battle of Newbury. A further copy of the poem, parts of it probably in Cowley's hand, later came to light in the same cache of manuscripts. Now Professor Pritchard publishes for the first time what — in historical terms — is a significant addition to mid-seventeenth century English poetry. In terms of quality one can speak less confidently. Cowley may have had the epic ambition; he did not have the epic power, and he is likely to be remembered, as he was before, mainly as a fine lyricist with an elegiac turn of mind, and a gentle, civilized essayist. Perhaps the most significant aspect of *The Civil War* is that it reveals a contentious and uncharitable side to Cowley's character which his familiar works do not lead one to expect, and so we realize how the poet matured with experience. Professor Pritchard has edited *The Civil War* with such monumental thoroughness that the scholarly apparatus takes up more than twice as much space as Cowley's poem.

NOVELISTS AND THE NATION

MANY COMMENTATORS have tried to discover or define the precise characteristics of Canadian nationality. Generally the views of literary commentators — novelists — have been regarded as impractical or irrelevant. Yet Canadian novelists, writing in English, provide an illuminating commentary on prevailing attitudes toward nationality that have evolved in their country since the middle of the eighteenth century.

The History of Emily Montague is an early novel which describes Canada as a colonial or provincial outpost. With its action set in the period immediately following Wolfe's great victory, the novel consists of letters exchanged between protagonists who are drawn largely from English army personnel, their relatives and friends. As one of these correspondents writes:

It [Quebec city, or Canada] is like a third or fourth rate country town in England: much hospitality, little society, cards, scandal, dancing, and good cheer; all excellent things to pass away a winter evening.

Frances Brooke, the English author of the novel, spent five years in Canada as wife of the chaplain to the Quebec garrison. The society that she saw is made up predominantly of expatriate military and administrative personnel who feel loyalty not to Canada, but to their native land — England. If life in Canada is simply a

means of serving England, it is not surprising that Mrs. Brooke's characters do not show much evidence of local loyalties.

The image of Canada as an outpost of Empire lasted for almost one hundred years after *The History of Emily Montague*. This image can be seen, for example, in the novels of John Richardson who wrote in the first half of the nineteenth century and was the first native Canadian novelist to achieve wide recognition. Richardson attempts to define wholly Canadian sentiments and attitudes, and in his fourth novel *The Canadian Brothers*, one of his protagonists illustrates this attempt when he says:

I too am a Canadian, but so far from endeavouring to repudiate my country, I feel pride in having received my being in a land where everything attests the sublimity and magnificence of nature. Look around you . . . and ask yourself what there is in the wild grandeur of these scenes to disown!

Ostensibly this assertion of native pride denies provincialism. But the speaker's self-proclaimed patriotism, based purely on his admiration of the Canadian landscape, entirely lacks the conviction that might be conveyed by deeply rooted psychological traits or actual habits and customs. It is forced patriotism prompted partly by the fact that Canada's ambivalent cultural association with Great Britain encourages Canadians, to some extent, to repudiate their own practices in favour of English customs and manners. Thus, far from asserting native pride, this patriotic statement rather confirms Canadian provincialism.

A similar portrait of Canadian society is given by one of Richardson's contemporaries, Thomas Chandler Haliburton. Haliburton is not a novelist; he is best remembered for his work as a social and political commentator and for his humor-

ous, fictional sketches. In the sketches, he expresses his views through a roguish Yankee pedlar, Sam Slick, who is almost certainly speaking for his creator in the following typically forthright pronouncement:

Provincialism and nationalism are different degrees of the same thing, and both take their rise in the same feeling, love of country.

Here, in fact, Haliburton does more than confirm the portrait of provincialism given by Mrs. Brooke and Richardson: he argues that provincialism is the early stage of an evolutionary process in which unstable feelings about Canada will gradually acquire stability and eventually form the solid core of truly national sentiment.

After Confederation, attitudes toward Canadian nationality underwent a change that is reflected in the literature of the period. Novelists no longer viewed Canada as a colonial outpost lacking established local customs and manners; they saw instead a "colonial nation", that is, a country which retained strong social and political links with England but still possessed an independent culture of its own. This ambivalent portrait of a "colonial nation" is reproduced most vividly in the novels of Sara Jeannette Duncan. In her best known work, *The Imperialist*, the patriotic Canadian hero loves England with as much devotion as he does Canada. As he contemplates his first visit to England, the hero, Lorne Murchison, tells his sister Dora:

I've been reading up the history of our political relations with England. It's astonishing that we've stuck to her through, but you can't help seeing why—it's for the moral advantage. Way down at the bottom, that's what it is. We have the sense to want all we can get of that sort of thing. They've

developed the finest human product there is, the cleanest, the most disinterested, and we want to keep up the relationship—it's important

Such fawning admiration for England seems to throw suspicion on Murchison's love of his own country; but he speaks with greater conviction than Richardson's Nature-loving enthusiast mentioned earlier. It was the peculiar historical situation in which he lived that allowed him and many of his countrymen to see Canada both as a colony of Great Britain and a separate nation in its own right.

Murchison's views are conditioned by events during a period when the British Empire was in its prime. Because of her military and economic supremacy, he could envisage Britain as the centre of a stable, social and political union in which all her Imperial possessions, colonies and dominions alike, would link themselves for mutual benefit. This world-wide, English-speaking Commonwealth may seem impractical to us today; but in Sara Jeannette Duncan's time it was seriously contemplated by many leading public figures. While each British territory would yield up some of its sovereignty in the interest of collective security, it could expect to develop and, in large measure, retain its own independent national character. This was the hope: that each nation would have greater scope for development within the security of a common, supra-national British framework. But shifts in the balance of world power, coupled with the growth of local nationalisms the world over were to doom this grand and benign Imperial scheme, making it, in due course, both irrelevant and anachronistic.

With the demise of colonial nationality a fresh concept of Canada came into

focus in Canadian fiction. Neil Macrae, the hero of Hugh MacLennan's first novel *Barometer Rising* envisages a new nation stretching from the Atlantic to the Pacific, and from the Arctic ice cap to the Great Lakes. Macrae's Canada is:

this anomalous land, this sprawling waste of timber and rock and water where the only living sounds were the footfalls of animals or the fantastic laughter of a loon, this empty tract of primordial silences and winds and erosions and shifting colors, this bead-like string of crude towns and cities tied by nothing but railway tracks, this nation undiscovered by the rest of the world and unknown to itself, these people neither American nor English, nor even sure what they wanted to be, this unborn mightiness, this question mark, this future for himself, and for God knows how many millions of mankind.

Although Canadian society is an unstable mixture of cultural elements that are partly British and partly American, Macrae foresees the assimilation of these elements into a new and stable union that would be neither British nor American, but distinctly Canadian. Moreover, he expresses the rather idealistic hope that the new Canada will be such a significant development that it would affect "God knows how many millions of mankind".

Macrae's idealism was obviously shared by Hugh MacLennan and by a great many Canadians. It underlies the emergence of a new world order in which Canada will play a significant and indeed central role. As Macrae reflects:

But if there were enough Canadians like himself, half-American and half-English, then the day was inevitable when the halves would join and his country would become the central arch which united the new order.

What is envisaged is the growth and widespread application of a broad, urban-industrial, technological culture and way

of life which would form the basis not only of the Canadian nation but of nations all over the world. Canada would thus have an open culture, exclusively its own, yet readily accessible to the wider world community. But as MacLennan himself was later to realize, the new nation was unlikely to emerge so long as the problem of Quebec's assimilation remained. In his sixth novel, *The Return of the Sphinx*, Neil Macrae's buoyant idealism has vanished, and is replaced instead by disillusionment and regret.

MacLennan's fiction fairly represents the rather hazy and confusing or contradictory image of Canadian nationality that is to be found in the novels of many of his contemporaries. Some novelists are skeptical of the very idea of an exclusively Canadian nation that is also international in character. The hero of Fred Bodsworth's *The Atonement of Ashley Morden* is a typical spokesman for Canada's international culture. When he is asked by an army official to carry out research in germ warfare, the hero objects on the grounds that he is an internationalist: "I'm an internationalist. I recognize one allegiance . . . mankind — all mankind." But the official challenges the whole idea of an international state:

It's [the international state] not created yet, and it doesn't look as if it's going to be created for a long time. Until then all you've got to pay that proud and pious allegiance is a dream. You're afraid to face up to the world we have, and you're using this internationalism thing as a front to hide behind.

From the bland unconcern of Mrs. Brooke's characters to the blunt scepticism of Bodsworth's army official, Canadian fiction reproduces a national image that is sometimes ambivalent, often contradictory, and always vague.

Three main changes have been noticed in the image of Canada that is presented by the novelists we have discussed. At first Canada is shown to be a colony or provincial outpost; then it is presented as a "colonial nation"; and then finally, by the mid-twentieth century, there is scarcely any consistent image at all. We may suggest two factors as a possible explanation of this inconclusive pattern. The first is that the original conception of Canada was dictated by military, political and diplomatic considerations which have gradually disappeared: in other words Canada, in its present form, is playing a role that no longer exists. The second factor is the unavoidable proximity of the U.S.A. whose size and power make the emergence and ultimate survival of a truly independent Canadian nation impractical, unlikely, perhaps undesirable.

FRANK BIRBAL Singh

FRYE ENUMERATED

FROM SCARECROW PRESS of New Jersey comes the first definitive checklist of works by and about Northrop Frye. *Northrop Frye: An Enumerative Bibliography* (\$5.00) is compiled by Robert B. Denham. It begins with an introductory essay that is rather simplistic in its adulation, but the actual list, with more than three hundred items by Frye himself and almost five hundred pieces relating to him, is remarkably thorough in its coverage, embracing even relatively obscure but sometimes perceptive notices in provincial newspapers, and its adequacy in this respect makes it a necessary handbook for any reader engaged in the intensive study of Frye and his achievements.

A.A.

PRAIRIE BIBLIOGRAPHY

AFICIONADOS of western history and literature will welcome the appearance of a second and enlarged edition of Bruce Braden Peel's *A Bibliography of the Prairie Provinces to 1953 with Biographical Index*. (University of Toronto Press, \$45.00). This invaluable checklist first appeared in 1956; a supplement was issued in 1963; now the information has been collated and new titles added, so that the *Bibliography* contains more than 4,400 annotated entries, beginning with the Kelsey papers which, though published only in the 1920s, actually date in terms of composition from 1692 and represent the earliest known record of the Canadian prairies.

G.W.

EVERYMAN'S CHECK LIST

FOR THOSE who want a handier reference book than the massive and costly Watters *Checklist*, Michael Gnarowski's *Concise Bibliography of English-Canadian Literature* (McClelland & Stewart, paperback, \$2.95) provides a much needed guide to the major Canadian writers of the past two centuries, listing their significant works and in each case noting the most useful critical essays relating to them. It is to be recommended to students and teachers, but especially to the general reader who needs a convenient guide which is neither expensive nor unwieldy but which at the same time is thorough.

L.T.G.

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