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CANADIAN LITERATURE

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CANADIANS — CONSCIOUS OR SELF-CONSCIOUS?

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BY PAUL W. AUSTIN

A QUARTERLY OF CRITICISM AND REVIEW

Mrs. Grundy

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editorial

PREMONITIONS OF MRS. PORTER

RECENTLY, when I was gathering material for a survey of Canadian poetry during the 1960s, and at the same time assembling the titles for a modest checklist relating to the same period, I was impressed by the persistence of the primitive strain. By the primitive strain I mean not the kind of fake illiteracy and bogus naiveté now cultivated by certain academic poets who have tried to transplant American aberrations into Canadian soil, but that unconscious capacity for the incongruous, that unselfconscious desire to glorify the banal and the bathetic which emerges among versifiers in mainly rural societies that have no surviving traditions of oral poetry.

Primitive poetry of this kind is a product of universal instruction that has not become universal education; the power and the desire to manipulate words are there, and even some sense of form, but unrelated to a sophisticated sense of logical structure or of the appositeness of images. Primitive poetry, like primitive folk art, is inclined to thrive in colonial societies, where the educated minority apes metropolitan literature and painting rather lamely (as the Acadian Goldsmith aped the Auburnian Goldsmith), while the men and women who consider themselves the voices of the half-educated minority produce work that projects in comically inflated form the small concerns of their small societies.

Magnification of the ordinary is a way of giving modest and isolated communities the importance in the eyes of their own people which the world denies them. It was shown in action when the people of Ingersoll, Ont., made a seven thousand pound cheese to impress their importance on the people of Toronto, and when the local poet James McIntyre addressed to it his "Ode to the Mammoth Cheese" in which he said, among many other delightful oddities:

Cows numerous as a swarm of bees,
Or as the leaves upon the trees,
It did require to make thee please,
And stand unrivalled, queen of cheese . . .

We'rt thou suspended from balloon,
You'd cast a shade even at noon.
Folks would think it was the moon
About to fall and crush them soon . . .

The primitive painters and sculptors of colonial and early Confederation Canada had their recent day of glory in the fine exhibition of their work that toured the major art galleries of the country during 1973. The primitive poets have been unjustly neglected, and so one greets with proper pleasure the republication of *The Four Jameses* (Macmillan, $4.95) which William Arthur Deacon, longtime book editor of the Toronto *Globe and Mail*, published originally in 1927.

The poets Deacon chose — his four Jameses — were James Gay, James McIntyre, James D. Gillis, and James MacRae. They are poets so complete and so original in their badness that, as Doug Fetherling remarks in his introduction to the new edition of *The Four Jameses*, they "make the invention of Sarah Binks seem redundant." For, unlike Sarah, these are *naturally* bad poets, and highly serious poets — so serious that James Gay styled himself, in all solemnity, "Poet Laureate of Canada, and Master of All Poets." His mastery was shown in poems like "The Elephant and the Flea", whose jaunty rhythm and succession of unexpected images reminds one of certain Trinidian calypsos:

Between those two there's a great contrast,
The elephant is slow, the flea very fast,
You can make friends with the elephant and gain his good-will,
If you have a flea in your bed you cannot lie still:
A flea is a small thing, all times in the way,
Hopping and jumping like beasts after their prey,
Oft dropt inside your ear — don't think this a wonder,
You may think for a while it's loud claps of thunder . . .

When I first read *The Four Jameses*, these early Canadian poets sounded too bad to be true; a quick glance at the Watters *Checklist of Canadian Literature* showed entries relating to at least three of them, which made it fair to assume that Watters had merely overlooked the fourth; after my experience this year in sampling the world of more recent Canadian poets I realized that versifiers of this kind were not merely authentic but representative of a surprisingly large and

persistent movement. Had they been painters such men would long since have been acknowledged. For what, after all, is it that we admire — and call the innocent eye — in naïf artists like Grandma Moses and Henri Rousseau *le douanier* but an inspired silliness? And one can hardly deny inspired silliness to James McIntyre when he sings:

> Man in spring logging oft awakes
> From winter slumbers nests of snakes,
> And listens to the music grand
> Of bull frogs, our Canadian band.

Nor — on another level — is it possible to ignore the premonitions of Eliot and his Mrs. Porter in the superb couplet:

> St. Catharines famed for mineral waters
> And for the beauty of her daughters . . .

But it is not only Eliot of whom we are reminded. For surely some of our more celebrated nineteenth century Canadian poets with their self-taught oddities acquire a proper background when we encounter Mr. Deacon's Four Jameses. The Jameses, undoubtedly, were among the men-at-arms in that veritable army of autodidactic bards whose captain was the best bad poet of them all, Charles Heavysege. The works of Gay and McIntyre, of Gillis and MacRae, are like bushes in the undergrowth from which that king of primitive melodramas, *Saul*, rises like a giant tree in a jungle painted by Henri Rousseau. They all — even Rousseau — belong in the same artistic ecosystem, parallel with but distinct from that of high and sophisticated art.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

SELF-CONSCIOUS CANADIANS

Hallvard Dahlie

I SEE NATIONAL self-consciousness first manifesting itself in Canadian fiction some thirty or thirty-five years ago, with its strongest initial expression in Hugh MacLennan's *Barometer Rising* (1941). Fiction prior to this time was on the whole unconcerned about the separateness of a Canadian identity or other Canadian issues, for writers like Stead, Ostenso, and Grove were more or less preoccupied with variations of the "roughing it in the bush" theme. It was the pioneer or rural virtues, rather than anything exclusively Canadian, which constituted their fictional themes and in this respect they were closer in spirit to rural romantics like Willa Cather than to succeeding generations of Canadian realists and nationalists. These writers were at the end of a tradition rather than at the beginning, and the decade of the thirties marks a kind of watershed between such derivative forms of fiction as the historical romance and regional idyll and the newer aesthetics associated with the emergence of realism and nationalism in Canada. Some fifty years previous to this time, William Dean Howells had offered a formula which has through the years lost none of its relevance: "I would have our American novelists," he intoned on that occasion, "be as American as they unconsciously can." The implications of this statement are of course twofold: first, that a novelist cannot write outside of his own experiences or milieu, and second, that he must at the same time take his environment for granted in order that his experiences can be translated into a larger pattern or meaning. He must be "American" or "Russian" or "Canadian" — that is, conscious of his environment and tradition — in the selection of his material, but in its execution he must drop this consciousness and transform the regional or national raw material into a form which reflects aesthetic sincerity and universal significance.

Howell's prescription was particularly appropriate for the novelist of an emerging literary tradition, such as that in Canada at the end of the thirties.

For in his haste to discard his derivative image, the Canadian novelist stood in danger of assuming new poses which could prove equally crippling: that of becoming a spokesman for Canada or a celebrator of her new identity, of becoming therefore an essayist and propagandist rather than a novelist and artist. Or alternatively, depending on his degree of scepticism, sophistication, cynicism, or despair, he could become an angry young man towards things Canadian, and deliberately set out to satirize or attack the whole business, as though Canadianism doesn't matter anyway. Both of these approaches reflect a self-consciousness towards Canada, and on the whole it is not until the last decade or so that novelists have been able to shake this burden, and leave Canada, as it were, alone, or simply take it for granted. Perhaps Canadian novelists have for a long time simply reflected the national obsession with explaining Canada to all and sundry, and tended to view things Canadian with a myopic vision; but it is when this concern superimposes itself upon, or even replaces, the legitimate aesthetic elements of fiction, that the trait of self-conscious Canadianism becomes fictionally damaging.

In terms of content, a large number of Canadian novelists — in particular, Hugh MacLennan, Ethel Wilson, Sinclair Ross, Robertson Davies — have been very Canadian in respect to character, setting, and event, and they have reached out not only into their own varied experiences, but into national traditions and history for intrinsically interesting material. But frequently, they have not been able to leave well enough alone: they have felt compelled to alternate passages of sensitive and perceptive writing with variant choruses of "O Canada" as though to reassure the reader that Canada is important enough to write about in the first place. This obligation to explain Canada was activated by Hugh MacLennan, not only in the "Forewords" to his first two novels, but also in an important article in the *Saturday Review of Literature* in 1946, where he said: "Canada may be respected, but no outsider feels it necessary for survival to understand the country. It is the Canadian writer's job to make his country interesting, to make it dramatic, and to show its intrinsic beauty and importance." And Edmund Wilson, who has been condescending on more than one occasion towards Canadian literature, echoed these sentiments some twenty years later when he celebrated MacLennan as a "writer strongly to be recommended to anyone who wants to understand Canada."

To give MacLennan his due, it is only fair to point out that his fictional celebration of Canada's characteristics did reflect the feelings of Canadians at large, and it is this fidelity to national sentiment that causes us on one level to

rank MacLennan with those other disseminators of Canadiana: *MacLean's*, the CBC, the National Film Board. Many of us recall the authorized "school editions" of *Barometer Rising* and *Two Solitudes* which reflect the official stamp of approval upon MacLennan's powers of cultural fertilization. When we read his novels today — aside from *Each Man's Son* and *The Watch that Ends the Night* — we in a sense stand amazed at how much he got away with, at how far beyond his expository "forewords" he carried his lecture method. In the first chapter alone of *Barometer Rising*, for example, we learn about the geological history of the Halifax peninsula, that the Narrows is "one of the most vital stretches of water in the world," and that the Citadel was "considered a symbol and bastion of the British Empire." Later we learn that Halifax is a terminus of the world's longest railway, that the Labrador winds cross the estuary of the St. Lawrence on their way to the Gulf Stream, and that when it is night-time in Nova Scotia it is noon in British Columbia.

These facts in themselves, of course, fulfil part of the implications of Howell's dictum, and perhaps they do help outsiders as well as Canadians understand Canada's "intrinsic beauty and importance". But according to MacLennan — and it is MacLennan the novelist we judge here — these are the thoughts which arise in the consciousness of his characters at times of unquestionably strong emotional crises. Neil Macrae entertains his complicated geological observations while he is furtively seeking anonymity upon his return to Halifax; Angus Murray reflects upon Halifax as a railway terminus mere moments before he proposes marriage to Penny, and unless in some Bergmanian symbolic manner he equates his sexual prowess with a thrusting CNR locomotive, the reader will quibble over the disparity of these two ideas. And near the end of the novel Penny is aching and throbbing for some reassurance of Neil's love, but all she receives from him is this violent outburst: "I tell you, if Canada ever gets to understand what her job in this world really is — well, unless she does, she'll never be a nation at all." Understandably, Penny "made no answer, but continued to stare into the darkness."

It would be gratifying to be able to read these passages as parody, but this device implies a level of artistic sophistication, of critical observation, and a sense of humour in which at that period of Canada's development seemed to be singularly lacking. Regrettably, we must read them for what they are: examples of an obtrusive injection of ideas that belong to MacLennan the essayist, artistic flaws which the many fine passages in his early work do not sufficiently compensate for. When MacLennan does indulge in a genuine sense of humour, as in *Each*

Man's Son, this awkward and self-conscious pose disappears, and one can only wish that he had exploited this rarely used talent more frequently.

When MacLennan *unconsciously* evokes the character of Canada's vastness or wilderness, as he does in the canoe trip episode in *The Watch that Ends the Night*, he ranks with the best of our novelists. And more to the point, character is not sacrificed: Martell's reactions are rightfully only those which we would expect a young boy in his situation to experience — fear, sickness, a revulsion at what he had seen, and finally, when the full impact of his aloneness had struck him, a genuine sobbing and crying out for his mother. And all along, the atmosphere of the New Brunswick wilderness is unmistakable; MacLennan's unconscious Canadianism here makes this episode one of the most finely sustained passages in all his fiction. In his *Barometer Rising*, he couldn't even let twelve-year old boys be boys, as it were, but had to invest them with amazing powers of generalization, as when he has Robbie Wain view the departure of the *SS Olympic* in terms of an experience which, we are to believe, "crystallized all the impressions he had formed of the past few years, what he had seen and read and what he imagined the purpose of the world to be. The purpose of the world was doing things, and doing them better than the other fellow."

The above quotation reflects another element of self-conscious Canadianism that weakens MacLennan's fiction — his tendency to moralize or find a purpose in incidents which by themselves do not normally carry this kind of burden. Thus, Roddie is not allowed to watch ships because he liked watching ships, but because it gave him a sense of purpose. The local girls, similarly, let themselves be ravished by the sailors not, presumably, because they enjoyed it, but because they had "no better place to be," and even the idleness or laziness of the aimless soldiers and dockworkers was not just good old-fashioned sloth, but "seemed to have a purpose, as though it were also part of the war." And in the only scene in this novel where MacLennan even gets close to a description of physical love, both Geoffrey Wain and Evelyn, at the height of their somewhat sophomoric love play, are moralizing to themselves about the reasons they enjoy making love. Here, as in the affair between Kathleen and Dennis Morey in *Two Solitudes* and between Bruce Fraser and Marcia in *The Precipice*, MacLennan cannot shake the Puritanical element of Canadianism which seeks to hide sexuality behind a cloak of moral rationalizing. This manifestation of lingering Puritanism is not of course exclusively a Canadian trait, but it is remarkably well preserved in Canada, and other novelists than MacLennan have come to grief over it — even some, as we well know, who sing of the orgasm loud and clear.

I have perhaps dwelt unduly and unfairly upon Hugh MacLennan, but he seems to me to represent the best and the worst of the fictionally possible worlds of Canada. If his artistry had matched his undeniably sincere feeling for Canada so that he could have exploited an unconscious Canadianism rather than a self-conscious one, more fiction of the quality of *The Watch that Ends the Night* or *Each Man's Son* would undoubtedly have been produced.

A STEP TOWARDS this experiential-artistic fusion was taken by Ethel Wilson who, like MacLennan, invests her fiction with a strong sense of moral and social purpose. Little interested in novelistic fads and experimentation, she sees the Canadian writer achieving stature slowly — "like the strong slow movement of water or glaciers," as she expressed it once. Like MacLennan, too, she is fond of authorial intrusion, and occasional preaching, but is more consistently interested in character than in idea. Her exploitation of things Canadian reflects this priority, and though it is not uniformly successful, it does tie in organically with development of character much more frequently than in MacLennan. Thus in *Swamp Angel*, one of the prevailing patterns is that of flight and movement — away from crowds, restrictions and stultifying forces, and towards liberation and self-fulfillment. Mrs. Wilson's superimposing of this pattern against a map of B.C., as it were, is on the whole effective, because the physical routes that Maggie Lloyd follows in her quest — the circuitous journey from Vancouver to New Westminster, the bus trip up the Fraser, Similkameen, and Thompson valleys — do not simply spell out a lesson in geography. They represent both a literal and metaphorical journey up-stream, to a clear source or beginning, as it were, where Maggie can take stock of her life and begin anew. Though we do learn some geography and some history in this novel, we are not too often aesthetically offended for in the process we learn much about the character of Maggie and of the new people in the midst of whom she is starting her new life.

But on occasion Mrs. Wilson, too, adopts the tone and technique of an essayist, and appears to be explaining Canadian facts to the reader more interested in Canada than in fiction, and we lose for a moment all credibility in Maggie, as in this scene, where her bus is approaching Lytton:

> Maggie opened a map upon her knee. What will it mean, all this country? . . . The very strange beauty of this country through which she passed disturbed Maggie, and projected her vision where her feet could not follow, northwards —

> never southwards — but north beyond the Bonaparte, and beyond the Nechako and the Fraser, on and on until she should reach the Nation River and the Parsnip River and the Peace River, the Turnagain and the Liard, and north again to the endless space west of the MacKenzie River, to the Arctic Ocean. What a land!

We are pulling for Maggie here — and for Ethel Wilson — but we balk at this rhapsodic evoking of Canada's vastness being engendered by a map, a Greyhound bus, and Lytton, British Columbia. We realize that in her odyssey Maggie moves into an understanding of her position in the world — her relationship with human beings, with animals, with the land, and perhaps even with the cosmos itself. But these relationships are handled much more convincingly in those scenes where Maggie is confronted directly with experience: fishing in the Similkameen, watching the flights of geese or the fight between the eagle and the osprey, her sudden observing of the fawn and the kitten, her awareness of the sky and stars on her first night out of Vancouver. Here the elements of the world — or of Canada, if you like — are inseparable from the character and feelings of Maggie. In her finest passages, Ethel Wilson demonstrates how effectively the principles of artistic selection and economy can operate when such extra-literary considerations as being a spokesman for Canada are ignored.

When we turn from the serious fiction of MacLennan and Wilson to the gentle satire of Robertson Davies, the shift in tone delights us, and on the whole there is a satisfactory fusion of Canadian experience and artistic vision. In a sense, Davies stands mid-way between the serious celebrators of Canadianism and those who deny it altogether, and he has the best of two worlds, as it were. He can proceed with his accurate shooting of sitting Canadian ducks, but one senses that he doesn't really want to destroy them. His heart is ultimately in Salterton, much as Sinclair Lewis's was in Gopher Prairie, and like his American counterpart, Davies gets mileage out of his satire chiefly the first time round, for it fails to expand or please significantly on subsequent readings. It is seldom intellectually realized, and depends for its effect in large part on an in-group recognition, on a kind of select snobbery and superiority. In a passage in *Leaven of Malice*, for example, Davies has that crusty old organist, Humphrey Cobbler, expound facetiously on the importance of Canadian music:

> "But this is authentic Canadiana," said Cobbler, "a suite of dances, composed in this very city in 1879 and dedicated to the Marchioness of Lorne. Title: *The Fur Suite.* I've played the *Mink Schottische.* I can give you the *Beaver Mazurka*, the

> *Lynx Lancers*, the *Chinchilla Polka* or the *Ermine Redowa*. Every one of them recreates the loyal gaiety of Victorian Canada."

This particular outburst adds very little to the dramatic dimensions of the situation under way at the moment, and stands indeed as a rather obvious intrusion. Gloster Ridley and Miss Vyner, the two main protagonists of this scene, dislike music of all sorts, not merely Canadian music, so all we can really credit Davies with here is a rather crude and superficial opinion of Canadian culture, which earns the reader's snicker rather than his genuine laughter. Much better handled in this same novel is the question of Canadian literature, from Rumball's prose epic, *The Plain That Broke the Plough*, to Solly Bridgetower's foray into Heavysege and Amcan:

> "Was Heavysege, in the truest sense, a Canadian writer? . . . Set your minds at rest. Who but a Canadian could have written Saul's speech? Does not Jehoidah behave like a Canadian when he refuses to cheer when his neighbours are watching him? Is it not typically Canadian of Heavysege's Hebrews that they take exception to Saul's 'raging in a public place'? Is it not Canadian self-control that David displays when, instead of making a noisy fuss he 'lets his spittle fall upon his beard, and scrabbles on the door-post'? Friends, these are the first evidences of the action of our climate and our temperament upon the native drama."

Nevertheless, even in this passage, there is a self-conscious Canadianism at work, in the fact that Davies elects to satirize a poet who on the whole has no supporters in Canada or elsewhere. And by supporting Davies all the way in his view on Heavysege, we are up to a point seduced into accepting as well his views on Canadian character.

In *A Mixture of Frailties*, where the satirical tone is much more subdued, the intrusion of self-conscious Canadianism doesn't work nearly as satisfactorily. The general ironic pattern works well throughout this novel, where we see the culturally deprived Canadian, Monica Gall, becoming the recipient of a trust fund, achieving a high cultural level in England, and thus ironically being liberated by the most narrow-minded of the old Salterton residents. Davies in this novel tries to be quite casual and off-handish about the Canadian element, and is quite successful in his depiction of Monica in her confrontation with various segments of English society. But on a number of occasions he lapses into an obvious awareness of the stereotypes of the Canadian character, as in this pointed remark about Monica: "She was perfectly happy, for she knew that she had done well, and (true Canadian that she was) she could enjoy her treat because she had earned it." This gratuitous dragging in of a facet of the Canadian puritan character tells

us more about Davies than about Monica, for up to this point in her education abroad, Monica had not revealed any significant reliance upon this trait.

A more serious intrusion is the unbelievable though superficially funny scene with the McCorkills from Medicine Hat who invite Monica out for a "real Canadian meal" in their temporary Wimbledon home. Here Davies pulls out all the stops, but the satire falls flat: Lorne McCorkill wears a sweatshirt with the name of a Canadian university blazoned on it, he has painted all the woodwork with "real Canadian rubber-base paint," he repeats profundities like "that's swell," and offers Monica a real drink called a Canadian lyric made up of course of lemon juice and maple syrup. If the whole episode is intended as an anti-American satire, then the implication is that no Canadian would behave so boorishly, which is a kind of self-conscious superiority on Davies' part; if it is intended as an anti-Canadian satire, then the McCorkills fail to emerge as anything except caricatures, and the description of the furnishings of their "Canadian" home reads very much like an inferior *Babbitt*. Artistically the whole episode fails, for its tone is significantly different from that sustained during most of Monica's English sojourn, and it seems to have been put in merely to remind us that in Davies' view, real Canadians, whether in Salterton, Wimbledon, or Medicine Hat, all suffer from a permanent form of provincialism. Perhaps the major problem in this novel is that of the inconsistency of tone, for at times one isn't sure whether Davies offers his remarks facetiously or seriously, as, for example, when Monica — in Paris, and by this point a very sophisticated Monica — suffers a sudden pang of homesickness when she sees a fur in a display window with the sign "Canada furs." In his earlier novels, *Leaven of Malice* and *Temper-Tost*, which are more thoroughly satirical, this inconsistency doesn't occur, and the self-conscious Canadianism in those works at least contributes consistently to the prevailing tone.

WHAT STRIKES the reader of Hugh MacLennan, of Ethel Wilson, and of Robertson Davies, is a kind of predictability of content: the scenes, the characters, the actions, all frequently reflect the stereotype, and one rarely experiences that delight of the unexpected which is the mark of a truly original novelist. It seems at times that the stock devices employed merely reinforce the uncritical and incomplete view held of Canada by many outsiders — a land of snow, of wheat fields, of mounties, of vast empty spaces. One can easily see where the poet John Robert Colombo got his material for his satirical "Recipe

for a Canadian Novel," published in *The Atlantic* in 1964. This poem lists the ingredients for a novel — one mountie, an Eskimo, one Indian, a small-town whore, a Montreal Jew, and a boy with a dying pet — and concludes with instructions on how to serve it up:

> Drain, bring to a simmer
> but avoid a boil.
> Pour, place in oven, bake.
>
> Slice in pieces, or leave whole.
> Serves nineteen million
> When cold.

But in a very real sense this poem was written after the fact, for even at the time of its publication it was almost as dated as the works it satirized. By the mid-sixties, much had happened in Canadian fiction, and a new artistic maturity had emerged in writers like Mordecai Richler, Brian Moore, Leonard Cohen and Margaret Laurence. In some ways, the element of self-conscious Canadianism shifted during the sixties from content to style, and certainly from affirmation to negation or denial. The difference between Davies' satire of sacred Canadian cows and Richler's, for example, in *The Incomparable Atuk*, reflects this difference, for Richler is much angrier at what he considers to be Canadian faults than Davies is. The only novel where on the surface he appears to be consciously Canadian is his tour de force *The Incomparable Atuk*, but I think it is misleading to see this book as an ordinary satire on things Canadian. For in an unmistakable way, it simply fulfills the warning contained in the epigraph from Richard Rovere: "Cut off from American junk, Canada would have to produce her own," and I suggest that perhaps Richler with tongue in cheek set out to provide one of the first contributions to this genre. In terms of content, I see it as too obvious to be taken any other way, for predictably, such stock objects of satires as the RCMP, Moose Jaw, and Diefenbaker are given the usual treatment, and perhaps the only genuinely refreshing sally is the inability of Canada's "darling" Bette Dolan to see her sexual insatiability as anything other than an extension of the Y's keep-fit programme. In many ways the book is consciously Canadian in that it stands as a deliberate satire on Canadian satire, and while it is not consistently junk, it is far inferior to his other Canadian based novels, all of which reflect an aesthetic detachment in their effective exploitation of the Canadian scene.

Fiction of the 1960's on the whole moved away from self-conscious Canadian-

ism in terms of content, but there was a manifestation of this trait in matters of style. Richler and Cohen emerge here as two of the relatively few novelists who have made major contributions in this area, and on the whole their works avoid the awkwardness, triteness, and straining for effect that so frequently characterize our fictional experimenters. Self-consciousness in this area manifests itself in the organization of structural elements, in diction, in narrative techniques; as much in excessive profanity, for example, as in excessive reticence, as much in over-playing sexuality as in underplaying it and two of the more dreadful examples of these qualities are found in Scott Symons' *Place D'Armes* and Robert Hunter's *Erebus*. Symons uses all kinds of gimmicks in his work, the journal form, typographical variation, a flippant biography, photographs, marginalia, and so on. And almost at random, we can open the book and find such outbursts as "the Roundhead Methodist All-Canadian Good-boy", or "I, the proffered Anglo-Canadian carré . . . ," and "I grimly realize that *his* is the new Canadian caste I fight . . . the half castes. The half-asses. . . . "; in short, he gives us what Paul West accused some poets of giving us, "a torrent of self-conscious flippancy". He substitutes typographical license for form, and a collection of sophomoric anti-Canadian outbursts for content; I can't really argue with the blurb on the dust jacket which states that "*Place D'Armes* is at once a first novel, a meticulously tangled diary, an insanely indiscreet autobiography, an existential Canadian allegory, a book of illicit imagination. . . . " With all that going for you, one is tempted to ask, why bother to write good fiction? At any rate, this book represents a very self-conscious attempt to be experimental, daring, iconoclastic, irreverent, funny, and its total effect is one of annoyance rather than curiosity, intrigue, or delight.

Hunter in *Erebus* offends us in another way in his very self-conscious attempt to prove that Canada's Puritan heritage of sexual reticence will disappear if one offers up a sufficient amount of filth and vulgarity in its place. Perhaps his chief problem is simply that he can't write, that he has no sense of language or metaphor, that he lacks imagination and a sense of humour, and that he has no compassion for his characters. He then tries to compensate for all these deficiencies by using a kind of shock treatment, by implying for example, that if one four-letter word or sexual scene works well, then ten of these, as it were, will work ten times as well. Again, as in Symons, the effect is boredom and at times even embarrassment, not at his lack of reticence, but at his lack of invention. His kind of self-consciousness is as destructive fictionally as any other kind, and

it is of course a debatable point whether Hunter's sweaty sexual encounters are preferable to MacLennan's glandless performances.

Here I have perhaps set up straw men who are easy to destroy, for I don't think that as novelists Symons or Hunter are taken seriously by very many readers. But they do, I suggest, reflect a tendency that is everywhere apparent today, a tendency to substitute superficial rebellion for fundamental thought, clichéd gesture for meaningful act, violent noise for a discriminating sense of texture, and formal gimmickry for organic form. Again, these tendencies are not peculiarly or exclusively Canadian, but they are manifestations of a self-consciousness that has severely affected the quality of recent Canadian fiction.

I do not suggest that the elimination of self-conscious Canadianism will make a bad writer a good writer, but I do suggest that it will help make a good writer a better writer. Perhaps it is a matter of recognizing that many of the constituents of what we see as Canadianism are really part of larger frameworks: of humanism, of spirituality, of materialism, of one ideology or another. And artistically, the psychological manifestations of these impulses in character are more convincingly presentable than are the traits of a national identity. Sociological self-consciousness produces a negative literature, as Robert McDougall pointed out some years ago, and his observations on contemporary fictional developments have a special relevance to the question of where Canadian fiction should go. "The probing of man's consciousness and conscience at the expense of external social reference," he argued, "has been increasingly the mark of fiction in the western world over the past fifty years." Though Canada has lagged behind in this respect, much significant activity has been going on in this area during the past decade, and I would predict that the kind of Canadianism that one hears shouted about on all sides in our sociological world will have increasingly less viability in our literary world.

NEXT TIME FROM A DIFFERENT COUNTRY

Robert Gibbs

> *I prefer, as far as my own work is concerned, a language which is clear, straightforward, and with little adornment. I do not normally allow myself a word which I should not use in plain prose, and I normally also use the sentence construction of plain prose. I think of a good style, whether in prose or verse, as being rather like the lady whom Sam Johnson considered to be well dressed because he did not remember what she had on. Or perhaps as Yeats says of his later poems, the poetry is naked. (Crabbe speaks of poetry "without an atmosphere.") Nothing requires greater effort, or is more beautiful, than simplicity.*[1]

THE ABOVE, Elizabeth Brewster's own account of her first large collection, *Passage of Summer*, is a clear enough announcement. Reviewers who have commented on her work have generally remarked on the presence of the qualities she has so deliberately cultivated. George Johnston, in a review of her later collection, *Sunrise North*, calls Miss Brewster "one of the most reliable writers I know," who "declares her intentions and carries them out," but he warns us that although her poetry "seems transparent and simple . . . it is not quite either."[2]

Taken together, the two collections mentioned, one published in 1969 and the other in 1972, give us a substantial body of work by which to judge what seems and what is in her poems, and, taken separately, two distinct arrangements or gatherings. *Passage of Summer*, as she tells us in "Chronology of Summer" consists of poems written over a period of twenty-four years.[3] *Sunrise North*, though it contains a few early poems, consists almost wholly of work done after

Elizabeth Brewster moved to Alberta in 1968. In terms of composition then, the 1969 collection gives a long view in time, while the new collection gives us poems largely written with a sense of that behind her. In a conversation I had with Miss Brewster in 1970, she commented on her own feelings about the two collections, one just out and the other projected:

> I think that so long as I had quite a bulk of unpublished work, in a way it meant that I wasn't likely to make any particularly fresh break. The fact that it was published just at the point when I was also moving to Alberta meant that these two things came together, There was the publication of the book — the book was accepted in October — I moved to Alberta in September. . . . The new place and the new work were going to come together.[4]

To my question whether or not this change had affected her poetic principles, Miss Brewster replied, "Oh, no, it's a new viewpoint, a new window to look out of." So with the two books we have both old and new windows, differences in space and time and distance to consider.

Passage of Summer contains most of the poems of Miss Brewster's three Ryerson Chapbooks, *East Coast*, 1951; *Lillooet*, 1954; and *Roads*, 1957. The title poem of the first, "East Coast — Canada", is noteworthy from both thematic and stylistic standpoints. It begins:

> Lying at night poised between sleep and waking
> Here on the continent's edge, I feel the wind shaking
> The house and passing on:
> Blowing from far across fabulous mountain ranges,
> Far over the long sweep of the prairies . . .

The one end-rhyme, muted by enjambement, since it is the only one of its kind in the poem, has the effect of momentarily arresting the rhythm. It is a short hold-out against the force of the wind, which once let loose blows pretty freely through the poem. In the final stanza, there is another kind of resistance:

> Drown it out. Drown out the wind.
> Turn on the radio.
> Listen to the news.
> Listen to boogie-woogie or a baseball game.
> Pretend we belong to a civilization, even a dying one.

The injunction to herself and to her readers has urgency. It is perhaps the urgency of necessity, the necessity of keeping an isolating and obliterating force at bay. But the "boogie-woogie" itself, tonally, undermines the imperatives.

Conscious self-irony breaks in with "Pretend" and continues to assert itself to the end of the poem.

> Pretend. Pretend.
> But there are the woods and the river and the wind blowing.
> There is the sea. Space. The wind is blowing.

Ironic as the effort has been, it has at least served to control poetically the terrors out there. To see the full measure of that control, one needs to look at what has happened in the two stanzas between the first and the last.

> The wind travels where we cannot travel,
> Touches those we cannot touch;
> For few and lonely are the sentinel cities of the North
> And rivers and woods lie between.
> Far, few, and lonely . . .

The effect is expansive, a free opening of the poem to those distances and solitudes. But the expansion cannot go on without sheer terror entering and overwhelming the controlled voice —

> Space surrounds us, flows around us, drowns us.
> Even when we meet each other, space flows between.
> Our eyes glaze with distance.
> Vast tracts of Arctic ice enclose our adjectives.
> Cold space.
> Our spirits are sheer columns of lice like frozen mountains
> Dashed against by the wind.

Internal rhymes here have quite the opposite effect of the initial rhyme. They inflate the poem and serve to translate the view of a vast openness from outside to inside. But control, however threatened, however urgently calling for that imperative voice, "Drown it out," is still there, expressed as hyperbole, a rhetorical expansiveness answering to but also taking charge of the emotion. The whole poem moves as it should, loosely as if freed to the wind, but not as loosely as it seems, and the overt irony of the end is only a gesture in the light of the irony that contains the whole. Here is enough to see the deceptiveness of Elizabeth Brewster's "transparency".

To make the leap from this early poem to the last poem printed in her new collection may be instructive. The mood in "Advice to the fearful self" is still imperative, and perhaps more urgently so —

If necessary, go through madness.
If necessary, walk through a wall of fire.
Let the flames eat your hand.
Let your body shrivel like the top of a burnt match stick.

There is a nakedness here, an exposure to an inner necessity more terrible than that coming from outside, but the voice and the controlling irony are still patently Miss Brewster's own. Qualification, ritualization, hyperbole (in the light of these), contain the emotion. The expanding impulse I noted in "East Coast — Canada" is here, in the succeeding stanzas:

If necessary, drown.
Walk undersea like a deepsea diver
but without his mask or oxygen supply.
Let the waves close over you.
See above your head
the webbed feet of seabirds
flying in water.

The extremity of the injunction is kept from being really extreme by the unfailing decorum, by the positive resonance of undersea images, and by the heightened and fanciful upside-down view. What follows is the more stark by contrast:

If necessary, be buried live.
Let sand clog your nostrils.
Close your mouth on pebbles.
In the frozen ground
stiffen with winter.

The "frozen fountain" image of "East Coast — Canada" finds a counterpart here, but there is no relieving beauty about it. Only the continuity of the rhythmic and rhetorical design keeps the emotion bounded. The fusion that a good poem needs comes with the final stanza:

If necessary, be conceived again.
Swim in the river of the womb
till, cast up fishlike on dry land
you grow a mouth and scream.

If necessary, scream.

That scream, a release of what "East Coast — Canada" would have drowned out, gets through. There is not the same distance here between the necessity felt and the composing imagination. We are closer to that "fearful self". But the

rebirth image, the fish image, grotesque as it becomes, cannot but exert its power as the culmination of an ordered series, a power to contain, check, compose the emotional content. The ironic structure closes even around the scream. Elizabeth Brewster is not a "howl" poet yet by any means.

The tightly rhymed poem, "Peace", which appeared as the penultimate poem in *East Coast* and in *Passage of Summer* as "Peace: I", is almost a statement of poetic credo for such poems as "advice to the fearful self". The final stanzas are:

> Peace is pain increased
> Till it is numb,
> And a cry so shrill
> That it seems dumb.
>
> Peace cannot be shaken
> By death or strife,
> For it has swallowed both
> To make its life.

Explicitly, "peace" here is more than the undisrupted continuity of the rhetorical pattern, but considering the effect here as elsewhere of the formal constraints, the swallowing of all extremities is a matter of poetic synthesis as much as of experience. When the formal pattern is as tight as here, there is an almost grotesque effect (considering the content), and yet to the unwary the poem may seem simply to affirm courage and stoicism. "Peace", the poem, may finally leave one shaken, though the purely formal bridge over the chasm is steady enough.

WHEN THE DISTANCE is one of time rather than of space, nostalgia often overlays the ironic control. Consider the last poem of *East Coast*, reprinted as the second poem in *Passage of Summer*. "River Song" begins

> Where are the lumberjacks who come from the woods for Christmas,
> Drinking, fighting, singing their endless ballads,

and ends

> Where are the logs afloat on the wide river?
> Oh sad river,
> Sing a song of pain for your children gone,
> Oh glory gone.

The river is still wide, but not as those ballads seem, endless, in either dimension. The sense of looseness, reinforced in verbs like "slopping", "shovelling", and

"churning", remains through the diminishing lines. The feeling is beautifully contained, controlling and controlled within the rhetorical frame. But the sense of distance predominates, and the isolating force of time is no less than that of space in "East Coast — Canada".

An early poem which works quite differently from any so far examined is "In the Library". The tense is present, and the ordering of the emotions allows for immediate drama. The effort appears to be to realize a moment of dissolution in the self.

> Believe me, I say to the gentleman with the pince-nez,
> Framed forever with one hand in his pocket,
> With passion, with intensity, I say it —
> Believe me, oh believe me, you are not I.
> Making my chair squeak on the chilly floor,
> Catching up my pencil, I say —
> But of course I am myself.

There is interplay here between the sure control of the composing imagination and the Woolfian sense of the elusive moment and the tenuous continuity of personal identity. The drama so far, however, is not so much played as reported being played "with passion, with intensity". The narrator-observer is still in charge though the distance diminishes and a more dramatic urgency breaks through —

> The minutes ripple over the varnished tables.
> This is June, I say, not yesterday or tomorrow.
> This is I, not Byron or Vanessa. I am not in the moon.
> I must differentiate my body from all other bodies,
> Realizing the mole on my neck, the scar on my hand.

But the truth once given in to is not so terrible as the fear of it was. The merging of the speaker's identity with others' is perhaps no worse than Keats' experiences of empathy. That yielding, allowing other selves to invade and merge with and perhaps obliterate the self, calls out another kind of control is evident from the final lines:

> The elastic moment stretches to infinity,
> The elastic moment, the elastic point of space.
> The blessed sun becomes the blessed moon.

For all the dramatic slippage the poem has taken us through, it ends with the control surer than at the outset. The orderly withdrawal from the experience is such that the merely personal becomes universal. The last line states, without

perhaps meaning to, the transmutation that has occurred from dramatized dissolution to imaginative and rhetorical stability. What has appeared more and more as one kind of experience miraculously turns out to be quite another kind, essentially the experience of making a poem, stabilizing while dramatizing an experience which outside of art would seem to be unsettling.

That Elizabeth Brewster should be doing such things with language is not surprising, considering that all art is an ordering and abstracting as well as a dramatizing process. The acting out, though, that constitutes the rhetorical, formal synthesis differs widely from poet to poet and can be defined only by the poems themselves. When a poet works as Miss Brewster most often does with matters that appear to be those of undisguised, unadorned experience, the effect is very different from what happens in more openly fanciful or mythopoeic poets.

Passage of Summer is not only a collection of poems, it is also an arrangement, a larger composition, as Miss Brewster herself has pointed out in her chronology:

> My first two sections are, in a way, related to psychoanalysis, dealing as they do with early memories and with dreams. . . . After the two highly personal sections at the beginning, I turn to the world of external objects and then to the section of "Portraits." Most of the poems are based on real remembered people, many of them remembered from my childhood. . . . The section which seems more objective and impersonal, "Pilgrims," may be after all, one of the most personal in the book. . . . Restlessness, whether physical or spiritual, is one of my commonest states, and it is reflected in "Explorations" and in the religious poems. . . . The concluding section of "Poems for All Seasons" once more brings in the theme of time. I also wished to end, in the classical manner, with a serene, anticlimactic poem.[5]

Miss Brewster here admits to seeming other than she is in her poems and to restlessness while insisting on the classical manner of serenity. Her book moves out from what is apparently most personal to what is possibly more personal (but more detached) and back. The whole is encompassed by the distancing effect of time. The opening stanza of the first poem, "Past as Present", establishes the manner Miss Brewster has said she wanted to end with —

> Walking these streets so often walked before,
> I almost feel as though my feet could find
> Their former path, reach one familiar door
> And enter to a world long left behind.

She does enter that world with measured steps but does not allow it, by any means, to assume control —

The fried potatoes and the apple sauce,
The still warm loaf, the doughnuts sugared white
Would vanish from the table. Ancient jokes
Would circle ghostly in the encircling night.

The whole rhetorical process is one of approach and withdrawal. The "still warm loaf" must here vanish in favour of ghosts from a distance anterior to the distance established at the beginning. The lost world of childhood, though it assumes a presence in the poem, keeps a distance, entering clearly as memory or dream.

The poem ends by expanding the vision to include history and myth, not so much to universalize the poet's particular experience, as to bring the larger human background within the same range and under the command of the serene, stabilizing imagination.

Those who drank hemlock or were crucified
Live in the triumph of their desolation.
Orpheus, though torn to death, remains untouched
To play his lute to a new generation.

There is no faltering here. The control is such that Orpheus and other sufferers remain distant and fixed against the poet's assertions about them. Serenity costs this. But considering the poem's function in relation to the book, the carefully measured pacing out of distances is needed for the stable frame. The poem encompasses what the book encompasses.

The last poem in *Passage of Summer*, "Saint John River in October", though it is really more serene I think than "Past as Present" (not having to insist so much on stabilizing), is a no less calculated closing of the frame.

It is late afternoon
In mid-October.
The smell of brittle leaves
Is in the air.
I walk by the river
By which I have walked many times
And I remember . . .

The movement is not quite the same as that of "Past as Present", which begins by reaching back and as a whole purports at least to bring the past forward. The outward movement within that movement forecasts the designated movement of the book. Here the process is similar. The present, though, from the very first has the taint of the past, and once the poet has established her distance, the "I

remember" lines become the means both of keeping it while bringing the past at least into view. The last stanza fixes the dual perspective:

> And I am surprised that all that time has gone,
> That life has flowed away with the river,
> And all the tears, humiliations, hopes, quarrels
> Have gone into the soil like dead leaves
> To be buried under another winter's snow
> Or feed the root of next spring's pussywillows.

Effectively all experience, all that the book has memorialized, reflected upon, dramatized, finds its place here in the present consciousness, which encompasses the dimension of time serenely and tidily.

That final adverb may indicate a patness or complacency in Miss Brewster that only an insensitive reader would take at face value. Open *Passage of Summer* to any page, as I have done to pages fourteen and fifteen. What is here is the conclusion of one poem —

> Tomorrow, I remember is Pascal's birthday,
> Puritan and gambler
> On the game of faith.
> And I remember
> The girl in my office
> Who plays bingo every Tuesday.
> "Some people always win," she says
> "But me — I always lose.
> But I go all the same."

The game of imagination is like enough the game of faith for Miss Brewster to keep a nice imbalance in such conversations with herself as "Alone in Hotel Bedroom". Also on these pages is "What I Want Is Stone", a declaration of principle, an allying herself consciously not just with neo-classicism but with the past. Yet the declaration is as "maliciously" ironic as it wants to be —

> I want to open a new novel
> And find it was written by Jane Austen.
> Civilization should tame barbarism,
> Decorum should control passion,
> The will subdue the act.
> Humanity should be a statue
> Senatorial, calm, with a Roman smile
> Ironic, wise, malicious, and Augustan.
>
> What I want is stone.

Miss Brewster is here having what she wants imaginatively, that decorous, hardened stance, but her smile, necessary to the accomplishment of that end, is directed at herself and any reader who might be taken in.

Sunrise North is not without design, but its design is less an enclosing than an opening. It begins with the conscious facing of a new landscape, and that points its direction. "Rising from Winnipeg" keeps the ever shifting view from the air before us; it records the movement of an eye over what it cannot reflect upon. The metaphors for the landscape are inconsistent, trite, but occur as what first occurs to an observer not familiar enough with what she sees to compose the experience. As a single poem, it is not one of Miss Brewster's best, but as a tentative feeling-out of the unknown land, it is a good beginning. Similarly, the second poem, "Moving Day", records the still unformed world of the poet's living-room being formed. The poem is the deliberate process itself acted out.

> There will be a chair in that corner,
> I think,
> and above it a painting
> of red on blue.
> There will be books
> and on the desk over there
> which is not yet over there
> I shall put a vase
> for chrysanthemums
> or for the first daffodils
> of next April.
>
> I have not yet decided
> how I shall arrange
> my visitors.

What is not yet there is there. The poet cannot escape her arranging, but she can stand off from it enough to mock herself. The saving grace of irony is still here, just as the window was there in "Rising from Winnipeg", as her chief metaphor of distance in these poems.

The third poem in *Sunrise North*, "Dwarf highrise," records a later stage in the progress. The eye from the window no longer lightly falls on whatever is the handiest metaphor; it forms the world out there and enters its interiors, then withdraws to its own ironic distance —

> Inside are people
> also small,

so small I can't see them.
They walk around behind the lighted dots,
fiddle with the minute knobs
of toy television sets.

They cook, eat, make love, do pushups
with precise cardboard motions.

The precision is the poet's but the diminishing she effects is nicely turned back on herself caught in the very diminutive act she sees —

Maybe someone has even
taken a sheet of paper
from a doll's house desk
and sits imagining

a Lilliputian poem
smaller than a speck.

There is immediacy here, a palpable imaginative process, but not so strong as to erase entirely the "malicious", Augustan smile.

By the time Miss Brewster gets to her "Cold Spell", three or four poems over from this, she is ready to extend the imaginative process. She begins "walking the zero street", observing, sensing, composing. She returns to her "twelfth floor" to "stand by the window", and from that distance and with that insulation take in the street she has just left. Abruptly, in the final stanza, her attention moves across time and space:

What is the weather like in your country?
I would like to be a magician
who, by gazing through my window,
could bring you
from wherever you were
into this cold landscape.
Suddenly you would appear walking
past that house with the blue roof

Is it memory working here? The effort is for magic, the power to translate the far to the near and finally to the close —

I would have to warm
your cold hands with mine.

Starting from where these poems start, the effect of regarding distances is very unlike that nostalgic irony that sang "Oh glory gone", in *Passage of Summer*.

THIS SUMMONING of the far from the near and making the two one results in some very moving love poems — "September twilight", "On awakening at night", and "November Sunday". The poem which best illustrates perhaps the unforced magic of such poems is "Thirty below". The perspective chosen is familiar and the impulse to pull together widely ranging associations there from the start. The poet is looking and listening through "frosted windows" to the wind and the snow. But her view is not confined to the street below, for she thinks " . . . how deep/ all over the country now/ snow drifts . . . "

> A solitary man walking
> wraps his face in a woollen mask
> turns his back sometimes
> so as not to front
> this biting, eye-smarting wind.

Here the view focusses on the solitary figure, but the wider range has prepared for the dramatic translation that follows:

> Suddenly I see my dead father
> in an old coat too thin for him,
> the tabs of his cap pulled over his ears,
> on a drifted road in New Brunswick
> walking with bowed head
> towards home.

The mood that has summoned and prepared for this vision does not take anything from its startling clarity and the abrupt sense it brings of distances giving way to simultaneity.

So distances remain but the sharpening of the senses to engage with the new landscape has reduced them. This is not to say that the individual poems in *Sunrise North* are better than those of *Passage of Summer* or that the book is a better book. What comes strongly through is the sense of a poet's having done one thing well in collecting and arranging one set of poems and now moving on to something else, a new way of ordering experience.

Dream poems have an important place in both books. A dream itself is an abstraction, a composition of psychic experience. The memory of a dream represents a further abstraction, and a poem that records such a memory must be at least three removes from whatever impelled the dream. Miss Brewster's dream poems, though filtered through these distancing lenses, retain the strength of

experiences vital to her imagination, and especially to that very composing and abstracting impulse so evident in *Passage of Summer*. The dream poems of *Sunrise North* take their character from the impulse of the book as a whole to reduce distances. The dreams become more dramatic as the voice becomes that of one recording things as they happen. The dream process becomes, as recorded, the composing process, the making of the poem.

> In a square classroom
> with a pointer in my hand
> I stand explaining my dream.
> There is a blackboard
> on which I make notes
> with white chalk.
> My explanation satisfies others
> but not myself.

Here in "Round Trip", as always, the ironic sense of the self within the composing process keeps the result from conclusiveness, keeps for the poem, that is, a necessary dramatic uneasiness.

> I am not sure
> whether it is good or bad
> to have come home again
>
> or if I intend to stay.

Within the dream the drama of this book is enacted; the "Round Trip" becomes a kind of exemplum for the larger composition.

In "Poems for psychoanalysis", the dreaming, composing, interpreting functions are removed from the individual psyche and dramatized through various personae: the psychoanalyst herself, the patients collectively and individually. The poet as "I" does not enter these poems; she has become an ironic, detached, and self-effacing observer of the whole tragi-comic play of interacting psyches. This self-effacement in favour of immediacy and drama appears elsewhere in such particularly fine poems as "Conversation between friends, largely unspoken" and "Gatrey Ketcheson". To move into psyches outside her own and render their memories, dreams and terrors with as much clarity as her own is a kind of triumph over the framing and distancing impulse, yet one that involves its own kind of distance.

Similarly the religious poems, which in *Passage of Summer* for all their ironic tension compose together a testimony of faith, have in *Sunrise North* a more

clearly dramatic character. "Good Friday performance" is itself a play with voices and actors, with the poet detached yet participating, with priest and congregation, with the bird beating against the rafters. As the dramatizing impulse comes to the fore, rhetorical continuity breaks —

> The cross . . .
> Suffering . . .
> Lift up your heads, O ye gates.
>
> Let him loose.
> Let the caged spirit free.
> The bird flits distractedly
> here and there.
> He cannot find the way.

The poem does not stay suspended and discontinuous. The poet's ironic awareness of the ambiguities of her faith draws all the elements together in a very strong conclusion:

> Be patient, be patient,
> they will try to let you out
>
> unless you fall first
> crumpled, beaten, crazed,
> the broken victim
> on the altar
>
> with the other Victim.

So in *Sunrise North* two impulses find play and interplay, the composing impulse, so strongly controlling *Passage of Summer*, and the dramatizing impulse that pushes against the insulating glass. The second of these impulses is the stronger for the interplay, itself a dramatic force in the poems. "Advice to the fearful self", which ends the book with a "scream", has a clear counterpart in "To a friend on the verge of breakdown":

> I cannot break the glass.
> You must smash your own hand
> through your own protection
> and save yourself by blood.

The act of poetic creation has for Miss Brewster come close and closer to being such an act.

I described the design of *Sunrise North* as "less an enclosing than an opening." This is true not just of the beginning. The book takes us through seasonal cycles, much as *Passage of Summer* did, but it ends less serenely. The unsettled character apparent in "Moving day" is far less settled in "Moving day again", which comes near the end of the book. Images of spring and rebirth, even the painful and grotesque rebirth of "advice to the fearful self", predominate in the final poems. This restlessness is not, however, even at the end, uncontained, just as the "scream" remains a verbal enclosure of the scream as well as an expression of it. Serenity reasserts itself again and again, as in "Under a plane tree", placed third from the end —

> Ah, yes, again you prove
> (doubt though I often may)
> that love and language conquer death.

If Miss Brewster takes an explicit position, it is usually on the side of decorum. She is self-aware, which means that she is aware of limits which she cannot cross or which she does not wish to cross as a poet.

> I come from a country
> of slow and diffident words
> of broken rhythms
> of unsaid feelings.
>
> Next time I am born
> I intend to come
> from a different country.

One can sense the malicious, Augustan smile closing round this poem, in which Miss Brewster drinking her "rum and hot water" has concluded that she cannot join the free chant of the "gold man". She is taking her place as deliberately as she planned the serene conclusion of *Passage of Summer*. But self-awareness is not all. The mock intention of the final lines is not (in the light of what has occurred in this book) as impossible of realization as it appears to be. As a poet, Miss Brewster moves on, from season to season, from landscape to landscape, closing distances and opening for herself new possibilities. Each beginning is a rebirth. In some very important ways, the Elizabeth Brewster of *Sunrise North* has come "from a different country".

NOTES

[1] Elizabeth Brewster, "Chronology of Summer," The Humanities Association Bulletin, XXI: 1 (Winter 1970), 38-39.

[2] Quarry, XXI: 3 (Summer 1972), 55.

[3] Elizabeth Brewster, 34.

[4] Transcribed from tape in possession of author.

[5] Elizabeth Brewster, 37-38.

THE ALCOHOLIC ON ALCOHOLISM

Art Hill

IF YOU BELIEVE IN heaven, be assured that Malcolm Lowry is there (and probably hates it). It is perhaps an unlikely destination for a man who occasionally sold his clothes to buy a drink, and wrote about people who might sell their souls for a dash of bitters. Lowry's principal — virtually his only — subject was his own mind and the demons that lived there. And mean, spiteful creatures they were! But his instincts were always right. The poor damned wretches who stumble through his stories, their foggy minds periodically lit by insights almost too sharp to believe, are always looking for a route to salvation through faith. That they never find anything to have faith *in* is quite beside the point. If heaven makes any sense at all, it's intent that counts. And their intentions (like Lowry's) are honourable.

Under the Volcano, Lowry's masterpiece, is a novel written (and designed to be read and understood) on many levels. It is about a man's distaste for what he finds in himself and his inability to live with it. It is about the need for love, and the pain of being unable to give it. But it is also a political novel, concerned with mankind's capacity for organized cruelty in a world moving toward fascism. It is filled with mysticism, signs, omens and portents, all expertly woven into the narrative by a man who knew the Cabbala and other dusty doctrines, and who firmly believed that nothing is quite what it seems. It is influenced by the cinema and by Lowry's taste for jazz. It is as complex as Joyce's *Ulysses*, to which it is often compared.

More than anything, though, it is about drunkenness. And this is the aspect of the book that has never been adequately interpreted. All the critics mention it, of course. One could not write about *Under the Volcano* without mentioning drunkenness. But many take the attitude that it is unimportant, that the book succeeds almost in spite of it. Some of them seem embarrassed by the confessional nature of it, as they would probably not be by the most explicit sexual revela-

tions. Most of them, I think, simply have no conception of the devious workings of the alcoholic mind. They are blind victims of the blessed ignorance that comes from not having wasted any considerable portion of their lives getting drunk. Which is all the more reason to pay attention, because it's all there if one can find it.

To begin more or less at the beginning, why was Lowry a drunkard? In attempting, without any real hope of success, to answer this question, it is worth noting that virtually every protagonist in a Lowry story is provided not only with an overwhelming sense of guilt to justify his urge for self-destruction, but with a tangible *reason* for it. Ethan Llewellyn, in *October Ferry to Gabriola*, agonizes over a prep school friend who hanged himself. It is suggested that he was almost an accomplice in the tragedy. Everywhere he looks, there are reminders of the dead friend. In *Volcano*, Geoffrey Firmin, the Consul, broods over the execution of some German prisoners on a British gunboat he commanded during World War I. The circumstances surrounding this event are always kept vague. Sometimes the Consul dismisses it as nonsense: " 'People simply did not go around,' he said, 'putting Germans in furnaces.' " This remark is recalled by his friend, Jacques Laruelle, in the long retrospective first chapter, which takes place exactly one year after the action of the story. But, Laruelle remembers, at other times he seemed to be tortured by the memory of the act, and to demand the blame for it: "But by this time the poor Consul had already lost almost all capacity for telling the truth . . . and the German officers were merely an excuse to buy another bottle of mescal."

There is ample room for doubt that the incident ever took place. For one thing, the Consul's age (which we can compute from other information) would have made him impossibly young, at the time of the incident, for the high naval rank which would have accompanied command of a ship engaged in vital missions.

Was Lowry's arithmetic bad? Not likely; he was usually careful of detail, and it is hard to believe that he would have let such an error slip through in a book he had worked on for ten years.

The obvious probability is that Lowry deliberately clouded this phase of the Consul's past. He created the possibility of a shameful secret, and along with it the strong likelihood that there was none. This is the sort of thing an alcoholic clings to: a reason for drinking so awful that it can only be hinted at, but which can yet be shucked off if he is ever seriously called to account for it. There is, of course, no need to simulate the feeling of guilt. All alcoholics have that automatically — about their drinking.

It is worth asking why Lowry felt it necessary to create a reason for his hero's alcoholism. Aside from the fact that a drunkard feels comfortable with a reason, it is also undoubtedly a concession to his readers. People who are not compulsive drinkers have a tendency to seek explanations for those who are. It makes for interesting conversation and it gives them a sense of the fitness of things ("there's a logical reason for everything"). The fact is that the vast majority of alcoholics do not know why they drink. Those who have permanently renounced alcohol are quite definite on this matter. Those who have not cannot be trusted on this or any other matter having to do with drinking.

While it is impossible to single out a reason for Lowry's insatiable drinking, it is easy to pick out a pattern in his life which fits it. His father, a prosperous merchant (whose stuffiness may be partially measured by the fact that he signed his letters "Your affectionate Dad"), was hardly the type to warm up to a son whose first ambition was to be a jazz musician — especially since Lowry's three older brothers had all toed the mark and played the game. There was, from the beginning, friction and misunderstanding between the Liverpool cotton broker and his youngest son.

Lowry was agonizingly shy as a child, hardly less so as a man. An eye ailment kept him almost blind from his ninth to his thirteenth year. He had a nursemaid who, he said, used to beat him and once attempted to kill him. The bitterness engendered in youthful mishandling never left him, and it is given voice in a number of his poems, notably in "Autopsy".[1]

The best piece ever written about Lowry's prep school and university days was done by Conrad Knickerbocker,[2] a superb reporter and a sensitive and sympathetic chronicler. Lowry, he says, had a neurotic fear of venereal disease, the product of an almost endless series of parental lectures on the subject, complete with pictures *and exhibits*, long before he was old enough to be in any danger of contracting such an illness (at least in the traditional way). They left him a "sexual hypochondriac" for the rest of his life.

Martin Case, a brilliant biochemist and one of Lowry's closest friends at Cambridge, calls him "A true syphilophobe" who talked about syphilis so much that people thought he had it. (It must be remembered here that syphilis, in those pre-penicillin days, was a far more terrifying disease than it is now, almost akin to leprosy in its capacity to inspire fear.) But his aversion to girls went quite beyond the bacterial. Case relates that he once tried to introduce him to a girl, "a literary type", but Lowry would have none of it: "... he thought we were

making fun of him. He simply couldn't believe that anyone wanted to meet him, nor . . . that his talents commanded great respect in others."

Lowry was, says Case, "frightened of people in charge". That says as much about the potential or incipient alcoholic as could ever be said in so compact a phrase. He was frightened of people in charge — not just the policeman or the boss, but the room clerk, the usher, the stranger on the telephone (who must be in charge of something, or one would not be talking to him). In Case's corroborative anecdote, it was a janitor.

Lowry's stories repeatedly support this description. In *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid*, Sigbjørn Wilderness (i.e. Lowry) marvels at the courage of a young man who faces the customs and immigration people at the airport unshaven and uncombed, "whereas Sigbjørn for fifteen minutes prior to landing . . . would have been dodging in and out of the lavatory and plaguing Primrose as to whether he looked 'all right' . . . this man . . . even daring to smoke . . . seemed to him the epitome of everything that he would like to be."

Lowry is, then, in many respects a prototypical alcoholic. But he veers wildly from the true path of alcoholism in one all-important respect: the ability to write so clearly and honestly about his addiction. His subtle understanding of his own devious alcoholic mind is the more astonishing because he attained it while still addicted to alcohol. The feat virtually required dividing himself in two, divorcing the mind of the writer from that of the man, in order that one might examine the other.

There is a simple and obvious reason for the alcoholic's inability to talk honestly about his condition. All alcoholics lie. It is intrinsic. They lie to their friends, they lie to themselves, they even lie to other alcoholics. Non-addicted drinkers often brag about how much they drink; alcoholics almost always minimize it. This is not to say that the alcoholic is basically dishonest. He may be a model of virtue in all things, except where his drinking is concerned. But this is misleading, because almost every decision an alcoholic makes is influenced by its possible effect on his ability to get a drink, now or two weeks hence.

To illustrate: given a choice of two parties to attend at some future date, the alcoholic will, within seconds, weigh half a dozen factors quite beyond the imagination of the normal person. The possible congeniality of the company may *not* be one of them. He may, in fact, prefer to spend the evening with people he doesn't much like. If the prospective host is lavish with his spirits, that will obviously weigh in his favour. But more important is his *style* of entertaining. Does he urge people to pour their own drinks? Does he leave the liquor around

where anyone can get at it? Is the drink-mixing spot out of sight of the room where the guests congregate? Do the host and hostess tend to over-drink (which draws attention away from others who do)? The list of possible questions is unlimited, but the experienced alcoholic will consider all of them. If the signs are favourable, he will get three times as much to drink as the average guest, without anyone's seeing him. If he is plainly very drunk at the end of the evening, he will be put down as one of those unfortunate people who can't hold their liquor, at least by those who don't know him. (The "invisible" drink is, of course, the source of the peristent notion that alcoholics regularly get roaring drunk on three or four drinks.)

If all this seems exaggerated, it is not. If it seems ludicrous, well, it is. The total dedication of a good mind to such a trivial pursuit is patently ridiculous. But it's deadly serious to the millions of good minds so dedicated at this moment.

I HAVE DWELT on this at such length because it is essential that the reader understand the inspired duplicity of the alcoholic mind if he is to appreciate Lowry's unique achievement. It is a mind thoroughly given over to deceit, trickery, and plain lying. And Lowry's was typical of the species. He lied, cheated and cozened with all the skill at his command, which was considerable. But Lowry the Writer pulled off the remarkable feat of dissociating himself from the drunkard, and writing about him with the clearest eye that has ever been fixed upon him. And he did all this without ever conquering his addiction. True, there were apparently periods of relative sobriety, but he never really renounced liquor and he died drunk. The alcoholic, even during a sober spell, simply does not share his secrets. Lowry broke that rule, and the result is *Under the Volcano* — something of a literary miracle.

In her book on the Cabbalistic significance of *Under the Volcano*, Perle Epstein footnotes an explanation of a mystically symbolic twelve-day journey, during which the subject remains in a trance, with the comment, "This aspect of ritual suffering is relevant to Lowry's hero, who goes through twelve chapters of hell in an inebriated state to his martyrdom."[3]

This viewpoint, while perhaps quite valid, is an example of the usual critical approach to the drunkenness theme in *Volcano*. It is seen as pure symbolism; only its figurative meaning is important. The fact that Lowry was literally a drunk, writing about genuine, mind-shattering, cold-sweat, hand-shuddering drunkenness, is apparently thought inconsequential.

The tragedy of the Consul in *Volcano*, best described, lies in his inability to love another human being. The phrase, "*No se puede vivir sin amar*," recurring throughout the novel, is translated by almost every critic as "you cannot live without love," when it really means: "You cannot live without *loving*." The difference is pivotal. Hardly anyone, deserving or not, is totally unloved. Certainly, the Consul was not. But *loving* comes from within and cannot be forced. Its absence is intensely personal and painful.

Stephen Spender, in his introduction to the 1965 edition of *Volcano*, says: "Fundamentally, *Under the Volcano* is no more about drinking than *King Lear* is *about* senility. It is about the Consul, which is another matter, for what we feel about him is that he is great and shattered . . . Most of all, *Under the Volcano* is about the breakdown of values in the twentieth century."

Spender is one of Lowry's most perceptive critics, but we cannot so easily separate the Consul from his drinking, because we cannot separate him from *Lowry*. Drunkenness, in *Volcano*, is not merely a thematic device to exemplify mankind's insensitivity to the evil within itself. Nor is it merely a technical device to sustain the Consul's wild fantasizing. It *is* both these things, but it is not *merely*, nor even primarily, them. It is integral to the Consul's tragedy because it is integral to Lowry.

It is important to mention here that Lowry was not able to create characters in the normal novelistic sense. All his major characters are versions of himself. This being true — conceded by critics and by Lowry himself — I shall not be reluctant to discuss the Consul as if he were Lowry, which, in so far as his alcoholic behaviour is concerned, he is.

Toward the end of the first chapter of *Volcano*, Jacques Laruelle finds a letter the dead Consul wrote, but never mailed, to the wife who had left him (but would return). After her departure, the Consul wrote, he had taken the train to Oaxaca, where they had once been happy together. The trip was a horror. Awful things happened to him, but even worse was what happened within him. Like most seekers after hell, he finds it in his own mind. He sees himself "as a great explorer who has discovered some extraordinary land from which he can never return to give his knowledge to the world: but the name of this land is hell."

In Chapter Ten, we will hear him shout, as he runs drunkenly into the woods, toward his death: "I love hell. I can't wait to get back there." Like Rimbaud (*"Je me crois en enfer, donc j'y suis"*), the Consul has created his own hell. Rimbaud, a poet, saw no need to put the words in the mouth of another, but the distinction is unimportant. The Consul's season in hell is Lowry's own.

The most significant line in the letter, however, is a simple statement: "You cannot know the sadness of my life." The apparent meaning is plain: the Consul wants his wife to come back; in the timeworn phrase of lovers everywhere, he cannot live without her. But he means much more than that. He means the sadness of *all* of his life, including that part she had shared with him. He means both what had made him a drunk (if he only knew what that was) and the fact that he is a drunk, and that being a drunk is a terribly sad thing, so sad, indeed, that one cannot face it without a drink.

"You cannot know the sadness of my life." This to Yvonne, who would have said that she well knew the sadness of his life, for she had lived it with him and found it so sad that she had left him. And yet the Consul is right. Because no one who is not an alcoholic can ever understand the alcoholic's need to drink. He does not understand it himself, but he knows what it *feels* like, something no "outsider" can know. (This is the basis of the success of Alcoholics Anonymous. It is not love or sympathy that the alcoholic seeks in AA — he may well get those at home — but the company of people who know how he feels. He can find that nowhere but with other alcoholics.) "You cannot know the sadness of my life." It is true. She cannot.

(It can be argued that she could know the sadness of his life by becoming an alcoholic herself. This is true. If she could, somehow, achieve that dubious goal, she would finally know the sadness of his life. But it would not interest her much, for she would then be totally immersed in the sadness of her own life.)

The *Times Literary Supplement*, in an unsigned lead article on Lowry,[4] says he "could remember almost everything that happened during bouts of drunkenness — no alcoholic amnesia, there . . . " The statement is naively absurd. All alcoholics have blackouts — periods, often of several hours, in which they function almost normally, may not even seem very drunk, but of which they can remember nothing at all. Lowry was no exception,[5] as is repeatedly made clear in his writing.

In Chapter Five of *Volcano*, it is eleven a.m. The Consul has been poking about in his garden, looking for (and finding) a hidden bottle. He sees his wife and brother on the porch, waves . . . and wakes up in the bathroom, an hour and a quarter later, holding a glass of stale beer, from which he drinks slowly, "postponing the problem soon to be raised by its emptiness."

The average person, waking in this condition, would be repelled by the very thought of a drink. To the Consul, the few swallows of warm beer are as antitoxin for the plague. But they must be taken deliberately, "postponing the prob-

lem". And the problem is that they will not be nearly enough. There are bottles of fresh cold beer — celestial nectar — in the icebox, a room or so away. Soon, he will have to open one of them. Why not now? Because the one thing a bathroom assures is privacy, the opportunity to drink alone, the absolute assurance that no one who loves you will say — and no one else who matters ever says it — "Don't you think you've had enough?"

Now, Hugh and Yvonne have been carefully *avoiding* criticism of the Consul's drinking. He could, if he wished, stride boldly to the icebox, pop open a beer, and be momentarily restored to health, without drawing so much as a sidelong glance. But he fears what they will — or even might — be thinking. For it is one more affliction of the alcoholic that he is always ashamed of his drinking. This is why, drunk or sober, he maintains the fiction that he could drink moderately, and surely will next time. He does not, *ever*, consider stopping until he faces the fact that moderation is not within his power.

One device the alcoholic uses to enforce the self-delusion that he doesn't "need" the drink is the tactic of spurious indifference. *Under the Volcano* is practically a textbook in the use of this gambit, which is absurdly simple. Given a drink after a period of abstinence (of any length), the alcoholic simply delays drinking it. That's all, and it is pointless, but he feels like a hero. Alcoholism being primarily an emotional ailment, the mere presence of the drink is calming. Deferring the moment of consumption supports the belief that it will be voluntary. It is a ritual as fixed as the mating dance of the curlew, and its consummation is even more certain: he will drink the drink.

At the beginning of Chapter Seven of *Volcano*, the scene is the home of Jacques Laruelle. Laruelle, a decent man, has been Yvonne's lover when she fled from the Consul's drunkenness, and the Consul is uncomfortable there. Drinks are poured. He does not touch his, but instead scans the countryside through binoculars from a balcony, commenting lightly on random topics. The implication is plain: he is so indifferent to liquor that he has forgotten the drink is there. He has not forgotten.

Suddenly, unexpectedly, Yvonne suggests that they leave to see the fiesta. She is more uncomfortable than he in Laruelle's house, but this has not occurred to the Consul, involved as he is totally with himself. Almost desperately, she pleads with him to come. Quietly, but actually with equal desperation, he expresses a

lack of interest in the fiesta and suggests that she and Hugh go along, and that he join them later.

Laruelle goes downstairs to see Hugh and Yvonne out. Left alone, the Consul permits himself to become aware of the profusion of good things that have come his way, quite unbidden. He has not touched his drink, the others have barely touched theirs, and the cocktail shaker is not empty. He is surrounded by alcohol. But still he does not drink. The Consul is playing the game to the limit. He even eats half a canapé — proving he is in no danger, for it is well known that alcoholics have no interest in food.

Laruelle returns and angrily attacks him: "Am I to understand that your wife has come back to you, something I have seen you praying and howling for under the table — really under the table . . . And that you treat her as indifferently as this, and still continue only to care where the next drink's coming from?" The Consul is stunned by this "staggering injustice" (no one but the player ever takes the game seriously).

Laruelle goes off to prepare for a tennis match, and the Consul suddenly decides to return a telephone call received hours before. The Herculean task of looking up the number puts him in a sweat. He finds the number, forgets it, looks it up again, half completes the call, hangs up in panic. It is too hard. He cannot make the call without a drink. He dashes back to the upper room, downs all the drinks plus the residue in the shaker, and saunters back downstairs, returned to the living. The telephone call is forgotten.

The game is over, this time. But he takes pride in the fact that it was played by the rules. At no time, he tells himself, did he intend to drink those drinks until the telephone crisis left him no choice. At no time, in fact, was there the slightest possibility that he would not drink them. For the experienced player, there is always a crisis.

A few hours later, the Consul, Hugh and Yvonne are sitting in the arena at Tomalín. What they are watching is not a bullfight, but a sort of bull baiting. The bull is not killed, or even hurt much. He is simply pestered unmercifully and robbed of his dignity. It is more sad than brutal, suggestive of a people desperate to be amused but unsure of how to go about it, and metaphorically of a world which laughingly tolerates gratuitous cruelty and seems about to end with a disinterested whimper. (It is 1938, and a different spectre is haunting Europe.)

Hugh takes a drink from a small bottle of rum he has brought, and passes it to Yvonne. She takes a sip and hands it to the Consul, who sits "holding the

bottle gloomily in his hands without drinking." The game is on again. Yvonne and Hugh, not being compelled to drink, can drink freely. The Consul, who must drink, must also pretend that he is indifferent to it. He can wait for the crisis. It comes quickly. In response to a challenge from the bull ring, Hugh goes down to ride the bull. He does it well, but the strain is too much for the Consul. Yvonne tells him there is no danger: "It's all right, Geoff. Hugh knows what he's doing." But the Consul is not, cannot allow himself to be, reassured. " 'The risk . . . the fool,' the Consul said, drinking habanero." But of course. And he drinks it all — all but a swallow for Hugh, so no one can say, "Oh, did you finish it?" The craftiness of the presumably befuddled alcoholic, when he is simultaneously protecting his liquor supply and his "honour," cannot be overestimated. The giant flaw in this virtuoso performance is that the audience doesn't know the show is on. Those who know him are not studying him. Why should they? They know him.

The Salón Ofélia, where the three go next, turns out to be a veritable theatre-in-the-round for the Consul's repertoire. " 'Mescal,' the Consul said, almost absentmindedly. What had he said? Never mind. Nothing less than mescal would do. But it mustn't be a serious mescal, he persuaded himself. 'No, Señor Cervantes,' he whispered, 'mescal, poquito.' "

This short passage introduces several basic alcoholic concepts. First, the Consul has ordered the deadly mescal (instead of something "safe" like tequila or whiskey) quite by accident, it seems. Well, now it's done, he might as well take it. Probably just what he needs. Second, there is the idea of the "serious" drink. The alcoholic finds it comforting to think that he won't get drunk unless he *wants* to. While this may be true for the moderate drinker, who can stop when he starts "feeling" his drinks, it is most emphatically untrue for the alcoholic, who drinks faster as each drink blurs his sense of guilt. This is a distinction the alcoholic refuses to make, even as he refuses to concede that his drinking is abnormal. Third, he tells the bartender "poquito" — just a little one. Needless to say, the drink will be regulation size, or the bartender will quickly have it called to his attention. But the concept of the "little" drink is cherished by those for whom every drink is too big.

There is a swimming pool at the Ofélia, and Hugh and Yvonne decide to go in. The Consul does not join them. This was predictable. Alcoholics are spectators. Their single hobby leaves no time for other avocations. But there are other reasons. The drunk's fabled bluster, for one thing, is tempered with great caution. He knows that, if he tries to participate in any activity requiring skill,

he will do it badly, and he is doubly reluctant to take part in anything at which he was once expert. Even if he could still do it reasonably well, the deterioration of his skills would be apparent to him, and he would be ashamed of what he has done to himself. Living constantly with shame, he shuns anything which will intensify it.

The principal reason for his spectator status, though, is simply that the recreational activities of others get them out of the way so he can drink unobserved. This is why the alcoholic is always urging others to "have some fun," go swimming, go dancing, go to the theatre, go anywhere — go away, in short, and leave him to his own miserable fun.

Secret drinking leads inevitably to the practice of drink counting, which, as done by the alcoholic, has no relation to standard arithmetic. Lowry expounds this point deftly, as the three principals sit down to eat at the Ofélia. The Consul is, at first, in a jovial mood. He has had, by alcoholic count, very little to drink — because the others did not see him drink the eight or nine secret mescals. He has sworn Cervantes, the bartender, to silence. Still, Hugh and Yvonne seem to suspect. Cervantes must have told on him. The bartender is a native of Tlaxcala; years ago the Tlaxcaltecans had betrayed Moctezuma to Cortez. With superb drunken logic, the Consul reasons that this Tlaxcaltecan has been "unable to resist" the equally grave crime of betraying him to his friends. How else could he justify Hugh's and Yvonne's attitude toward him? According to his double-entry drink-counting system, he has been observing a code of conduct so nearly puritanical that he really ought to let down a bit and have a drink. He is probably surprised they don't suggest it. The fact that they can see he is drunk does not occur to him. By *his* count, he is obviously sober in *their* eyes.

Refusing to accept their concern for him as genuine, the Consul accuses Hugh and Yvonne of using his problem as a pretext for their own love-making. Although they may have been lovers in the past, this is untrue now. But the alcoholic mind, ever suspicious, ever anxious to divert the attack from itself, lashes out at targets of opportunity. Do-gooders, he charges, always have an ulterior motive. Shifting to a political analogy, he derides Hugh's revolutionary fervour, insisting that nations "get what they deserve in the long run." Indirectly, he is suggesting that he, too, will get what he deserves finally, regardless of their solicitude, which isn't really as unselfish as they pretend, so why don't they leave him alone. He is tempted, he says, by Yvonne's offer of "a sober and non-alcoholic Paradise", but he prefers to live in hell. Shockingly final as this sounds, it is not really a major decision at all. It is one made repeatedly by alcoholics

who face the problem while at their lowest point of resistance. Paradise is an agony away, and hell is so handy.

Arthur Calder-Marshall, the British novelist, said of Lowry that "he regarded drinking as an essential part of the creative act." The anonymous critic in the *Times Literary Supplement*, quoted earlier says that Lowry used alcohol as a "vision-giving drug". Max-Pol Fouchet, who did so much to popularize Lowry's work in France, falls into the same error. He says of the Consul, and presumably means it of Lowry as well, *"L'alcool pour lui n'est pas un vice, mais une passion de l'âme, un moyen de la connaissance."*[6]

This is a tiny sampling of the notion, common among critics of Lowry, Dylan Thomas and others similarly afflicted, that alcohol or any other drug can be used as a creative instrument. It cannot. The idea that this medium of oblivion can be a "*moyen de la connaissance*" is patently ridiculous. So how does the belief originate? Probably with writers themselves, in collaboration with sympathetic friends. An intelligent, talented man finds it hard to explain why he spends so much of his time in a state of boozy ineffectuality. How nice to be able to say — or have his friends say for him — that it makes him do what he does, and does very well, even better. If a banker or a welder or a jockey said it, it would be properly labelled nonsense. But so deep is the mystery of creativity, even among artists themselves, that a writer can get away with it. And the fact is that the imaginative mind often *does* see a brighter picture of the world under alcoholic influence. Sadly, it is not a reproducible picture.

LOWRY, who understood alcoholism as few alcoholics have, was unlikely to have been taken in by the "creative binge" myth. But he was thoroughly familiar with its origins, as he demonstrated in an early passage in *Under the Volcano.*

At the beginning of Chapter Two, Yvonne returns to Quauhnahuac and the Consul after a year's absence. She finds him drinking in a hotel bar at seven in the morning. Nothing, obviously, has changed since she left. He has been praying for her return, which is totally unexpected, but still he greets her cautiously, suspicious of what she may demand of him. Recognizing that she is stunned by this negative welcome, he frames a long conciliatory discourse, which he does not speak aloud. In it, he tries desperately to explain why his drinking is vital and beautiful and essential. It concludes:

> "All mystery, all hope, all disappointment, yes, all disaster, is here, beyond those swinging doors. And, by the way, do you see that old woman from Tarasco sitting in the corner, you didn't before, but you do now?" his eyes asked her, gazing round him with the bemused unfocussed brightness of a lover's, his love asked her, "how, unless you drink as I do, can you hope to understand the beauty of an old woman from Tarasco who plays dominoes at seven o'clock in the morning?"

Every alcoholic with a soul has *thought* a soliloquy equally bittersweet. Every morning drinker has pitied the poor sober wretch who simply has no conception of the utter loveliness of "an old woman from Tarasco who plays dominoes at seven o'clock in the morning" or reasonable facsimile. This capacity to invest the ordinary or the ugly with an aura of beauty — very real, however fleeting — is the one positive justification ever put forward for the alcoholic's addiction. All other reasons are defensive, mere excuses.

Note well, however, that Lowry does not attempt to make the old woman beautiful to us — which he could surely do if alcoholic creativity were not a myth. He tells us only that she looked beautiful to the drunk, which is quite a different thing.

Remember, too, that the words are not spoken. Even the highly articulate Consul, we must assume, could not have said the words as skillfully as his mind heard them. The wonder of it is that Lowry could write them. Obviously, he could not have done so without having had the alcoholic experience, but the writing of this passage was, none the less, a triumph over — not of — alcoholism.

The whole concept of words imagined but not spoken is well known to alcoholics. They yearn to say the things that will make everything all right, or to hear them from others. Unable to speak the words, they dream them. And they imagine them, with equal vividness, coming from others. After the Consul and Yvonne have left the bar and are walking home:

"The Consul was beginning to shake again.

" 'Geoffrey, I'm so thirsty, why don't we stop and have a drink?'

" 'Geoffrey, let's be reckless this once and get tight together before breakfast.'

"Yvonne said neither of these things."

So expertly and profusely does Lowry use this device that the reader must be alert for it, or he will get the impression that a great deal more is being said than actually is. A high percentage of the material which appears between quotation marks in *Volcano* is never actually spoken.

To this point, I have said little about the humour in *Under the Volcano*. Surprisingly, there is quite a bit of it. In Chapter Three, for example, the Consul

dashes out to get a drink while Yvonne is bathing, and is soon found lying face down in the street, fully conscious but disinclined to get up. He is roused by a passing Englishman, a hearty Colonel Blimp sort of chap, who disputes Geoffrey's "absolutely all right" with the marvellously logical argument that a man lying face down in the middle of a moderately busy street cannot be entirely all right. They exchange old-school-tie pleasantries, and they part with Geoffrey trying to give him his card, which on closer examination turns out to be someone else's. In another book it would be hilarious; in this one we find it hard to laugh. Such incidents are not funny when they happen to real people — and the Consul has become disquietingly real to us. There is additional evidence of Lowry's comic sense throughout the book, but like the passage cited it seldom invokes real amusement.

Critics who knew Lowry's sense of humour first-hand seem to resent the picture that is often drawn of a brooding, morbid, obsessed man. He was, says Douglas Day, "an essentially happy man", and critics have been remiss in failing to note "the saving grace of humor, the refusal to take too seriously the annihilation of the transparently autobiographical *personae* who serve as his heroes." The Consul, says Mr. Day, "throughout his headlong flight into hell, almost never gives in to maudlin self-pity . . . seems, in fact, almost happily to embrace his destruction."[7]

We are called upon here to admire a man who carries himself and his wife to their deaths, severely damages the lives of all those who love him, and casts a little darkness on almost everyone he meets, because he does it all without getting glum about it.

No, if I like the Consul, it is because I know that he *does* want desperately to make right all the things he has made so wrong. If I feel compassion, it is because I understand a little of the mysterious agony that prevents him from doing it. But, more to the point, the whole thesis of Mr. Day's argument is false because it is precisely Geoffrey's alcoholic self-pity that turns him back every time he is inclined to make a move toward his own salvation.

Robert B. Heilman, in a more credible vein, mentions Lowry's "extravagant comic sense that creates an almost unique tension among moods" and refers to "the Lowry fusion of the ridiculous and the ghastly".[8]

The sad truth is that drunks are funny. It is one more cross alcoholics must bear to know that, in addition to being simultaneously condemned and pitied, they are also being laughed at. Lowry was too good a writer and *too serious a student of his own condition* to overlook that vinic verity. But the ability to laugh

at oneself is hardly a denial of morbidity. It may, indeed, be the only palliative for it and, as such, the mournful proof of its existence.

One of the things that presumably make drunks funny is that they can't think clearly. But this is not always true. As I have pointed out, the alcoholic often becomes a master logician when his liquor supply is threatened. What he *does* find it almost impossible to do is to make a moral decision when the alternatives are tough. And this is at the very centre of Lowry's "study" of the alcoholic mind. It is exemplified in the scene at Laruelle's house when the Consul and Yvonne are briefly left alone, and she begs him to forgive her infidelity. The Consul, who knows that the transgression was as much his as hers, looks within himself and finds that he wants her, needs her, wants and needs to love her. The right answer is obvious. But he is a man, steeped in Victorian notions of male honour, as well as in self-pity. He finds it impossible to say, "I forgive, I love," with conviction. Only fairness and simple self-interest weigh in its favour. And what are these against the bias of centuries? No doubt, they would be controlling factors to the clear mind, able to evaluate an ethical question on its merits. But the alcoholic mind shuns the mental labour involved, in favour of the pre-tested response. By this manner he rejects her, and all is lost.

At that moment, the Consul makes the commitment which he will finally confirm in the Farolito, the evil cantina where he falls into the hands of local fascist officials who, he realizes, are going to kill him. A moment comes when they neglect to keep watch on him. He can walk out, and save his life. But he needs one more drink — "one for the road." He has, in fact, chosen to die. And it is not only for symbolic reasons that Lowry has him prefer that last drink to a run for survival. It is the choice an alcoholic might well make in such a situation. Accustomed to reaching for a drink whenever a difficult decision must be made, he finds it perfectly natural to do the same when faced with the most awesome decision of all. In lesser matters, the drink often postpones the decision until someone else must make it. And so it does in this case. The Consul does not think of himself as electing to die. Rather, he is letting someone else make the decision — which is easier to live with, even for a little while.

I have tried to show that it is Lowry's brilliant analysis and interpretation of the alcoholic mind that makes *Under the Volcano* one of a kind. The Consul's drinking is not incidental to the narrative, nor simply a device to allegorize the mess mankind has made of itself. Almost nothing Lowry says about alcoholic behaviour is simple description or mere colourful detail to lend verisimilitude to the story. The very critics who have been so keenly responsive to secondary

meaning on almost every page of the book, have largely failed to perceive the full significance of the passages which deal with drinking as a complex problem in itself.

It should be clear that alcoholism was foremost in Lowry's mind — ahead of mysticism, politics, domestic relations *per se*, the mystery of Mexico, and all the other elements which make the book such a diversified feast — as he wrote *Under the Volcano*. The primary evidence is in the book itself. But there is more.

Lowry's reaction to the success of Charles Jackson's *The Lost Weekend* is important in this regard. Some of his distress is expressed in his *Letters*,[9] but his almost paranoiac response to it is better described by the Lowry-figure in *Dark as the Grave*, who says that, had he realized how successful it would be, he might have killed himself. *The Lost Weekend* is a good popular novel about alcoholism, hardly comparable to Lowry's masterpiece. But it is clear that Lowry considered it a premature invasion of his private domain.

Lowry's own definitive statement on the subject comes at the end of the preface he prepared for the French edition of *Volcano*.[10] After discussing various aspects of the book at some length, he says finally: "... it would perhaps be honest of me to admit to you that the idea I cherished in my heart was to create a pioneer work in its own class, and to write at last an authentic drunkard's story." That seems plain enough, in or out of context.

On the matter of his inability to create characters, Lowry once wrote: "There are a thousand writers who can draw adequate characters till all is blue for one who can tell you anything new about hell fire. And I am telling you something new about hell fire."

Was it new? It was an old story to millions of alcoholics. But none of them had ever been able to put it on paper. Malcolm Lowry did. And that was new.

NOTES

[1] *Canadian Literature*, Spring 1961.
[2] "Swinging the Paradise Street Blues," *Paris Review*, Summer 1966.
[3] *The Private Labyrinth of Malcolm Lowry: 'Under the Volcano' and the Cabbala* (New York: Holt, Rinehart & Winston, 1969).
[4] *TLS*, January 26, 1967.
[7] See, for example, *Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry* (London: Jonathan Cape, 1965), p. 189.
[6] *Canadian Literature*, Spring 1961.
[5] "Of Tragic Joy," *Prairie Schooner*, Winter 1963.
[8] "The Possessed Artist and the Ailing Soul," *Canadian Literature*, Spring 1961.
[9] P. 46 *et passim*.
[10] "Preface to a Novel," *Canadian Literature*, Summer 1963.

DEEP IN THE OLD MAN'S PUZZLE

Nancy E. Bjerring

> *I am deep in the old man's puzzle, trying to link the wisdom of the body with the wisdom of the spirit until the two are one.*
>
> FATHER BLAZON *(Fifth Business)*

ROBERTSON DAVIES' first three novels, *Tempest Tost*, *Leaven of Malice*, and *A Mixture of Frailties*, are satires on Canadians and Canadian society. Often heavy-handed, and often hilarious, these three Salterton novels expose and ridicule Canadian foibles and affectations. Yet although they are about Canadians and Canadian culture (or lack of it), they are somehow not truly "Canadian novels". At no time does Davies probe the Canadian psyche with any great depth or clarity of vision; he contents himself with exposing Canadian gaucherie with a decided tone of derision. Moreover, he does not just mock bumbling Canadian innocence and cultural ineptitude; he sets up an ideal, which he evidently admires greatly. Britain, he never lets us forget, is our cultural superior, and ought to be emulated. We always suspect that Davies' sympathies (and inclinations) lie not with his ineffectual Canadian heroes, but with his Britishers, like Humphrey Cobbler and Sir Benedict Domdaniel, who are always able to perceive with piercing accuracy the true state of affairs, while poor Sally Bridgetower and Monica Gall have to struggle to approach the same level of awareness. In short, Europeans are among the initiated, Canadians are "rustic beyond redemption", and, could we only see ourselves as others see us (and Davies is clearly among the "others"), we would turn our backs on our struggling cultural aspirations, and bow to those of our superiors. Ultimately we can accuse Davies of having little respect for his Canadian characters, and enjoying them only inasmuch as they provide him with foils to his eminently amusing and often scathing wit.

In 1960, Davies wrote, in a piece collected in *A Voice from the Attic*:

> Nevertheless, we may observe that in writers more fortunate or more sagacious than Leacock, who have won at least a part of their reputation as humourists, there occurs a development which is of great interest; at some point in middle age, the brilliant and often nervous quality which distinguished the humour of their early work gives place to a humour of another nature; the source of the writer's humour seems to have changed, and what he draws from this new well is of a fuller flavour . . . Why then if the gift is so great does the humourist seem to abandon it, or relegate it to an inferior place, in middle age? The answer is that he does not do so; rather, he balances it against another quality which has arisen in him and demands expression, and that quality is a sense of tragedy. This second quality, this later-comer, is not sufficiently powerful to alter the quality of his work absolutely, but it gives it a background of feeling which is sufficient to turn the brilliantly humourous young man into the richly but fitfully humourous middle-aged one.

In *Fifth Business*, we see Davies' observation on the British satirists, Waugh and Huxley, becoming applicable to himself. No longer are Davies' characters mere caricatures of a particular Canadian foible; no longer are his revelations of Canada one-way and superficial. In *Fifth Business*, we get at last a truly realistic depiction of Canadian mores and morality, of psychological orientation and motivation. And finally his criticisms of the "Canadian sensibility" are valid, sharp and thought-provoking. The easy laughs at the expense of the Canadian cultural wasteland have been replaced by real insights into the spiritual problem of Canada. Yet Davies has not confined himself to "Canadianism" as his previous novels had forced him to do. A man's search for his true self and for the nature of reality is hardly a theme exclusive to Canadian literature; but the reasons behind Dunstan Ramsay's search, the nature of his search, and the shape of his final discovery have a peculiarly Canadian flavour.

We are aware all through the book of a mentality against which Dunstan must constantly struggle, and in Davies' mind this mentality is exemplified by most Canadians, though there are hints that it is common to all Anglo-Saxons. It is the sort of mentality which, with its severe unemotional empiricism, rejects any notion of spirituality or the mystical. It is a mentality shaped by external reality, and can be seen in the novel especially in Dunstan's parents, and Boy Staunton, who are materially minded in the extreme, and who cannot even conceive of spiritual self-knowledge; but it is shared too, by most of the town of Deptford, Davies' microcosm of Canada. It is the tone of the opening of the book, when Ramsay is extremely irritated by the article published about his career in his old

school quarterly — written by a man with a "scientific view of history". The clichéd article is so obviously neglectful of any true perception of Dunstan Ramsay as a whole human being who has had "great spiritual adventures", that he is goaded into writing a vindication of his life — in the form of a book, *Fifth Business*.

Davies is sharply aware in this novel of the stereotype which Canadians have adopted for themselves — plain, sensible, hard-working, material souls, proud of their ignorance of the spiritual aspect of their nature, proud of their disdain for the impractical and foolish. It has become such a stereotype, that Liesl, commenting on the "autobiography" of Eisengrim, says: "Now, tell me how you are going to get the infant Magnus Eisengrim out of that dreadful Canada and into a country where big spiritual adventures are possible?" Canada is a land that has no recognition for those who have had "great spiritual adventures". Spiritual reality has no existence in Canada as Davies sees it, and yet he is all too aware that in each one of us there is a spiritual self that responds to the "unbelievable" or the extraordinary, and he believes that it is crucial for the self to recognize it. He is aware that conventional Protestantism does not provide this necessary spiritual factor, hence his insistence on the "intellectualism" of the Presbyterians. But what does? Saints? Illusion and magic?

Davies tantalizes us in this book — he is trying to trick our stubborn Canadian mentality into being psychologically aware. He makes us believe that Mrs. Dempster is a saint, and then he suddenly confronts us with the fact that she is a simple lunatic. Eisengrim's magic is nothing but mechanical cleverness and illusion — but he is able to cause the death of Boy Staunton. Why do we believe? Why do we *want* to believe? What is in us that *makes* us want to believe? These are the questions which *Fifth Business* explores.

In his portrait of Deptford, the hometown of his three protagonists, Davies has made a microcosm of Canada. The town was described as " . . . more varied in what it offered to the observer than people from bigger and more sophisticated places generally think, and if it had sins and follies and roughness, it also had much to show of virtue, dignity, and even of nobility," but it has one major limitation:

> I have already said that while our village contained much of what humanity has to show, it did not contain everything, and one of the things it conspicuously lacked was an aesthetic sense; we were all too much the descendants of hard-bitten pioneers to wish for or encourage any such thing, and we gave hard names to qualities that, in a more sophisticated society, might have had value.

The nature and character of Deptford (and Canada) are firmly rooted in practical common sense and a solid reliance on material, down-to-earth reality. The strongest influence of this orientation upon young Dunstable Ramsay is his mother, Fiona Ramsay, though his whole family is renowned for its good sense:

> By far the majority of the Deptford people had come to Western Ontario from the South of England, so we were not surprised that they looked to us, the Ramsays, for common sense, prudence, and right opinions on virtually everything.

Mrs. Ramsay is inevitably spoken of in terms of her "good sense", "Mrs. Ramsay had her head screwed on straight", "A Scots-woman widely admired for her practicality . . . with little sense of humour", with her "unfailing good sense". She is firmly opposed to any sort of softness or spirituality, nor does she understand it. Her moral system would accommodate no shades of grey: "Mrs. Dempster had transgressed in a realm where there could be no shades of right and wrong." This is the main influence on Dunstable, and although the town manifested other opinions, the general tone was the same. Amasa Dempster, for example, was supposed to represent feeling and emotionalism as opposed to Presbyterian intellectualism and practicality: "His quality of feeling was weighty. I suppose this is what made him acceptable to the Baptists, who valued feeling very highly." But this sense of "feeling" expends itself on cavilling about the "Devil's picture book" and his own hard lot in life. He has no true sense of religion or the spiritual, and Dunstable sees where this attitude of Dempster's leads:

> I was most hurt that Dempster had dragged down my conjuring to mere cheating and gambling; it had seemed to me to be a splendid extension of life, a creation of a world of wonder, that hurt nobody. All that dim but glittering vision I had formed . . . had been dragged down by this Deptford parson, who knew nothing of such things, and just hated whatever did not belong to life at the $550-a-year level. I wanted a better life than that. But I had been worsted by moral bullying, by Dempster's conviction that he was right and I was wrong, and that this gave him an authority over me based on feeling rather than reason: it was my first encounter with the emotional power of popular morality.

Even the local atheist offers no alternative. "If he hoped to make an atheist of me, this was where he went wrong; I knew a metaphor when I heard one, and I liked metaphor better than reason."

With that last statement, Dunstable clearly establishes himself as being apart from the general stream of the village. From his earliest appearance in the novel, he is distinguished from the other boys his age. He was technically guiltless in the

affair of the snowball, Percy Boyd Staunton really being at fault, but nonetheless, he suffers the agonies of the damned when Percy refuses to accept any of the guilt. He comes to feel that he was responsible for Paul's birth — " . . . and if this were ever discovered some dreadful fate would overtake me. Part of the dreadful fate would undoubtedly be rejection by my mother." So when Mrs. Ramsay takes the Dempster family on as a charity-case, Dunstable doesn't really mind becoming their chore-boy; in a sense it allows him to expiate some of his guilt. But as he grows older, the other boys in the village reject him because of his association with the Dempsters: " . . . some of the oddity and loneliness of the Dempsters was beginning to rub off on me" and he turns for solace to his loneliness to books of magic. He resolves to become the world's "foremost prestidigitateur". This dabbling in the occult leads to a stormy scene with his mother, which can be seen as the collision of the two inclinations, the one towards the mystic, the other towards the solid and the real. After this quarrel with his mother, Dunstable gravitates more and more towards the influence of Mrs. Dempster, and simultaneously he begins to teach Paul some of his magic tricks, and reads to him from a storybook of saints. From these early inclinations, we see the three main divisions into which Dunstable's lifelong preoccupation with the mystical falls: Mary Dempster, hagiography, and magic.

AT THIS EARLY AGE, Dunstable is attracted to Mrs. Dempster partly because of his rejection by his mother, and partly because she is so unlike the other Deptford people: "Her face wore a sweet but woefully un-Deptford expression". He has been so thoroughly immersed in the practical, and so disillusioned by it, in his confrontations with both his mother and Amasa Dempster, that he begins to search for something else. Hence, his interest in Mrs. Dempster grows.

> It would be false to suggest that there was anything philosophical in her attitude. Rather, it was religious, and it was impossible to talk to her for long without being aware that she was wholly religious. I do not say "deeply religious" because that was what people said about her husband, and apparently they meant that he imposed religion as he understood it on everything he knew or encountered. But she . . . seemed to live in a world of trust that had nothing of the stricken, lifeless, unreal quality of religion about it . . . She lived by a light that arose from within; I could not comprehend it, except that it seemed to be somewhat akin to the splendours I found in books, though not in any way bookish.

When the town's harsh morality decides that she is no longer respectable,

Dunstable refuses to abandon her, even though he knows that his mother's stern morality forbids continued association. He says: "I regarded her as my greatest friend, and the secret league between us as the tap-root of my life."

Dunstable is directly confronted with the village's sense of material reality, when Mrs. Dempster performs her second miracle, that of raising Willie from the dead. Dunstable's belief in this miracle finally alienates him from the whole village. His friends think that he is a "credulous ass"; the town doctor advises him that: "I might become queer if I did not attempt to balance my theoretical knowledge with the kind of common sense that could be learned from — well, for instance, from himself." The Presbyterian minister advises him that: "The age of miracles was past, and I got the impression that he was heartily glad of it. It was blasphemous to think that anyone — even someone of unimpeachable character — could restore the dead to life." Even his father says: "I would do best to keep my own counsel and not insist on things my mother could not tolerate." But the strongest opposition of course, comes from Mrs. Ramsay herself. "It was clear that she now regarded a hint of tenderness towards Mrs. Dempster as disloyalty to herself, and as loyalty was the only kind of love she could bring herself to ask for, she was most passionate when she thought she was being most reasonable." Ultimately Dunstable realizes that: "Deep inside myself I knew that to yield, and promise what she wanted, would be the end of anything that was any good in me; I was not her husband who could keep his peace in the face of her furious rectitude; I was her son, with a full share of her own Highland temper and granite determination." When she at last challenges Dunstable to choose between herself and Mrs. Dempster, he runs away and enlists in the army.

While Dunstable is in the army, Mrs. Dempster performs her third and final miracle for him. She appears to Dunstable in the face of a small statue in a church in the middle of a bloody battle at Passchendaele, and saves his life. He is wounded and in a coma for many months, and awakens in England. During his convalescence he hears of the death of his parents in the flu epidemic:

> It was years before I thought of the death of my parents as anything other than a relief; in my thirties I was able to see them as real people, who had done the best they could in the lives that fate had given them. But as I lay in that hospital I was glad that I did not have to be my mother's own dear laddie any longer, or ever attempt to explain to her what the war was, or warp my nature to suit her confident demands. I knew she had eaten my father, and I was glad I did not have to fight any longer to keep her from eating me.

While in England, he is tempted to marry the charming girl who had nursed him back from the dead, but he is aware of the flaw in their relationship: "I know how clear it is that what was wrong between Diana and me was that she was too much a mother to me, and as I had had one mother, and lost her, I was not in a hurry to acquire another." Thus Dunstable decides not to adopt another stultifying set of Anglo-Saxon values. Diana's spiritual orientation does not satisfy Dunstable:

> But when I told her about the little Madonna at Passchendaele and later as a visitor to my long coma, she was delighted and immediately gave it a conventionally religious significance, which, quite honestly, had never occurred to me.

She is a romantic, and Dunstable knows that romanticism is not the route he must follow either. He is determined to return to Canada in order to prepare himself to discover the significance of Mary Dempster and the little statue, and free now of the restrictive force of his parents, he sets out as Dunstan Ramsay, renamed and reborn. This rebirth is significant in that he rids himself of the name Dunstable, his mother's maiden name; thus he is freed of her tyrannical influence on his soul.

One cannot help but be somewhat surprised at Davies' rejection of England as a place to find oneself, in this novel, remembering Monica Gall's enthusiastic adoption of the "mother country". Davies has perhaps realized that a Canadian cannot find his true self, except in the context of his native land.

After the war, Dunstan moves from his first phase of mystical involvement into his second. Although he remains in contact with Mrs. Dempster, she has no recollection of him, and she never again performs a miracle. But from Dunstan's fascination with her, comes his compelling preoccupation with hagiography. In his search for the small statue which saved his life, Dunstan picks up bits of information about saints, and soon becomes intrigued by one particularly odd saint: Wilgefortis, a Portuguese hermaphrodite. Although on the surface, Dunstan's search is an intellectual preoccupation with the discovery of knowledge, the nature of this saint is a clue to Dunstan's actual search. The hermaphrodite is classically the symbol for the whole self — the totality of male and female, reason and passion, which since their division has caused much of the misery of mankind. Dunstan's search is for the "whole" selfhood, but he does not yet see it in these terms. He is now intrigued by a study of the spiritual, ashamed of his Protestant ignorance:

> But I became aware that in matters of religion I was an illiterate, and illiteracy was my abhorrence. I was not such a fool or an aesthete as to suppose that all this art was for art's sake alone. It was about something, and I wanted to know what that something was.

He is not sure of the exact nature of his search, nor exactly what he is searching for. He says:

> I clung to my notion, ill defined though it was, that a serious study of any important body of human knowledge, or theory or belief, if undertaken with a critical but not a cruel mind, would in the end yield some secret, some valuable permanent insight into the nature of life, and the true end of man . . . The only thing for me to do was to keep on keeping on, to have faith in my whim, and remember that for me, as for the saints, illumination when it came would probably come from some unexpected source.

Dunstan is searching for the "true end of man" and does not yet see it in terms of his own search for self-knowledge.

PARALLELING Dunstan's rebirth and awakened interest in the spiritual, is the rising career of Percy Boyd Staunton. Where Dunstan has deliberately attempted to turn his back on the practical roots of his upbringing, Boy has exploited these very qualities. He has a genius for making money, and he becomes a material success. Davies emphasizes that the nature of his success is completely worldly and materially oriented; all through his life, Boy's success relied upon the submersion of any spiritual or mystical tendencies, and thus, as Davies shows us, he lacks any true knowledge of himself.

Davies goes out of his way to emphasize how artificial Boy really is: "It was characteristic of Boy throughout his life that he was always the quintessence of something that somebody else had recognized and defined." Any religious or moral attitude is essentially self-centred for Boy — not in the sense of gaining knowledge about himself, but rather in that he defines his total self in terms of his material self. As Dunstan eventually says: "You created a God in your image, and when you found out he was no good you abolished him. It's quite a common form of psychological suicide." Boy's conception of Christ, borrowed from an American preacher, pinpoints this attitude:

> I mean, Christ was really a very distinguished person, a Prince of the House of David, a poet and an intellectual. Of course He was a carpenter; all those Jews in Bible days could do something with their hands. But what kind of a carpenter

> was He? Not making cowsheds I'll bet. Undoubtedly a designer and a manufacturer, in terms of those days. Otherwise, how did He make his connections? . . . And an economist! Driving the money-changers out of the Temple — why? Because they were soaking the pilgrims extortionate rates, that's why, and endangering a very necessary tourist attraction and rocking the economic boat . . . the priests got their squeeze out of the Temple exchange, you can bet, and they decided they would have to get rid of this fellow who was possessed of a wider economic vision — as well as great intellectual powers in many other fields, of course.

But Boy and Dunstan have a strange symbiotic relationship. Dunstan's major concern is now with the spiritual; for Boy, " . . . the reality of life lay in external things, whereas for me the only reality was of the spirit — of the mind, as I then thought." But in a sort of love-hate relationship, they each provide the other with a certain service. Boy provides Dunstan with a number of useful tips on the stock market, and in a sense, provides him with his material necessities — he is Dunstan's tie to the material world, and as he says: "I've been your patron and protector against your own incompetence!" Dunstan acts as sympathetic ear to all of Boy's problems and troubles, and of course, at the end is revealed as the keeper of Boy's conscience.

Dunstan's quest is still only a vague search when he goes for the first time to Brussels, and meets Father Blazon, who is one of the keys to his self-discovery. In the character of Blazon, Davies gives an example of a man who has found true self-knowledge through religion (albeit approached in a thoroughly unconventional manner). "Jesuit training is based on a rigorous reform of the self and achievement of self-knowledge. By the time a man comes to the final vows, anything emotional or fanciful in his piety is supposed to have been rooted out." Perhaps Blazon's ultimate discovery would be considered emotional and fanciful by the conventionally Catholic, but what he finds is a God who teaches him the totality of the selfhood:

> Everybody wants a Christ for himself and those who think like him. Very well, am I at fault for wanting a Christ who will show me how to be an old man? . . . I think that after forty we should recognize Christ politely but turn for our comfort and guidance to God the Father, who knows the good and evil of life, and to the Holy Ghost, who possesses a wisdom beyond that of the incarnated Christ. After all, we worship a Trinity, of which Christ is but one Person. I think when He comes again it will be to declare the unity of the life of the flesh and the life of the spirit. And then perhaps we shall make some sense of this life of marvels, cruel circumstances, obscenities and commonplaces. Who can tell? — we might even make it bearable for everybody!

This is Davies' metaphor — the totality of God in the totality of self. But Dunstan is not yet ready to recognize this as the answer to his problem. His immediate concern is with saints, and with his attempt to establish the fact that Mrs. Dempster is a true saint. Wisely, Blazon advises him: "Turn your mind to the real problem. Who is she . . . who is she in your personal world? What figure is she in your personal mythology? . . . you must find your answer in psychological truth, not in objective truth."

Having devoted many years to the study of the saintly, in Mexico Dunstan gets an opportunity to study the demonic, through his relationship with Liesl and Magnus Eisengrim, the magician. Blazon warned him to learn the meaning of his personal saint; he must now discover the meaning of his personal devil.

From Eisengrim, Dunstan learns why the public has a fascination with magic;

> You know that nowadays the theatre has almost abandoned charm; actors want to be sweaty and real, playwrights want to scratch their scabs in public. Very well; it is in the mood of the times. But there is always another mood, one precisely contrary to what seems to be the fashion. Nowadays this concealed longing is for romance and marvels . . . People want to marvel at something, and the whole spirit of our time is not to let them do it. They will pay to do it, if you make it good and marvellous for them . . . What we offer is innocent — just an entertainment in which a hungry part of the spirit is fed.

And we realize that Davies means that all Canadians who have grown up in a stolid, practical atmosphere crave a knowledge of the marvellous, and that this craving for the marvellous is really a craving for self-knowledge — for the knowledge of something which has been repressed but manifests itself in a fascination with the mystical.

While Dunstan is with Eisengrim's troupe, he is initiated into the "other side" of the life of the spirit — into the demonic aspect of himself, which can round out his "saintly" aspect. Part of his initiation comes with his physical relationship with Liesl. She had accused him of lacking the complete knowledge of self — that he had not lived in a physical sense, and which had been symbolized throughout by his one-legged crippled body. She calls him:

> . . . you pseudo-cynical old pussy-cat, watching life from the sidelines and knowing where all the players go wrong. Life is a spectator sport to you . . . there is a whole great piece of your life that is unlived, denied, set aside . . . But every man has a devil, and a man of unusual quality, like yourself, Ramsay, has an unusual devil. You must get to know your personal devil. You must even get to know his father, the Old Devil . . . Why don't you, just for once, do something inexplicable,

> irrational, at the devil's bidding, and just for the hell of it? You would be a different man.

How do the pieces of the puzzle fit together? In spite of Liesl's revelations, Dunstan does not yet make a drastic change in his life — in his role as Fifth Business: "the one who knows the secret of the hero's birth, or comes to the assistance of the heroine when she thinks all is lost, or keeps the hermitess in her cell, or may even be the cause of somebody's death if that is part of the plot", Dunstan must bring about the dénouement of the plot. He reveals to Boy to exactly what extent he has been the keeper of his conscience. He shows Boy the Stone which he had so long ago embedded in the snowball, and informs Boy of his fault in the accident. "Boy, for God's sake, get to know something about yourself. The stone-in-the-snowball has been characteristic of too much you've done for you to forget it forever!" But Boy, the material man, refuses to own up to his guilt and he dies after Eisengrim's hypnotic suggestion, though through his own volition. The material man cannot know himself.

But who is Paul Dempster, alias Magnus Eisengrim, in the workings of the plot? It is no accident that Eisengrim is a master of illusion, for his human personality in the world is illusory too. Davies hints that Eisengrim is the "Faustian man", one who has sold his soul to the Devil, in order to gain knowledge and power. Eisengrim has lost contact with humanity, and is absorbed in self-aggrandizement. As Dunstan says:

> It was clear enough to me that his compelling love affair was with himself; his mind was always on his public personality, and on the illusions over which he fussed psychologically quite as much as Liesl did mechanically. I had seen a good deal of egotism in my life, and I knew that it starved love for anyone else and sometimes burned it out completely.

Eisengrim had been convinced by his father that his birth had been responsible for his mother's loss of sanity. He says: "I was too young for the kind of guilt my father wanted me to feel; he had an extraordinary belief in guilt as an educative force. I couldn't stand it. I cannot feel guilt now." Just as he feels no guilt for his mother, he feels no guilt about hypnotizing Boy and suggesting that he drown himself. He is no longer a human being.

Davies establishes a unity of the saintly and demonic sides of his hero's soul; from the one original accident, one character becomes a saint, another a studier of saints, and another a magician whose miracles "have a spice of the Devil about them". Dunstan, for so long the chronicler of saints, becomes the chronicler of a

magician. The two people who are the oracles of the two points of view, Liesl and Blazon, both advise Dunstan the same way. Blazon advises him to know his own saint and how she affected his personal mythology, but advises him to know the Devil as well:

> The Devil knows corners of us all of which Christ Himself is ignorant. Indeed, I am sure Christ learned a great deal that was salutary about Himself when He met the Devil in the wilderness. Of course, that was a meeting of brothers; people forget too readily that Satan is Christ's elder brother and has certain advantages in argument that pertain to a senior.

And Liesl urges him to know his own devil, to round out his awareness with the "poetic grace of myth". Both aspects are necessary, they are two sides of the same whole, the "union of the flesh and the spirit" which must be known by each individual in order to be whole. We suspect that Davies shows us that total conversion to one side or the other produces the madness of the fool-saint, or the impersonal inhumanity of the magician. The complete neglect of it leads to the Canadian success story, Boy Staunton. But the integration of it leads to self-fulfillment, leads to the discovery of the true nature of man.

Ultimately, we must ask: what is it that Davies is advocating in *Fifth Business?* Is he recommending that Canadians shake their stolid frame of reference and immerse themselves in a study of saints or magic? What are we supposed to do?

Man may view his life either in terms of his function in the external world, or as an integrated, psychologically aware being. Anglo-Saxons have always tended towards the former attitude, and Davies believes that Canadians especially are afflicted by this orientation. Thus his hero concerns himself with the view which his milieu disregards — the world of the mind. It becomes necessary to jolt Dunstan out of his too esoteric world, and into the realization of his being in the world — his role as Fifth Business. Thus for Davies the question becomes more than a matter of orientation, be it spiritual — saintly or demonic — or material. It becomes more even than the answer which Dunstan finally achieves, for the idea of the perfection of man being found in the unity of flesh and spirit is an ancient one. Davies finally tries to convince us (and this explains the form of the book — that of vindicatory letter), that our life is not defined solely in terms of the external world, nor in terms of our own intellectual yearnings, or imagined personalities. We must live in order to know life; we must live with the awareness of the total self.

LOWRY'S FOREST PATH

Echoes of Walden

Richard Hauer Costa

FEW MAJOR writers can be so compactly formulated by biography as Thoreau. His life was simple and uneventful. Contemporary undergraduates who get "turned on" by the notion that a man could live alone in the woods for two years get "turned off" by the scarcity of compelling autobiographical material on the escape to Walden Pond. Thoreau's *Journal*, by his own admission, is not autobiography, and only fragments of it have survived for the Walden period. The *Correspondence* yields next to nothing, and supplementary records are scarce. The few pages of objective facts, from sources outside Thoreau's literary texts, are mostly concerned with surface matters: groups who came out for picnics, children to whom he showed wildflowers and woodland creatures, the commercial side of the ice-cutting episode, and so on.

But the chief effect of this prosaic picture, at least for the student of literature, is salutary: to turn the reader *inward* to the text of *Walden* where actuality has been transformed by art. If *Walden* is a masterpiece of literature, it must be (and I quote from Charles R. Anderson)

> something quite different from amateur natural history, dated social criticism, or the autobiography of a transcendental crank. Before the mystical world of *Walden* can be distinguished from the literal setting of ponds and woods and township, we must learn to separate the actual Henry Thoreau, citizen of Concord, from the fictive character who is both the persona and that voice that speaks to us in the book.[1]

Anderson presents a persuasive case for thinking of *Walden* as a species of poetry rather than prose, if one does not insist on the mechanical distinction of verse as opposed to paragraph form. Wit and metaphor, he writes,

> serve Thoreau as the negative and positive means of his quest. These set up the direction of the book and open out its multiple contrasts. Not only are society and

> solitude juxtaposed but the civilized and the primitive, complexity and simplicity; also matter and spirit, animal faculties and the higher laws, earth and heaven, nature and God. Man cannot achieve his high aims by rejecting the one and leaping into the other, but must work his way up from the sty of materialism to the perfection he seeks.[2]

My purpose here is to demonstrate that a later writer — like Thoreau a fugitive from his century and era, but one whose demonic life had nothing in common with Thoreau's sylvan peace — came also to seek transcendence. He came at last to seek it not on the easy-payment plan of addiction — this writer's usual way — but on the Thoreauvian plan: the evocation in art of the *felt* life of spirit and higher laws, earth and heaven, nature and God.

Malcolm Lowry was an alcoholic and a symbolist. His lifelong sense of being haunted, of living perpetually in what he once termed, in the punning manner he learned from his mentor Conrad Aiken, "introverted comas," produced all those Lowrian personae: guiltridden John Bunyans who live in hell but aspire to heaven; above all, the Consul of *Under the Volcano*, literature's first character to reflect fully the noblesse-oblige of the addict, the kind of pride that must be asserted to seek in drink a means of transcending the agony of consciousness.

The problem with Lowry is precisely that which Professor Anderson isolates in the case of Thoreau and *Walden*: the need to separate the citizen of Concord from the fictive character who is the persona and voice of the book. In Lowry's case, the need is to separate the man who drove unflinchingly to an alcoholic's early death and the masks which loom as the protagonists of the books.

After *Under the Volcano* (1947), Lowry became obsessed by a subjective aesthetic by which he would return again and again to the writer writing about a writer who is writing a book in which he is the main character. Only once after *Volcano* did one of his works *outgrow* its creator so as to wrench free of autobiographical trappings. That single instance is "The Forest Path to the Spring", a novella which Lowry wrote during the last years, the early 1950's, in the squatter's cottage at Dollarton, near Vancouver, British Columbia, ten miles through deep woods from the nearest tavern. "Forest Path" was originally published in *New World Writing* (Spring, 1961) and reprinted as the final and climactic item in Lowry's only collection of short fiction, *Hear Us O Lord from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place*. Both appearances were in 1961, four years after his death.

In "Forest Path", one finds it possible to discern in Malcolm Lowry what Anderson called necessary for an artistic appreciation of *Walden*: the separation

of Lowry, the rootless addict in life, from the fictive persona and voice that speak to us of rebirth through an identification with the cyclical current of nature. For once, Lowry eschews all ambiguity of viewpoint — all those shifting personae of a single story retold *ad nauseum* — for a unity of narrative stance that is absolutely without precedent in his fiction.

Although he employs the "I", Lowry appears reluctant to limit his narrator to precise identity. He is never given a name. For once, here is no writer writing about the writer writing. To be sure, Lowry reveals that his narrator has been a jazz musician but one who has given up his old life of the night.

> [H]ow far away that seemed now, my life in which my only stars were neon lights! I must have stumbled into a thousand alcoholic dawns, but drunk in the rumble seat I passed them by. . . . Never had I really looked at a sunrise till now.

But this *curriculum vita* appears halfway into the story. No disquisition on drink takes over. There is a brief tribute to jazz musicians like Venuti, Satchmo, and the Duke, who have for him "the aspects of a very real glory", but no detailed digression. Lowry's thrust at all points is toward *control* of his materials and away from the self-indulgent ruminations that wreck most of his post-*Volcano* work.

WHAT GIVES Lowry control in "Forest Path" is that he has subjected the *felt* life of the protagonist to a *created* structure which elevates it to art. That structure is more than chronology: the cycle of the seasons around which its eight sections swing. What really unifies these sections is that Lowry has waived his usual subjective strategies for those of a kind of narrative pastoral, a poem.

I of course am neither suggesting extraction of the best passages from "Forest Path" for stanzaic rearrangement nor applying to it that hybrid term, "prose poem." What I am suggesting is a technique for reading this story, one which aligns "The Forest Path to the Spring" to *Walden*.

I have never seen anywhere in Lowry's voluminous notes or letters a single mention of either Thoreau or *Walden*. There is a reference to Thoreau, not an especially respectful one, midway through Lowry's last book, *October Ferry to Gabriola*, published in 1970. Their kinship is accidental but pervasive, a matter that goes beyond commonality of circumstances. Certainly Thoreau and Lowry, a century apart, were searching for solitude and rejecting an economy of abundance in favour of a simple natural life. The real theme of the two works is the

search for perfection, for a life of holiness; for a way to endure what Thoreau called his "several more lives" away from Walden Pond and what Lowry feared would be his life after eviction from his forest retreat.

The goals in both works and the journeys towards them are rendered in a deceptively simple series of image-clusters: animal, water, rain, and shelter, the imagery of time, the quest or journey, the self reborn even as the ice thaws and the land becomes green again. Lowry's story is poetic in the same way *Walden* is, and the presence of *another* — wife, helpmate, guide — makes Lowry's counsels more outgoingly human, less cranky, than Thoreau's.

Lowry's novella is dedicated, in fact, "To Margerie, my wife". If Thoreau went to Walden Pond "to transact some private business with the fewest obstacles," Lowry makes it clear that retreat to the Canadian Northwest wilderness could only work as a partnership. Life became "a continual awakening . . . until I knew her I had lived my whole life in darkness."

The couple arrived at Eridanus (Lowry gives Dollarton a name dear to the ancients — Eridanus, river of both Life and of Death) on Labour Day at the beginning of the war, intending to combine a delayed honeymoon with a last summer holiday. For a time, "the garishness and strangeness of . . . the sun . . . to me, long used to the night and sleeping fitfully . . . brought the quality of a nightmare." But metamorphosis soon takes place, a curious giving in to benevolent nature, a sense of their $12-a-month cabin as part of "eternal flux and change" which on the arms of the tides seemed alternately to lower and elevate "like a strange huge cave where some amphibious animal might have lived." Fall gives way to the first frosts, and they are still there. In an epiphanic moment one winter's night, the poet-persona knows why:

> [C]oming across the porch from the woodshed with a lantern in one hand and a load of wood under the other arm, I saw my shadow, gigantic, the logs of wood as big as a coffin, and this shadow seemed for a moment the glowering embodiment of all that threatened us; yes, even a projection of that dark, chaotic side of myself, my ferocious destructive ignorance.

Lowry's real subject in "Forest Path" is the war which Nature wins over nature, the triumph of the discovered correspondence between elemental forces and man's abiding but muted selflessness. Just as Thoreau's arguments against the railroads are among the pretended subjects of *Walden*, Lowry's diatribe against the oil refinery across the bay is a diversionary tactic against another antagonist altogether. Tonally, Thoreau's strategy is directly hortatory: go ye and do likewise. When he lashes out at the railroads, Thoreau explodes into wit and metaphor

that are aimed at the rescue of time from the deception of speed. Men live life too fast, thinking

> it is essential that the *Nation* have commerce, and export ice, and talk through a telegraph, and ride thirty miles an hour . . . but whether we should live like baboons or like men, is a little uncertain. If we do not get out sleepers, and forge rails, and devote days and nights to the work, but go tinkering upon our *lives* to improve *them*, who will build railroads? And if railroads are not built, how shall we get to Heaven in season? . . . We do not ride upon the railroad; it rides upon us.

From this point in "What I Lived For" to the end of the section, Thoreau opens each paragraph on a cautionary note against being taken in by the lures of technology. The essence of time, he declares, is not changed by the post-office or by the telegraph or by newspapers. Rather "Time is but the stream I go a-fishing in. I drink at it; but while I drink I see the sandy bottom and detect how shallow it is. Its thin current slides away, but eternity remains."

Malcolm Lowry's way is more confessional. His entire thrust is summed up by one of Thoreau's rare acknowledgements that his life before Walden had been sham. He went to the woods so as not, "when I came to die, discover that I had not lived." Near the end of "Forest Path" Lowry apologizes for the "mere heroics" and "vain gestures" that have characterized his life. Yet he must "go beyond remorse, beyond even contrition . . . pass beyond the pride I felt in my accomplishment, and to accept myself as a fool again." Eridanus, finally, is out of time altogether. The narrator gladly accepts his previous life as a necessary hell, *felix culpa.* He and his wife have transcended the passions of the moment and the attendant fears — even the hellish fear of losing their house — for "now the joy and happiness of what we had known would go with us whenever we went or God sent us and would not die."

THE REAL ANTAGONIST is the world which Thoreau and Lowry would banish in the interests of discovering the self. The purpose of their experiments is now clear: to withdraw from the life of civilization so that they can merge with the life of nature, to leave the artificial to the real. But the lives at Walden and Eridanus are means not ends. *Walden* and "The Forest Path to the Spring" are the records of quests for the buried life of the soul.

In the midst of writing "Forest Path", Lowry wrote to his agent Harold Matson that his book, as far as he knows, "is the only short novel of its type that brings the kind of majesty reserved for tragedy (God this sounds pompous) to

bear on human integration."[3] The last is the important word. Not only is his story a raging toward self-integration but its poetic technique at all points a working toward an integration of man's primal urges and fears. Like Thoreau an inveterate punster, Lowry devotes much of the first section of "Forest Path" to a play on the names of the beach cottages, a practice which he sees as a human rebellion in a day when "streets and houses are mere soulless numbers . . . a survival of some instinct of unique identity in regard to one's home . . . for identity itself." One notes Lowry's ability — it was Thoreau's eminently — to synthesize the mythological and the quotidian. In recalling the legend of Eridanus, Lowry observes that Jupiter had to save the world from Phaethon's "splendid illusion", but made a protective garden of the place where he died. The Shell refinery is emblematic of waste in the guise of industrial progress, but no Jupiter destroys it (although today's ecologists might find a prophetic irony in Lowry's metaphor). Rather, "distant rate-payers" consecrate the refinery as an open cathedral. Later, the poet will reveal that one night the "S" in *Shell* failed to light, leaving it revealed for what it is: *Hell.*

Lowry establishes a series of polarities to warn of man's fate: squatter's shacks on one side of the bay, the refinery on the other; the finding of paradise against the threat of eviction; God's sovereignty against man-made laws; the good fishermen and boatbuilders against the real estate people and the tourists; the achievement of oneness with nature against the false buffers of progress. All are one tension, of course, and Lowry represents their reconciliation in one magnificent metaphor: the daily act of redemption in walking, at dusk, through the forest to the spring for water.

Lowry's handling of the water-rebirth motif is pervasive but never intrusive. The sheer logistics of obtaining water in the wilds — getting a boat, manoeuvring it to a spring, returning a distance of miles to the shack — lead to frustrations and bitter resolves to return to the city. One afternoon late in the fall, everything about the water having gone wrong, the narrator sees a ship's canister on the beach left by the receding tide. They recover it. A light rain begins to fall. Their bitter despair forgotten, she explains with "inexpressible wonder" that "rain itself is water from the sea, raised to heaven by the sun, transformed into clouds and falling again into the sea." He, who has been a ship's fireman, relives the story behind the discarded canister. It does not matter that the story he tells his wife while cleaning the canister is unlikely to have happened. What matters is that they have recharged each other's flagging spirits. One of their boatbuilder

friends then shows them a spring, its running delayed by the long Indian summer, less than a hundred yards from their house.

His first walk down the path to the spring takes the form of a ten-page central section. It is an ode to recovery from life's *sturm-und-drang*, to man's recoil from the dreadful Wendigo, the man-hating spirit of the wilderness. He sees his hatred and suffering as like a forest fire, "a perversion of the movement of the inlet". The fire was his hatred, turning back on himself, self-devouring.

The onset of winter leads to contrasting strategies in *Walden* and "Forest Path". Thoreau's winter by the pond never threatens; it is a time for deeper reflection. "Why is it," he asks, "that a bucket of water soon becomes putrid, but frozen remains sweet forever?" Thoreau's answer is witty, metaphoric: "It is commonly said that this is the difference between the affections and the intellect." Winter at Eridanus shakes all the resolves of Lowry's characters with cosmic terror: "... [W]e would lose all hope... the rending branches, the tumult of the sea, the sound of ruination under the house, so that we clung to one another like two little arboreal animals in some midnight jungle. . . . "

Both winter sojourners conclude their songs on notes of apotheosis. Thoreau bathes his intellect in the *Bhagavad Gita*. He lays down his book, "so remote is its sublimity from our conceptions," and goes to the well for water, finding "the pure Walden water mingled with the sacred water of the Ganges." Lowry's narrator's actual path to the spring is made impassable by winter, but he still walks it in imagination "as if eternally through a series of dissolving dusks".

Nothing in "Forest Path" compares to Thoreau's rejuvenation at the sight of the spring thaw on Walden Pond. He sees man molecularly, as but a mass of thawing clay where "one hillside illustrated the principle of all the operations of Nature. The maker of this earth but patented a leaf. What Champollion will decipher this hieroglyphic for us, that we may turn over a new leaf at last?" But the ecstacy Lowry represents ascends the same pantheistic empyrean. "My God," he asks while looking at the full moon blazing clear of the pines behind the mountain, "why have you given this to us."

Thoreau's great book concludes with a chapter whose main business seems to be a series of exhortations: to explore one's "private sea"; to advance in the direction of dreams; to simplify; to step to the music one hears; to love one's life poor as it is. But the real theme of the chapter — of the whole work — is embodied in a single sentence near the beginning of the chapter: "Our voyaging is only great circle sailing." Thoreau's plea is to transcend human limitations which allow the present to be a mere replay of the past:

> [M]ere lapse of time can never make to dawn. The light which puts out our eyes is darkness to us. Only that day dawns to which we are awake. There is more day to dawn. The sun is but a morning star.

Thoreau's plea for transcendence of time and place is echoed at the end of "Forest Path" by Lowry's rage against giving in to the tyranny of the past:

> [It] was my duty to transcend the past in the present. . . . Sometimes I had the feeling I was attacking the past rationally as with a clawbar and hammer, while trying to make it into something else for a supernatural end.

He must transcend the hubris that has enabled him to read mystic portents in every passing moment; must return to a state of acceptance of himself as innocent of such perceptions. The story concludes in a bucolic kaleidoscope — a pastoral celebration — and, at the last, in Thoreau's "great circle sailing" back to the regenerative fount, the forest path to the spring.

NOTES

[1] Charles R. Anderson, *The Magic Circle of Walden* (New York, 1968), pp. 10-11.

[2] *Ibid.*, pp. 17-18.

[3] *Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry.* Eds. Harvey Breit and Margerie Lowry (Philadelphia and New York, 1965), p. 266.

WOMEN IN CANADIAN LITERATURE

Isobel McKenna

Most women don't even live lives of quiet desperation. (Quiet desperation is far too dramatic.) Most women live lives like doing the dishes, finishing one day's dishes and facing the next, until one day the rectal polyp is found or the heart stops and it's over. And all that's left of them is a name on a gravestone.

BRIAN MOORE'S HEROINE comments thus in *I Am Mary Dunne* (1968), his study of the confused Canadian woman of today. Moore may have been only transiently a Canadian writer, but he has caught exactly the mood of the Canadian girl who seeks a way out of the faceless secondary role the world offers her.

How did the situation arise? For Canadians the best record is found in Canadian fiction. Literature, much more than sociological or psychological studies, provides the rounded picture, the most complete expression of the social and psychological nature of a society, and does so not necessarily in the best writing.

Since the essence of literary art is to show us what a human being is within a particular culture, in a particular time and place, a glance at some fairly representative Canadian novels in English can be expected to demonstrate what has been the position of women in English Canadian society. Fashionable plots and popular attitudes, varying over the years, provide the clues to understanding the society contemporary to both author and audience.

The earliest novel in English which had a Canadian setting and was to some extent written here is Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague* (1769). In popular epistolary style it gives a rather charming but limited view of garrison life in old Quebec at the end of the eighteenth century. Romantic love triumphs amid sleigh rides, balls, and afternoon teas. The position of women is simply that of transplanted Englishwomen. To understand Emily's place in society one cannot seek for Canadian roots, but must look back to England and its current *mores*. That, in fact, is just what Emily does.

Emily's story is concerned with only English men and women in a then new and rather exotic setting. Garrison officers and government appointees have social importance; they are pleasantly surprised to discover elegance and charm in seignorial society. But the French Canadian girls are more coquettish — hence less "ladylike" — than the English girls, and this not only causes the English women to accept this as proof of their own superiority; it also seems to be the first example of what Ronald Sutherland terms "the myth of *la femme fatale canadienne*" *(Second Image)*. All the women have importance only as wives or daughters of important men, and this attitude was to prevail not only in Canadian colonial society but long after the creation of the nation.

Such was the basis of Canadian novels until reading books became more of an activity of the lower and middle classes, since people like to read about themselves, or what might be their own situations. The English ideal dominated in Canadian society generally and therefore in its literature. Both actively and passively the influence was reinforced to produce a watered-down imitation of English social values. The Church of England was fashionably inclined to poetic expression; Methodists and Presbyterians believed in education but for practical, "useful" purposes; English-speaking Roman Catholics were often poor, and like their French Canadian contemporaries, were usually encouraged to make the most of the situation in life to which they had been born. The priesthood was a high vocation that attracted bright young men since it offered education along with its dedication, but cultivation of a deep interest in literature was rarely part of their training. Every congregation's admiring dependence upon its clergy increased the latter's influence and encouraged the *status quo*, which in turn meant that the secondary role of women in society was praised as the true one. The romantic place of nature in nineteenth century fiction encouraged the popularity of "nature" novels, where the absence of women is a negative indication of woman's place in contemporary society.

Managing a well-run household was the proof of the Canadian woman's worth. In pioneer circumstances, this was a necessity. Physically, it was a natural division of the vital work to leave outside work to the men and inside work to the women. The Strickland sisters, Susanna Moodie and Catherine Parr Traill, were unusual in the cultivation they brought to the backwoods. They exemplified the educated Englishwoman of genteel birth whose leisure might well be occupied in writing. To express herself, or to earn some much-needed money, there was little else that a woman could do, apart from the manual labour to which some hard-pressed women were reduced, though if she were sufficiently

well-born, she might open a school for young ladies, where a doubtful education would be dispensed, along with some training in managing a household.

There was still something of the feudal lady of the manor in the style in which women administered the many facets of running a home. Even Mrs. Moodie was conscientious about such duties, since to her, as to her contemporaries, this was only doing her share in the partnership of marriage. Every mother of young women became the administrative manager, assigning actual duties to daughters and to servants. Mrs. Moodie might despair of the servants available in Canada, but she had them; the work involved in running a house then was accomplished by a great deal of manual labour done by those who usually had no education at all. In a supposedly democratic country, varied social levels were an accepted fact of life.

During the 1850's and 1860's, Rosanna Leprohon wrote with some success when she turned her emphasis towards Canadian society as she knew it in and near Montreal. She quite accepted the established social hierarchy, and her stories seem to vary from the currently popular style chiefly in their novel setting, involving French Canadian society, with women who did belong to their environment.

In large part, Canadian writers sought the more lucrative and prestigious American markets, which determined the kind of writing they could undertake. Most of the fiction appeared serially in magazines, in stories that were usually highly moral and infinitely dull. About the time of Confederation, the American market had become even larger, and more Canadian writers were attracted. Most simply catered to popular tastes, but some, like Sara Jeannette Duncan, had genuine talent and some originality.

Besides literary ability, Duncan demonstrates shrewd objectivity and an accurate eye for her society. *The Imperialists* (1904) remains the best portrayal of life in a small Ontario town during the latter part of the nineteenth century. Duncan's characters are closer to actuality than those of her rivals, and the gossipy atmosphere of little towns is clearly mirrored. The central character, Lorne Murchison, is romantically in love with Dora Millburn. Dora is not very bright, the product of the superficial standards of her society, and she turns from Lorne to a young man, shallow as she is, whose greatest recommendation is that he is English. This lends him a cachet which home-grown heroes cannot equal — except in the author's eyes. Here we see the tide turning against the former tendency to worship anyone and anything imported from Britain. Here, at least, England no longer sets the pace, though the ties are not yet cut.

Dora and her young Englishman illustrate the false social standards condemned by Miss Duncan, and they deserve one another. Lorne's sister, Advena, is much more the ideal young Canadian woman of the period. She is high-minded, kindhearted, pure and constant in her love. She has also something of the martyr complex, then considered attractive since it implied faithful endurance of great trials and misunderstandings. The hard work and self-sacrifice so vital in the pioneer are now metamorphosed into a kind of subservience to society. The original importance of the group over the individual has been replaced by the Victorian male domination of the family and especially of the women in it. Negation of personal desires is no longer a requirement for survival but a quality sanctified by society as the mark of the true "lady".

The only gratification of such martyrdom is a self-deluding smugness entailing a clouded, hypocritical view of social roles. But Advena is Canadian, with an honesty and independence which the author feels are typical. Advena endures so much and no more; the role of martyr is not to be accepted without a struggle. She does something about her frustrated love for the new young minister in town, and in the end, through Advena's initiative, she and her young minister are free to fall into one another's arms. The solution is rather pat, but the point is made that custom and manners are superficial and often false: the true values of kindness, faithfulness, and sincerity count in both men and women. Both sexes can be dominated by false values only to their own misfortune. Despite the moral tone, Duncan also makes the point that to achieve any kind of fulfilment in life, sincerity requires an independent spirit to accompany it. Although Duncan's theme here is political, the women she portrays are realistically part of the story. In Advena especially, we see one who is all that her society expected and admired, but who also has some of that freedom of thought balanced by native intelligence which the author herself displayed. Like Duncan, Advena manages to get what she truly wants and at the same time to get along within her society. It was the kind of compromise that had then to be made, but at least it involved much more than simple mindless compliance.

Materialistic values and illogical snobbery are also attacked in Duncan's other, and lesser, novels, which are not set in Canada. In *A Canadian Girl in London* (1908), Mary Trent's father, a Senator, has sent her with her brother Graham to become acquainted with London society, but they are glad to escape its hypocrisies to return to the more direct simplicity of Canada. But Mary's admiration for her wealthy self-made father and her handsome brother betrays, in its

acquiescence to them, her own sense of inferiority: she sees clearly but can act only directly.

This is the kind of situation which gave rise to the popularity of the Victorian belief that "the hand that rocks the cradle rules the world." For all her independent intelligence and tactful firmness, Mary's role is still that of an adjunct to the males in the family. The pioneer concept of the family working together to gain achievement still dominates the role of the woman. It is father who makes the decisions regarding the aims of the family — which are his own. Duncan's women are always conformist to a degree that allows them to fit within their society, but at the same time they are individuals with no time for false pretenses, conforming only within the limits of their sense of justice.

Not long after Duncan's books appeared, L. M. Montgomery published the first of her stories about Anne of Avonlea, *Anne of Green Gables*, 1908). An attractive, imaginative little girl, Anne learns to blend her independence with the conventionality of her time and place, and through necessity as much as through following her own wishes, she gains a career, she becomes a teacher, then a rather new and honourable profession open to women. Teachers in the public schools had formerly most often been men; women who taught had either been nuns or faded gentlewomen who provided a meagre education to those whose parents could afford to pay.

Much of the long popularity of Anne of Green Gables is due to her independent spirit, her confidence that she can accomplish something for herself. She is intelligent and better educated than previous generations of Canadian-born women had been. Her children, who appear in later stories, receive her encouragement in expanding their horizons. Women in Montgomery's books still belong to the rural society that dominates then, but they feel fortunate in comparison to preceding generations. Life is less difficult, and it offers many new chances; careers in nursing and secretarial work as well as teaching were then just opening up as fields of exciting opportunity for women.

In the early days of the present century, the west was just beginning to develop while the east had already gone through its pioneering stages. Ralph Connor recalled in his novels the Glengarry area and the Scottish pioneers among whom he grew up. He portrayed women as he had known them — vital to their society, though confined by their settlers' lives. The chief reason for the existence of women was the necessity for good wives and mothers, according to pioneer standards. In *Glengarry Schooldays* (1902) Connor described Mrs. Finch, his

most admired example of such womanliness, as "last to bed and first to stir", with a "steadfast mind and unyielding purpose":

> Her husband regarded her with a curious mingling of reverence and defiance ... but while he talked much about his authority, and made a great show of absolutism with his family, he was secretly conscious that another will than his had really kept things moving ... withal her soft words and gentle ways, hers was a will like steel ... Besides the law of order, there was ... the law of work ... To the mother fell all the rest. At the cooking and cleaning, and the making and the mending, all fine arts with her, she diligently toiled from long before dawn till after all the rest were abed. But besides these and other daily household chores there were, in their various seasons, the jam and jelly, the pumpkin and squash preserves, the butter-making and cheese-making, and more than all, the long, long work with the wool.

The laws of order and work that Connor mentions meant that each could accomplish what his or her talents suggested, in terms of their society. Where girls were concerned, creative and administrative talents were not only encouraged but were vital to the farm life most people followed, and to contemporary urban life.

Despite the unadmitted fact that both knew that she indeed ran the farm, Mrs. Finch was a good wife who, in her awareness of his need to appear absolute master, never argued with her husband. In quiet, devious ways, she arranged that injustices should not last long, and the family accepted this oblique kind of authority. When this ideal wife and mother became ill, no one related this to the physical exhaustion she must have felt, and no one was more surprised than her husband, lost without her. Mrs. Finch demonstrated the strength of character for which she was noted, and suffered in silence. This martyrdom illustrates the endurance which pioneer life demanded; when it turned out that she had "malignant cancer" for which nothing could be done, her early training served her well. Mrs. Finch was granted after her death the supreme accolade: "all her life ... she lived for others."

The other woman prominent in this story is Mrs. Murray, the minister's wife, described as "fine and fair and saintly", the inspiration of all. The influence of a good woman was acknowledged and appreciated in pre-Freudian novels, and women were well aware of this power which society granted them. They regarded it a duty to use it well, and this in turn encouraged a more selfless attitude.

There is indeed something almost frighteningly simple in the standards Connor portrays. Women were not expected to work outside the home in any capacity that interfered with their first duty, the household — but most lived the life of

Mrs. Finch, with plenty to occupy them. Certainly Connor grants to women ability, intelligence, charm, along with a kind of superiority to men. In his later novels, he attempts to fathom character more deeply, but society has changed, and although he recognizes this, he cannot cope with it.

Later, beginning with *Jalna* in 1927, came the stories of Mazo de la Roche, widely read outside this country but never considered great literature here, largely owing to the unrealistic settings and their author's soap-opera imagination. But her characters sometimes display the faults and virtues of real people. Meg is sweet but unyielding, in the manner of her contemporaries who still felt the need to be martyred by their convictions without ever examining them honestly. Old Adeline may be a dominating, rather irritating old woman, but she is true to her times. Such tyranny within the family was a woman's sole outlet if she had the qualities of leadership, and Gran had no special talents outside them: she merely liked to run things. Her own generation had considered her ambitions not only acceptable but necessary: the family must be united in the common cause. By virtue of her position as matriarch, she had a duty to perform which society felt was absolutely incumbent upon her. She was an exaggerated representation of the kind of woman considered "good" in the author's youth, and her portrait seems drawn partly in admiration and partly in irritation

As the years pass in the Jalna stories, women make greater efforts to attain independence. Often as not, they suffer for it, or are shown to be ridiculous and not very bright. In the author's own society a woman was always faced with a choice: either a life of her own, or life with a husband as mother-homemaker, based on the pioneer concept updated to the disadvantage of women.

As society develops beyond the pioneer stage, women are considered as restricted by their own natures, although in practice the restriction is imposed by society itself. But the pioneer evaluation of women as individuals still lingers. Frederick Philip Grove shows sympathy for the overworked and downtrodden immigrant wives on the prairies, who work there much as they would have done in their homes in Europe. *Our Daily Bread* (1928) and *Fruits of the Earth* (1933), like his other prairie novels, reflect the west of the first decades of this century, still the time of the pioneers. In *Settlers of the Marsh* (1925), Mrs. Amundsen is a victim of the cruelty of her husband's harsh peasant attitude, and this in turn deeply wounds, psychologically, her daughter Ellen. This kind of loveless slavery disgusts Clara Vogel so much that she turns completely against everything that might have been good in farm life. Uneducated and untrained, Clara turns to her only alternative in the city, where easy virtue brings an

easy life. Ellen and Clara are both victims of their society: the only future offered to them is marriage and homemaking and child-rearing, and when they refuse this, little remains. Ellen earns her reward through patient suffering, while Clara did as she chose until caught by the nemesis of violent death.

Despite Grove's empathy with these women characters, the moral views of his time dictate what they may do, or be. In *The Master of the Mill* (1944), different times and circumstances are involved, and the women have differing roles. The three Mauds of the story are the three faces of Eve, granted characteristics which belong to individuals nevertheless. As R. E. Watters suggests in his "Introduction" to the 1961 edition, the three Mauds encompass "the trinity of mind, heart, and spirit", but it is notable that each can only symbolize one of these qualities. It is also notable that in Maud Dolittle we see a woman who is brilliant, with keen business ability along with a warm heart. Grove knew well that many women were indeed capable of more than housework, and in this novel he has a situation where such a woman fits in. But the society portrayed seems to share the views of Mazo de la Roche: these women either marry *or* have a career, and the only career is Maud Dolittle's as secretary.

Grove accurately reflects the times of which he wrote. In *Two Generations* (1946) he not only portrays the "generation gap" long before the phrase became trite, but he demonstrates his belief in the "new" woman, who wanted her own life as well as a husband and a home. Like the other Patterson children, Alice feels frustrated by her father's narrow attitude. She, too, is determined to leave the family farm, although her own ambition is subordinated to that of her brother Phil. Their almost incestuous love for one another is meant to show the shared ideas and beliefs of the younger generation who feel that there is more to life than physical labour. They are surprised at the support their mother provides, and come to realize that she, too, was once young and dream-filled. The most modern woman of them all is Nancy, their brother George's wife: she has struggled to become a dancer, and has no intention of giving up her hardwon opportunities. Grove allows Nancy to make everyone eventually happy: she bears George's son, the first grandchild, but continues to plan for her career. The opposite pole to Nancy and Alice is Cathleen, brother Henry's wife. Grove loses no opportunity to point out the stupidity and conformity which make her uninteresting to all, even to Henry.

No matter how dated the story's details, Grove positively supports the notion of women as individuals with talents and abilities to be encouraged. He is one of very few writers of his time to do so. Despite women having the vote and

being recognized as persons before the law, few novels, then or later, reflect any great change in their attitude to women, whose characters are usually portrayed as more restricted and less free than in real life they need be. Society in general was slow to adopt new ideas or to face realities, and fiction reflected the lag.

For instance, in Callaghan's *Such is My Beloved* (1934), the two prostitutes are convincing in terms of the novel's theme, but add nothing to the portrayal of women as they exist in this century; they are Eve in modern dress, man's downfall, leading him out of Paradise.

Callaghan sees the Christian virtue of self-negation as the woman's role. In *They Shall Inherit the Earth* (1935), Anna's lack of self-centredness may be the giving of spirit which man must learn in order to live in this world, but it also seems to be the old martyr-complex of women in different terms. Certainly it projects an ideal of which Ralph Connor would have approved.

More Joy in Heaven (1937) is deliberately a martyr story, with Kip Caley condemned by society because it cannot understand his Biblical sense of charity. But his mother and Julie are martyrs too, whose suffering is only intensified through association with Kip. Only the "bad" characters gladly suffer nothing.

In *The Loved and The Lost* (1951) Peggy Sanderson embodies another version of the martyr role. In her common sense, Sara Jeanette Duncan would be impatient with Peggy's lack of understanding of reality, although she would recognize the traces of Victorian gentility in Peggy's difficulties. No matter how high her intentions, Peggy suffers for flouting society's rules, since she does not recognize that society is still insistently conformist to outworn ideas. One can imagine a Mrs. Finch, for instance, finding a way to cope, even though it would be through an attitude which Peggy could not abide.

Generally, Callaghan's themes are seen through male characters who have a strength which raises them against the background of his flat style. The women tend to be paler, blending into this background. His more recent novels change somewhat in technique, but though the settings are contemporary, there is little difference in the characters of the women, despite the author's sympathy.

One of Hugh MacLennan's best portrayals of women is rather oddly, in his early novel, *Barometer Rising* (1941). Penny Wainwright is almost a complete metaphor of twentieth century womanhood: she is caught between the conflicting rules of the older generation of her father and his friends, and the newer freedom with its stress on individuality. She refuses to be a martyr, but acts to solve her difficulties. Penny's circumstances are not far removed from the present as far as her position in society is concerned. In MacLennan's later books, how-

ever, women tend to be merely types, with even less individuality and sense of purpose than Sara Jeannette Duncan's characters.

Not surprisingly, the most penetrating studies of women tend to be in novels written by women. Ethel Wilson portrays women sometimes tied by marriage, or by love alone, but still as individuals with some freedom of choice, often preoccupied with the search for a meaning to their lives. Margaret Laurence has much the same attitude. In *The Stone Angel* (1964), for example, she shows how one woman born out of her time remains strongly individualistic, reacting to the restrictions of her world. In the end, Hagar has been defeated by her turn-of-the-century small-town society as much as by the simple fact of age. For such as Hagar there was no place.

The push-and-pull of contemporary society and its effects on a sensitive, intelligent Canadian woman are perhaps best expressed in Margaret Atwood's *The Edible Woman* (1969). Marion McAlpin, the central character, leads the conventional life of the recent university graduate. Atwood herself is quoted on the book's jacket as stating that the novel is "about ordinary people who make the mistake of thinking they are ordinary", which sums up Marion's situation. She does all the expected things, even to being almost engaged to a young-man-on-the-make. But suddenly Marion cannot eat: unknowingly, but literally, she is fed up with conformity, and understands this only when she realizes that she herself is being eaten up by society. Symbolically, she frosts a cake as the image of a woman and serves it to her friends. They are appalled, so Marion happily finishes by eating it herself. The old martyr-complex had subtly pushed her into contemporary "nonconformist" conformity, but rather like Duncan's Advena, Marion is saved by a sturdy indepedence she had never suspected in herself. With none of Advena's social and moral commandments to guide her, Marion must find her own way, and it is difficult. She is involved in a war, not between the sexes at all, but of one kind of society against another. The "edible" woman is the loser, the contemporary martyr — unless, like Marion, she turns against the society that is nibbling away her individuality.

Like Susanna Moodie, Mrs. Finch, or Nancy or Alice Patterson, Marion realizes that femininity is only a part of her own unique person, and is not to be worn as a hair-shirt.

review articles

KNISTER'S STORIES

Dorothy Livesay

Selected Stories of Raymond Knister, edited by Michael Gnarowski. University of Ottawa Press.

AT LONG LAST the short fiction of Raymond Knister is seeing the light. After fifty years of neglect, six of his short stories have been selected, with an introduction by Michael Gnarowski in a new series of Canadian short stories initiated by the University of Ottawa Press. The project is commendable and timely. But perhaps more needs to be said than the editor has set down, concerning the life and writings of Raymond Knister. For too long he has been known only to the elite as an imagist poet who came from an Ontario farm to make his way in the twenties magazines, *This Quarter*, Paris, and *The Midland*, Iowa. His chief desire, however, was to write fiction. In testimony therefore we have the experimental novel, *White Narcissus*, and the biographical novel *My Star Predominant*, centred on the life of Keats which was published after Knister's death by drowning at the age of 33. There is also the evidence of the unpublished novels in the Douglas Library, Queen's University and his letters quoted by me in a memoir to his *Collected Poems* (1949).

Raymond Knister's ancestry, like Frederick Philip Grove's, was German on his father's side and Scottish on his mother's. But Knister had the advantage of not coming to Canada as an outsider. He was born in 1899 near Comber in Essex Country and grew up on his father's farm in corn and tobacco country. Already in his high school days he was reading voraciously whatever came to hand in the Chatham public library, roaming through English, German and French literature. It was interesting that whereas the father was an experimental farmer, sending his soy beans to win a prize at the Chicago exhibitions, the son brought his experimental writings to Chicago where he hoped to meet those new realists, Sherwood Anderson, Carl Sandburg, Ruth Suckow. Hemingway in the early twenties was as yet unheard from, but the realist movement in fiction and the imagist movement in poetry, emanating from Harriet Monroe's *Poetry*, made a deep impression on the shy, stuttering farm boy. He went to Iowa and got editorial work on *The Midland*.

His first literary influences then were those found in the American mid-west.

But if I assert that Raymond Knister was strongly influenced by what we might call now the "magic" realism of Sherwood Anderson, this is to say that he found in him a confirmation of his own views: start with precise observation, but see behind it into the nature of things. As Schopenhauer pointed out, in discussing Goethe's Confessions, the special quality of the artist is that it is given to him to perceive the metaphysical real — *das Ding an Sich*. Consider for instance this paragraph by Sherwood Anderson from the first chapter of *Winesberg, Ohio*:

> That in the beginning when the world was young there were a great many thoughts but no such thing as truth. Man made the truth himself and each truth was a composite of a great many vague thoughts. All about in the world were the truths and they were all beautiful. The old man had listed hundreds of the truths in his books. I will not try to tell you of all of them. There was the truth of virginity and the truth of passion, the truth of wealth and of poverty, of thrift and of profligacy, of carelessness and abandon. And then the people came along. Each as he appeared snatched up a dozen of them. It was the truths that made the people grotesques. The old man had quite an elaborate theory concerning the matter. It was his notion that the moment one of the people took one of the truths to himself, called it his truth, and determined to live his life by it, he became a grotesque and the truth he embraced became a falsehood.

And here is Raymond Knister, speaking of his aims as a writer:

> Life is likely to be troublesome at times. Let us veil it, they say, in sonorous phrases and talk about birds and flowers and dreams. Birds and flowers and dreams are real as sweating men and swilling pigs. But the feeling about them is not always so real any more when it gets into words. Because of that, it would be good just to place them before the reader, just let the reader picture them with the utmost economy and clearness, and be moved by little things and great. Let him snivel, or be uncaring, or make his own poems from undeniable glimpses of the world.
>
> It would be good for the flowers and birds and dreams, and good for us. We would love them better, and be more respectful. And we might feel differently about many other common things if we saw them clearly enough. In the end we in Canada here might have the courage of our experience and speak according to it only. And when we trust surely, see directly enough, life, ourselves, we may have our own Falstaffs and Shropshire Lads and Anna Kareninas.
>
> We may climb ladders, and our apples will be hand-picked, and make more lasting vintage.

The seriousness of Knister's practical approach to writing short stories may be seen from the following excerpts from his letters to an Ontario friend, after an illness which prevented him from pursuing university studies. (They are all quoted, like the above passage, in my memoir appended to the *Collected Poems*.)

> When I got back to the farm and recovered my health, by dint of working fifteen to sixteen hours in the field until autumn, I began to change my views about writing. There was something about the life that I lived, and all the other farm people round me, something that had to be expressed, though I didn't know quite how. But the attempt would have to be made in the form of short stories. I had read a great many short stories from several literatures. Now for a subject: it wouldn't do to start with an autobiographical piece. One must be objective. As the days got shorter, and the time for more leisure came nearer, I looked about me earnestly.

He found his story in the life of an old man who had helped take in the crops.

> Here was my story. When fall work was over and the Christmas season, I sat down on January 2, 1921, and wrote it. The writing was quite bad, but the composition or the architecture had been given some care, and I was not surprised, though rather gratified, when "The One Thing" was accepted by *The Midland*. I had heard of *The Midland* through Edward J. O'Brien's year books of the short story, and I figured

it would be better to have even one cent a word and a printing in such a place than the thousand dollars I had heard the popular magazines paid, and run the risk of any loss of prestige; the deuce with the money! But the letter of acceptance from John T. Frederick, while it praised my story with the most ingratiating discrimination, mentioned that *The Midland* did not pay for stories. . . .

That winter I wrote several more farm stories, and also thirty or forty farm poems, with the eye on the object. These were printed at intervals in the "little magazines," poetry journals, and expatriate quarterlies — all American. Some recognition came from American critics, and in London *The New Criterion* singled out a dozen of my poems from a galaxy of moderns for their "objectivity". It was this objectivity which forbade the acceptance of my work in Canadian magazines. My poems and stories were so Canadian, and came so directly from the soil, that Canadian editors would have nothing to do with them. . . . But they weren't morally subversive, nor eccentric mannered, these attempts. It seemed gruesomely significant that not a Canadian editor would have anything to do with them, and that probably there were a few other young men in the country writing about it with the same immediacy, who were likewise rejected.

Thus, it seems to me that the same simplicity, objectivity and intimacy as was Sherwood Anderson's, was the aim of Knister. But Knister is less facile and obvious than Anderson. He is more profoundly concerned with the loneliness of man.

In the six stories chosen by Gnarowski the editor finds four of them "myths of initiation" from innocence to experience. This emphasis on the mythopoeic aspect of the stories is provocative, yet in my view it runs contrary to Knister's own intention. All writers make use of myth but with some moderns such as Malcolm Lowry or Robertson Davies there is a conscious structure, a schema of symbols. I do not feel this to be the case in Knister's fiction. Listen for a moment to his own stated aims in writing, again from the letters quoted in my memoir:

> . . . I agree with what you say about the stories. "The Strawstack" was the harder to do, and it is not nearly so true as "The Loading". I incline to find more and more that the short story is one of the trickiest of forms. How to impart a hint of the mystery and wonder behind the circumstances, and yet remain true to these latter? . . .
>
> Yes, I owe a good deal to Muilenburg (Walter T.), although I had written all my published stories before seeing Ruth Suckow's. She began publishing just one year before I did. . . . Walter I count in my innermost circle. Yet the contrast between him and his work (to the casual) is immense. "Heart of Youth" was perhaps the story that woke me to country life, as life and as possible material for art; and from my first reading of it in O'Brien I now regard it as to me the best of farm stories — most universal and lyrical. . . .

Again, in a letter dated April 11, 1924 from *The Midland*, Iowa City, Knister makes his views quite clear:

> Speaking of understanding, your remarks on the Bible touch on my pet theory — that we need not understand. We do not understand life, nor great art that is its essence. Enough if we see its mystery and beauty . . .

The truth that emerges is that whereas Knister sought for a simple realistic effect he possessed, in addition, an intensity and sensitivity by which he was able to make the ordinary extraordinary. Again, the phrase borrowed from painting, "magic realism" could well apply.

Moreover, though in no sense a naturalist of the school of Zola or Dreiser, nor a propagandist for change in society, Knister's central concern was the relationship of the individual to the community. In all of the six stories before us there is a lonely, introspective key character who identifies with "one thing", one person, one animal, one object; usually because

he cannot fit into the norms of the community. Lacking the community, lacking love of neighbour, the characters are thrown back on their own resources. Those not strong enough "crack up" or destroy themselves. In the story, "The Strawstack", the protagonist commits suicide; in the other stories there is a loss of contact through submission, as in "Mist-Green Oats"; accidental death, "The Loading"; paranoia, "The One Thing" and "The Fate of Mrs. Lucier"; and traumatic revelation of evil, "Elaine". Because none of the characters succeeds, either morally or socially, Knister's stories lack the easy optimism and wit of Stephen Leacock. In this collection at least the tone is sombre and parallels in many ways the *Collected Poems.* But perhaps this is not a wide enough sampling, and if some of Knister's more journalistic sketches written for *The Border Cities Star* and *Toronto Star* were set alongside, we would find a lighter, more whimsical side to this writer's body of work.

The real significance that comes when looking at Knister's prose is to find that here we have a stylist of the first order. What F. P. Grove struggled for and did not attain, what Ethel Wilson found and perfected, and what Knister grasped at, was the need for a wholly original way of handling language. Knister's prose must be read slowly, savoured, for each sentence has weight and thickness, its rhythms carefully balanced. It is as if, to make up for his own stammer, he takes a painful and secret pleasure in creating a perfect sentence. Then that sentence must be intimately linked with the next and the next, to build the paragraph. Nothing is dashed off or left to chance; and therefore a few of the obscurities in the present text must be due to faulty proofreading. Certainly there are misspellings! and there is something definitely wrong with the following excerpt:

> Nearly two days were gone. But he should have, though only until realization, for expectance the last one of her absence.

A further aspect of Knister's style is his vocabulary, recherché sometimes to the point of obscurity. More often his originality pays off. I like particularly phrases such as "stridor of haste", "inertly voiced remarks", "chivied and lured", "prefigured prize", "brusque unconsciousness". Again Knister's very strong sense of imagery, the imagery of sound as well as sight, makes his prose leap into life.

In "Mist-Green Oats", for example, the description of the boy's aching feet and how he eases them by taking off his shoes and rubbing his feet in the grass is utterly vivid:

> ... Such immeasurable sweet pain he had never known. At first he could scarcely bear to raise his weary feet from the depth of the grass. Presently he would lift one at a time in a strange and heavy dance, for the pleasure it was putting it down again among the cool soft blades. The lowering sun variegated the green of the different kinds of evergreen trees back of the house, of which he always confused the names. Something of beauty which, it seemed, must have been left out of it or which he had forgotten, appeared in the closing day. Something was changed, perhaps. He did not know how long he had been there, scrubbing his soles about like brushes in the grass, and regretfully hopping, until he remembered that the men would be coming in for their supper at any minute. Beginning to wonder whether anyone had witnessed his movements, he went into the house and replaced his shoes.

Or consider the following passage:

> He went out into the dusk. Innumerable crickets joined voices to produce a trill. A wind was blowing and he sniffed it grate-

> fully. "As fresh — as fresh, as on the sea," he muttered, slouching toward the barn. The cattle were in the yard, spotting the gloom. He could hear their windy coughing sigh, which was at once contrasted with the loud drumming snort of a horse as he burrowed about in the hay of his manger. The closed stable was loud with the grinding of jaws on the tough dried stems.

This evocation of landscape through all the pores of the senses is what makes Knister's short stories so memorable. The other haunting element is the structure of the stories: their movement with great ease from the authorial-objective point of view to the subjective inner eye of the protagonist. And finally there is the effect of the inconsequential, ambiguous series of endings to the stories. Here Knister could offer a lesson to Callaghan, who presses home his point *ad nauseum*. Knister's "point" is hard to come by. We are left with the question: just what does the story mean? And that is perhaps why there will be many more interpretations beyond mine, and beyond Gnarowski's.

CATEGORICALLY SPEAKING

W. H. New

JOHN MOSS, *Patterns of Isolation*. McClelland & Stewart, $4.95.

AT THE OPENING of his chapter on "Immigrant Exile", John Moss enunciates the belief that constantly underlies his book of criticism. Differentiating Canada from the United States, he writes:

> Canada is a name to which adheres a complex mosaic of histories and geographies. It is a place, a landscape. Dreams and ideas have always been in the order of what to do with it. Being such a vast space, it has always demanded expansive schemes to make it seem less so.

It is just such an expansive scheme that *Patterns of Isolation* attempts to provide. Proceeding on three main fronts, Moss samples Canadian prose writers from Frances Brooke to the present and organizes them into groups on the basis of what he identifies as their cultural attitude and thematic preoccupation (Garrison, Frontier, Colonial, and Immigrant Exile); he notes certain recurrent features of Canadian fiction (Indian lovers, illegitimate births, fool-saints, regionalism, and ironic sensibilities); and he appends to his basic structure some fairly detailed critical readings of a dozen works he considers particularly significant (*As For Me and My House*, *The Nymph and the Lamp*, *Swamp Angel*, and others). Along the way he offers incidental quarrels with six other critics (Frye, Jones, Eggleston, Pacey, Atwood, and Ronald Sutherland), arresting autobiographical asides, and capsule judgments that range from the provocative to the stale.

It is for the grand design it attempts, and for the provocation it erratically provides, that the book deserves to be read. Its accomplishment lies in its efforts to synthesize current approaches to English-Canadian fiction rather than to chart new pathways, and its originality lies in its pervading sense of *personal* discovery rather than in the conclusions it reaches. Moss draws his appreciation of garrisons

and landscapes from Frye and his appreciation of irony from Watters and Ross. His book's thematic organization bears a generic relationship with that of Atwood's *Survival* and Waterston's *Survey*. But though he openly declares his reasons for not dealing with French-language fiction (English and French works "participate in distinctly separable traditions which only occasionally converge"), Sutherland and Warwick have supplied leads to Quebec literature that he could well have pursued in his effort to classify garrison, frontier, and colonial exiles.

Patterns of Isolation is bound to get an ambivalent reception — probably cooler than Moss deserves, considering the difficulties involved in compiling any individual history. Readers accustomed already to the judgments in it, particularly if they miss the synthesizing process in which Moss asks them to share, will not feel instructed; readers seeking instruction in an area they do not yet know will find Atwood's book, however misleading it might be, livelier and easier to follow; the readers who are likely to be most satisfied are those halfway between, who want a structure for the ideas which their preliminary readings in Canadian literature and criticism have led them to glimpse.

Of the problems besetting this book, the most enervating is the author's style. The first 37 pages, for example, contain redundancies, awkward phrasing, and repetitive sound patterns that interfere with one's reading:

> The preceding paragraph is almost verbatim the same as the concluding paragraph. . . .

> But, of course, Canada remains a place of exile for Rivers and Emily, for whom consummation is concomitant with a return to England. . . .

> The frontier is a context, relatively uncomplicated, in which duality consists of a single vision of reality confronted by itself as in the concave reflection of an encompassing mirror. . . .

> A combustion of isolation without alienation allows them to recognize the peculiar quality of their frontier environment as well as fall in love with each other.

Moss is capable of much better writing than these excerpts indicate — his anecdotal memoir of his grandmother Isobel Cameron is a case in point — but the flaws are too numerous to ignore. They particularly burden the opening section, creating a barrier for all but the most dedicated readers, and they are accompanied there by a rash of consistent misspellings. One of Lowry's titles is inaccurately rendered every time it is mentioned, and two of his characters are misnamed. It is hard to know whether to fault Moss for these and the other inaccuracies, or his editor at McClelland & Stewart. The cumulative effect, in any case, is one of carelessness, which detracts from the study. Responsibility for the overall tone might similarly be divided. Moss sometimes comes across as thesis-writer and editorial-writer rather than critic. The fragments of critical quarrel, for example, are not developed enough to be useful or interesting, and could well have been edited out.

Problems also arise in connection with the judgments and the method of approach. Though Moss's enthusiasm for Frances Brooke and Howard O'Hagan proves infectious, his even greater claims for Thomas Raddall's *The Nymph and the Lamp* ("the first rank of excellence") do not convince. And if he offers some of the most helpful observations yet to appear on Rudy Wiebe's work, and some of the only comments on Hugh Garner's, he

fails (as have many before him) to come adequately to terms with the novels of Robertson Davies. Moss's methodology has much to do with these difficulties. He is committed to decribing patterns, which is a perfectly sound critical occupation. But occasionally — schematic critiques all run this danger — a work that fits a pattern is identified, in a transition that may even be unconscious, as *therefore* "good".

The categories he establishes as the typical frames of reference for Canadian novelists are themselves interesting. A "garrison" mentality occurs when a writer sees a new world through alien eyes, a "frontier" mentality when he sees the new world as chaos, a "colonial" mentality when he tries to redefine the local in old world terms, and an "immigrant" mentality when he tries to reconcile some old world sensibilities with the physical and psychological landscapes of the new. But categories become containers, while the writers themselves beg not to be confined. Moss places Lowry and Brooke in the "garrison", for example, though Lowry, particularly, lives in a "frontier" too, and as an "immigrant".

Even more interesting is the basis for the book's overall structure, the link between the categories themselves and the comments on regionalism, landscape, and particular novels. Moss voices this assumption most directly when writing about Sheila Watson and Charles Bruce. Both of them, he concludes,

> build the patterns of moral and physical isolation, the conditions of human existence, from those of the natural world. Both redeem their characters from the ultimate oblivion of isolation through a sense of community imposed by the conditions of their natural surroundings.

Moss sees Canadian society, in other words, as a moral structure, its *patterns* of isolation establishing a communal framework. The impulse of the book carries Moss from critical observation into social reflection, therefore; the patterning is important to him as a guide to "the processes of our emergence into national being". For that reason it is all the more unhappy that his categories have trapped him so often, for they affect the implicit social comment which his literary scheme carries.

One part of Moss's mind rejects "imposed" systems, for (about Atwood's *Survival*) he complains: "Literary analyses according to the dictates of rigid systems tend to omit much and to distort what they do reveal". But ironically his own book ends up not describing but prescribing. The change of a single word in the "almost verbatim" paragraphs at the beginning and end of his book epitomizes this inconsistency. In the introduction Moss writes that no set of patterns other than this one "better displays the indigenous character of the Canadian community"; at the end of the book we are advised that none "better defines" it. The book does not bridge the chasm between "displays" and "defines", but more puzzling still is why it should ever have attempted to try.

The point is that Moss's first assertion may or may not be acceptable; it depends on the extent of a reader's agreement with his *literary* judgments. But the second one, because of what it implies about Canadian *society*, must firmly be resisted. Mapmakers can draw political boundaries, and societies can abide by them. To accept, however, the principle that Canadian culture and character can be *defined*, placed in a category, given ideological edges, is to deny its essentially

flexible nature, restrict its capacity for change, and give it what Moss himself calls the "codified" consciousness of the United States. Patterns certainly exist in Canadian literature, but they ought not, because they exist at any one time, to become cultural dictators. Nor can good writers ever be so controlled.

GETTING THE VOICES RIGHT

Adrian Mitchell

DENNIS T. PATRICK SEARS, *The Lark in the Clear Air*. McClelland & Stewart, $6.95.
SAROS COWASJEE, *Goodbye to Elsa*. New Press, $5.95.
MATT COHEN, *The Disinherited*. McClelland & Stewart, $8.95.

DENNIS T. PATRICK SEARS never quite decides just what kind of novel he wants to write, and what could by the signs have been a very fine novel is marred by a fundamental disjunction. There is much that is charming in *The Lark in the Clear Air*, an account of the events of a year or so in the life of Danny Mulcahy, coming to terms with the adult world in a remote northern Ontario farming community. Danny is responsive to the sweet sounds and sights about him, and for the most part Sears manages to keep the texture of the descriptive asides to an exquisite thinness, a clarity or lucidity of vision that is appropriate to the title. But for all that charm it is perhaps a little too aware of itself as charming; and it is this self-awareness I think that creates the difficulties.

Sears sets his novel at a safe temporal as well as spatial distance. The year is 1931, though the Depression is not really in evidence because, as Danny observes, he has always known hard times. It is the nostalgic distance of Laurie Lee's *Cider with Rosie* above all else; but Sears mixes up his Lee with the burly roistering of the wild Irish boyo, and like so much of the determined Irish cult in writing, Sears assumes that Irishness is fascinating because he finds it fascinating. The real sentimentality of the novel is not in the images of bird flight or landscape, it is in the self-congratulatory admiration of things Irish. The Irish are all great giants of good-looking fellows. They have a fierce sense of justice, and so on. "You Irish certainly have a strongly developed vein of poetry, don't you?" says the nice young schoolteacher. That isn't really examined in the novel; it is roundly embraced. (So, one might add, is the nice young schoolteacher, also with Irish gusto.) Does Sears mean the lilting Irish eloquence which, the way he handles it, becomes a compulsive narrative flow pursuing its own emphases as they occur? Or does he mean the sweet-sad view of life, the denial of romantic promise by the intrusion of hard realities? Sears manages to capture what is I suppose a nice Irish flavour in the diction of his characters, but most of the narrative is in a different idiom. In any case, Danny's observations tend to be too determinedly colourful.

At one point in the novel Danny ventures out on to the Canadian Shield: "depending on how you looked at it, it was a country of god-forsaken wasteland or the prettiest place on earth." That is Sears' intention, to show how perceptions

vary according to the angle of vision. The scattered references to birds call attention to the same thing; the meadowlark sings and flies into the clear air of the day not to move men with its beauty but to stake a claim to the territory it needs. The beautiful and the belligerent are the same thing. Unfortunately Sears, through Uncle Mick, is too inclined to draw the patent moral. And what he hopes to show as the complexity of life is not sustained imaginatively. It becomes an oscillating rather than a coordinated vision of life. In the same way, there is an unresolved conflict between the terseness of Danny and the run of his narration; a similar inconsistent shift between the taciturnity of the character and the surrender to literacy. The dangerous invitation to sentimentality is partly kept in check by Danny's maverick toughness — but there are some dreadful descents, especially towards the end.

What is best here is the strong sense of remoteness, of a small community of people locked into a particular locality; and moments of genuine wistful beauty, as well as of riotous gusto. It is a novel that fills in a gap in the Canadian literary scene, a light and entertaining book that is content to be not too ambitious. Sears listens to words and he can tell a vigorous story, but he has not achieved the control of an overriding vision.

Saros Cowasjee's *Goodbye to Elsa* is a very different novel, yet it bumps into some of the same difficulties. It too tells its story in the first person; but Tristan Elliott is a much more riddling character than Danny Mulcahy. He is an ambiguously pathetic figure, who both invites and evades our sympathy. Although in his loneliness he is taken up with self-pity of a kind that makes him more than a little ridiculous, he is also harrowingly lonely. There is real distress as well as posturing.

Tristan Elliott is an Anglo-Indian teaching history in Canada ("a country where there were more professors than janitors"). He has no special attachment to Canada or Canadians, or to any other place for that matter. By birth he is neither English nor Indian; his childhood in India and his student days at Leeds University (the best thing in the novel by far, with a nice control of comic incident) show him as skirting the edges of life. Tristan emerges as a strangely peripheral personality; and Cowasjee's style reinforces this impression. The novel, that is, seems to work only at the literal level, not as imaginative conception. Its wit, its symbols and allusions are all carefully placed, but they fail finally to promote any central meaning. "At the core of my being there is a strain of insincerity," Tristan admits, and one is inclined to think this is true of the novel too. Its ambiguities are in the end more sardonic than comic. What exactly is the tone of "the Canadians are so neutral. . . . They generally take the colour from their surroundings", for example?

Cowasjee's real talent is for caricature and parody. He captures in the rhythms of his prose the rapid patter of Indian English, the quick transitions of thought and, satirically, the polite changes of opinion, especially in the sequence of events at Leeds. There, Tristan is without question comically ignorant and unaware of his foolishness. Later, when he sometimes pretends to see things with naive simplicity, we are uneasy about the significance of that affectation for the character. The summary of academic politics and the lobbying power of the Faculty Wives' Association is in the vein of Lea-

cock's not-quite-so-harmless irony, but is Cowasjee merely indulging himself at the expense of his narrator and the story line, or is this digression to be seen as a sign of Tristan's growing instability? The force of Cowasjee's satiric wit keeps breaking through the presentation of character.

The novel has its more serious side too. Tristan keeps a weather eye, his one good eye, on God. Increasingly he quotes biblical texts; more and more he prays to God; and more and more he determines to pre-empt God's authority. He plans to kill himself: and he also plans the ritual sacrifice of a girl, Marie (who has a boyfriend Joe, a carpenter — the proffered allegory seems pointless). That he shoots instead Marie's identical twin sister, or maybe does not shoot her, is certainly related to the fact that he has vision in only one eye; but does it mean anything? His ultimate design, however obsessive, is frustrated. Life does not go according to plan. But since on the way to his savage and despairing end he has been such a memorable comic butt, we find it a wrench to take seriously his testament of absurdity.

Matt Cohen is a very much more accomplished novelist. *The Disinherited* is a more complete novel; it manages the full realization of character in a situation. Where the other two novels are controlled by the demand of the narrative current, Cohen's eye picks up the details, notices the reflections and odd angles; character, not action, takes precedence. It is a slower novel, ruminative but not ponderous, suiting its pace not just to the rhythm of the central character, Richard Thomas, a farmer in Eastern Ontario, but more astutely to the quality of his mind. It leads us, from inside Richard Thomas's thoughts, to those events in his past which he still does not quite understand, and to those significances which he understands by apprehension rather than comprehension. He is not an insensitive man, but the quick of him has been thickened by the slow routine of works and days, and coarsened by the legacy of family and neighbourhood.

It is a very skilful piece of writing, a beautifully sustained reconstruction of the bewildering context of domestic tension, family history and various external factors which define and limit Richard's awareness; and throws against his inward life the subbornly separate life of a body giving in to a series of heart attacks. Cohen is honest to the emotions of his characters, and sensitive to the rhythms and speech of his chosen locality. He gets the voices right, as Margaret Laurence would say.

For most of the novel Richard Thomas is in a semi-private room in a Kingston hospital, recollecting his thoughts and feelings in what little tranquillity he can find between visiting hours and the ministrations of the night-duty nurse, and balancing that remembrance of life against the presence of pain and the imminence of death. Although it seems to him at first that he has a choice to make, whether to die or not, the decision has already been made. That is in keeping with the way that the whole of Richard Thomas's life has happened to him. He has inherited his life, not mastered it — and to that extent he is in fact disinherited.

This is the life-style of all the Thomases. Each generation imposes some kind of disinheritance on the next. Erik, Richard's son, hopes not to inherit the farm. He is less successfully portrayed, not because he is a weaker character, nor because he has

attempted to break away from some Brangwen notion of the land to the city, but because Cohen takes for granted too many assumptions about him. That is, Erik's weakness is not always interesting — it becomes often (especially early in the novel) tiresome attitudinising. There is no quarrel with Cohen's decision to make him negative, but Erik is disastrously inarticulate to himself. And there are some cheap points scored off him extraneous to the real concerns of the novel.

In his previous publications Cohen has shown that he is a gifted writer, that he has plenty of imaginative flair. *The Disinherited* begins for him the process of tough discipline. In some things he is over-inventive, in recounting the adopted son's childhood experience for example. It in no way *accounts* for Brian, a minor *Straw Dogs* character who might have been all the more convincing for not being 'explained'. But that is a small objection to a novel of remarkable carefulness and perception. Cohen looks to become a very considerable novelist indeed.

A BROKEN WAND?

Audrey Thomas

MARGARET LAURENCE, *The Diviners*. McClelland & Stewart, $8.95.

IT IS IMPOSSIBLE for me to pretend to any sort of objectivity when reviewing this novel, at least in terms of its content. On page 147 Morag (college girl) is talking to her friend Ella: (They have been discussing the problem of being brainy, literate young women.)

> I know [Morag says]. And yet I envy girls like Susie Trevor so much I damn near hate them. I want to be glamorous and adored and get married and have kids. I still try to kid myself that I don't want that. But I do. I want all that. *As well.* All I want is everything.

That's it, that's exactly it. We want the freedom, leisure, patience, energy and above all opportunity to be both artists and women, even mothers if we choose. We don't want to be told by Leonard Woolf (however much we might have longed for his support — and his press — at times) that our minds/bodies/whatever are too fragile to bear children. We don't want to be called "child" or "little one" by the men we admire. We don't want to be *humoured*. And yet:

> If only there were someone to talk it out with. Someone to share the pain I guess. And maybe she [the married girl in the flat upstairs in London] is indeed worrying unnecessarily. As probably I am. But you would just like somebody to say — God, love, I *KNOW* and I'm worried too.

Morag is caught in the traditional cultural trap which says that "somebody" has to be male and this may alienate her from many feminists. It is from the males — Christie Logan, her stepfather, Jules Tonnerre, her first lover and father of her child Pique, Brooke, her English professor husband, Dan McRaith, her Scottish artist-lover, Royland, the old man who divines water, that Morag learns about life, about herself. The one exception to this is Mrs. Gerson, her girl-friend's mother, who is both loving and intellec-

tual (but a widow so maybe she has more time and energy?).

In spite of her métis lover, her half-breed child, and that child's agonized cry that "you've never had somebody tell you your mother was crazy because she lived out here alone and wrote dirty books and had cooky people coming out from the city to visit," Morag is in fact a pretty conventional heroine. Perhaps that is part of her charm. The "romantic" elements of the book (making the stepfather a garbage collector, the lover a métis, the final guide a diviner) are not nearly as strong as the realistic elements: Morag unwilling to clean a fish and throwing it back in the water, unable to give up smoking in spite of her terrible cough, unhappy about the fact that she is "sometimes so god-damned jealous of [her daughter's and her daughter's present lover's] youth and happiness and sex that I can't see straight" (and so gets up early and slams around in the kitchen), guilty about not "really" living in the country, not "really" going back to nature (she does not garden, she has an electric stove and uses instant coffee, takes a taxi to the nearest village to get her groceries, is afraid of the weeds in the river). All this is so good and so true.

We learn very little about the creative process from Morag — she doesn't understand it herself. (It seems to me important that the Gunn clan has "No Crest, No Motto, No War Cry".) All she knows is that she has to be a writer. This is the main difference between Morag and Stacey Cameron in *The Fire Dwellers.* Stacey's life is totally caught up in her children (and husband); Morag, who is very like Stacey in her doubts, fears, desires, has this other side. "I've got my work to do," she says, "to take my mind off life." The fact that her very first book is accepted and from then on it seems to be smooth sailing (from a literary point of view) is maybe a little improbable. Maybe we would like Morag to struggle more, as a writer, the way she has to struggle as a person. She is never Down and Out in London or Paris or New York. (She also never gets pregnant except the one time when she wants to.) She finds her loghouse by the river on the first try. She has had, perhaps, the "everything" she wanted, in the end.

Although the book is set in the present, in Ontario, Margaret Lawrence weaves in the past through the tales which Christie Logan and Jules Tonnerre tell Morag while she is young. Christie's tales are bardic in language and romantic in tone, and have mostly to do with Piper Gunn, Morag's mythical ancestor, who led a group of highlanders to Canada. Jules' tales are of an equally mythic character, about his grandfather, "Rider Tonnerre", who participated in the métis uprisings. As Morag grows in historical knowledge, she discovers that the tales are indeed fiction (albeit based on fact) but also discovers that it doesn't really matter. She then repeats the tales to her own child, just as the child's father — and later Pique herself — makes songs out of these ancestors' past exploits. The "diviners" then become of course not just Royland and Morag, the "official" creator of the book, but also Christie, Jules and Pique. Dan MacRaith, as painter, is another one.

The image of the water, of the river which flows both ways, is a good one for the artist and particularly good for Morag — the artist as woman. The diviner's rod becomes Prospero's Wand, only held perhaps by Miranda. To dowse means to

divine, but is also means (dowse, douse) to extinguish (by water usually, I think). Royland's power has been extinguished by the end of the book. It was a gift from the gods, and it is gone. Morag wonders when/if this will happen to her. Margaret Laurence tells us this is probably her last book of fiction. Prospero/Miranda deliberately breaks the divining rod. Why? The swallows go but they return. It seems a strange, gratuitous gesture from a novelist whose keen eye and ear have ranged over such wide territories. Any way, I'm not sure her kind of divining is something you can quit before the gift actually goes. Maybe it has gone, now; maybe that's what she's trying to tell us. For myself, I suspect she's still got a Back Forty somewhere in the rich acreage of her mind. It may be laying fallow at the moment but it will not be, I think, for very long.

MAGPIES AND NIGHTINGALES

Christopher Levenson

ELI MANDEL, *Crusoe: Poems New and Selected.* Anansi, $5.95.
ELI MANDEL, *Stony Plain.* Press Porcépic.

THE PUBLICATION within the same year of a 'new and selected' volume and a new collection allows Mandel's readers an unusually convenient basis for both prospect and retrospect. Not that the poems represented in *Crusoe* (and chosen by Margaret Atwood and Dennis Lee) have the same sense of completion as those in, say, Miriam Waddington's *Driving Home*, but the familiar major themes recur under different poetic guises thoughout the book — ideas of madness and sanity, the exploration of an often savage subconscious, and the search for spiritual and moral standards. These are often conveyed through the re-invigoration of mythical archetypes but curiously, despite some notable successes, Mandel's many talents when mingled often smoulder rather than ignite.

Perhaps the very calm and collectedness with which he writes of the uneasy, haunted and terror-stricken has something to do with it. Certainly the poems in *Crusoe* that succeed best are those like "Houdini", "Landscape" or "The Speaking Earth" that proceed in terms of a single unifying metaphor or situation carefully worked through or, like "Metamorphosis", juxtapose first and later reactions to the same situation. Presentation as myth, on the other hand, often has the effect of diminishing the rawness of his raw material. By comparison with later work, the admired "Orpheus", for instance, seems literary, whereas Mandel's general direction has increasingly moved away from definition, both semantic and metrical, and towards the open and inclusive. As he writes in "The Milk of Paradise", "I put away this last unfinished poem/ to think with trouble of a friend/ who wrote me words and whose words I scorned." The desire for greater inclusiveness necessitates a more overt personal involvement in the events of the poem and leads Mandel to an increasingly direct linking of the forms of public vio-

lence and horror and Mandel's own familial but representative experience as a mid-twentieth century Jew.

Within the rhythmic and syntactic texture the movement towards simplicity, even starkness, of statement is parallelled by a breaking down of formal structures so as to accommodate suggestions and hesitations. The earlier poems in *Crusoe* often lack rhythmic interest and gain little by being read aloud. There are, of course, exceptions, such as "The Fire Place" with its very effective use of almost Blakean rhymed quatrains, but usually the voice is informal, putting on no airs and yet not colloquial. These poems' clotted nature is due partly to long sentences made up of a sequence of subordinate clauses and phrases which, in "Estevan, Saskatchewan" for example, do not build dramatic suspense as Yeats' do, but interlock and complicate the prose meaning. The fact that they are written for the most part in complete statements also affects the tone of the poems: the resultant air of authority tends to the aphoristic, the images more often conceptual than tactile.

Stony Plain, a beautifully designed and printed volume, confirms the shift presaged in the last poems of *Crusoe* and suggests a turning away from the prophetic "visionary" ecstasy that John Ower predicted in *Canadian Literature 42,* while the mythopoeic element has retreated in favour of poems that are more overtly political and contemporary. A realistic awareness of twentieth century horror is dominant —

> an iron time survival
> a style learned in the light
> of our own extinction
>
> ("The death of Don Quixote")

but the tendency now is to see these horrors more in terms of artistic or literary exempla (Quixote, Wilde, Camus; Bosch, Goya, Velasquez) or in such historical figures as Ho Chi Minh, who is treated laconically in the Auden manner. More of the surface paraphernalia of the contemporary world is present, so much so that at times one wonders if Mandel is not sacrificing too much to a rather unsubtle form of contemporary "relevance". "For Jimmy Hendrix and Janis Joplin", for instance, comments:

> . . . I loved you Janis
> as I love those whom terror seized
> for its own poetry: Roethke and Agee,
> Dylan, Crane, Jarrell and Sylvia
> dead at last in the oven of her own head
> not those whom politics silenced or made
> well
> nor the killers on horizons who make guns
> their songs and celebrate the will
> but drunk, crazed, doped, defeated
> by the wild mistake that believes its own art

One appreciates the sentiment but the poem has too much of a manifesto quality; its need to make a particular point is too blatant. For the most part, however, these poems are not political in any limiting, propagandistic sense: the foci remain power, evil, responsibility, while the relationship to public events is that of the committed private individual, not the spokesman.

In terms also of that crucial index of poetic vitality, verse movement, *Stony Plain* marks a real advance. Although in "Nerja" and "Sea Things" the Black Mountain-like self-consciousness of the layout and the amount of emphasis that one has to give to almost every word undermines the impact of the totality, generally the suppleness and control of the pace of these poems by spacing and line breaks together with a corresponding dislocation of formal syntax results in

greater subtlety, especially of ironic effects, as is witnessed by the ending of "For Ann: on the question of Franco's successor":

> knowledge no longer a burden
> we know freedom
> songs.

Most poets are as much magpies as nightingales, displaying a fondness for bright words, unusual sounds and unexpected connotations. Mandel's ostensible subject matter has always been electic. Now his experiments with syntactic dislocation have made it easier for him to adopt new poetic strategies such as the "found poem" (e.g. "First Political Speech" or "Manner of Suicide"), the ironic juxtaposition of official jargon and personal reminiscence found in "Pictures in an Institution", and the sort of deadpan impersonation, a revamped, less naturalistic version of the dramatic monologue, represented here by "The President speaks to the Nation" and "Political Speech (for PET)" — variants perhaps of the more heroic persona of that fine poem "From the North Saskatchewan".

Structurally no less than thematically, then, Mandel's latest poetry seems in a state of flux and openness. Above all, it reveals a steadily increasing potential for combining subtlety and strength.

THE AMATEUR ANARCHIST

Fred Cogswell

PETER HUGHES, *George Woodcock*. McClelland & Stewart, $1.25.

GEORGE WOODCOCK has been for a long time an extremely busy man at a number of things, and Peter Hughes in No. 13 of the Canadian Writers Series has been given only sixty pages — however, marginless and minuscule in print they may be — in which to deal with him as man, polemicist, biographer, historian, writer of travel books, poet, literary critic, and magazine editor. He has chosen, wisely under the circumstances, to write four articles linked together by a general introduction. Each article deals with at least one aspect of Woodcock's work and the general effect is one of chronological progress and of cumulative effect, although it is sometimes difficult to determine how much the ideas under discussion at any given time are Hughes' and how much they are George Woodcock's.

The thread that ties the articles together, and presumably the thread that unifies George Woodcock's career, is anarchism, and before proceeding further with this review I ought to give its readers an indication of my own bias in the matter. As far as I am concerned there are two kinds of anarchists, amateur anarchists, whom I regard as true anarchists, and professional anarchists, whom I do not consider to be anarchists at all. These latter, and their views, form most of the themes developed by Hughes in this book, and in it he seems to be asking for sympathy for a cause that does not deserve such a response. Let me explain.

The amateur anarchist is the man or woman, extremely rare, who does not wish to rule others or to be ruled himself but because he knows that for most of mankind the chief delight in living lies in the power struggle, he respects their value

systems and accommodates himself as well as he can to the mess they make of the world, creating oases of independence only where this can be done without infringing upon the rights of others. Freedom for him is a series of epiphanies, and the joy of these epiphanies gives him the strength to survive the slavery of routine and conformity on the one hand and the creative energy to transform his epiphanies into art on the other hand. Like St. Francis and Jesus Christ he realizes that his true kingdom is not to be found in this world but in the world of the spirit.

Between this, the amateur anarchist, and the professional, there is a small but significant difference. The latter feels it his duty to save the world for anarchy by proselytizing. He thinks he is being his brother's keeper and knows what is better for his brother than his brother does for himself. His good intentions in reality mask a will to dominate, to unify in accordance to his will. His action betrays the true principles of anarchy. That is why I do not feel sorry for the anarchists in their struggles with either the Right or the Left. If the principles of Christ, when forced by either peaceful or other persuasions upon others not naturally fitted to receive them, become hopelessly perverted, what guarantee have the professional anarchists that their work is in any sense worthwhile? Defeat would only involve themselves and followers in further frustration and ruin. Victory would merely inflict another tyranny upon a world that cannot exist without tyranny in any case.

I see George Woodcock as a man and a writer who began as a professional anarchist of the kind described above and who has gradually transferred himself to an amateur or "true" anarchist. Consequently, I have little patience with Peter Hughes' attempts to show the significance of anarchism either by drawing parallels between Godwin's time and our own or by showing the wisdom of some of its predictions, or by showing how it has suffered by persecution from the Left even more than from the Right. All these things in so far as they affect my life are a waste of time.

I am repelled also by Peter Hughes' attempt to deal with the disillusion which World War II produced as if it were a universal phenomena. It is true that its effects on Woodcock and his friends were as described but Hughes neglects to mention that World War II brought millions of people raised in the depression their first meaningful employment in life, that it brought many families, through rationing and price control, the nearest thing to luxurious living they had ever known, and that the cameraderies established in the shadow of bombing was a social fact whose disappearance after the war is ever to be regretted.

Equally distasteful to me is the attempt of Hughes, and in this instance, Woodcock, to be derogative of the activity of the state, particularly with respect to education. As one of thousands who would not have received an education had not the government paid my expenses, and as one who has taught in a public institution with no greater curtailment of his freedom than a private institution would have insisted upon, I must protest such passages as the following which in no way represent what I have, without interference, attempted to do:

> Bureaucrats outside and inside the universities impose on those trying to learn and teach the duty of increasing the gross national product, keeping the young out of

> the labour market until companies hire them, showing that the national or provincial state of affairs is the shape toward which all creation moves, and supporting the building of academic empires dedicated to the stamping out of thought.

The above statement is Hughes' not Woodcock's, but if it were really true, in more than a superficial sense, I doubt whether Hughes or Woodcock, any more than myself, would have taught in a university.

After allowance has been made for the above strictures, I must admit that Hughes has written well, sometimes brilliantly, with respect to Woodcock's achievement as a biographer of Godwin, Kropotkin, Wilde, and Aphra Behn; as a historian of anarchy and of Greek influence in India; as a writer of polemic essays; and as the author of travel books in which the writer's knowledge of the place visited and its history is united by the point of view of a humane and civilized anarchism. What is disappointing, however, is that Woodcock's biography of George Orwell, which Hughes approves of as his best work of a biographical nature, gets almost no treatment at all in any of the essays in this book. This is particularly regrettable in that this age has seen few, if any, writers as wise, intelligent, and honest as George Orwell.

On page 51 of the article entitled "The Imaginative Person" there is one bad *faux-pas*. Fourteen lines are quoted and referred to as being "irregular ten syllable lines." This is astonishing since the basic pattern of the lines in question is twelve syllables and only one line in fourteen in fact has ten syllables. To redeem this, however, the article contains four pages of as good appreciative criticism of George Woodcock's poetry as I have ever read.

Hughes' treatment of Woodcock as an editor, critic, and anthologist of Canadian material is almost equally good. It is marred by the occurrence, and reiteration of a statement so patently false that it defeats its purpose despite its good intentions:

> And in the past ten years, apart from all his other work, he virtually created Canadian literature through the journal he founded under that name.

Literature is created by writers, and what writers write for are readers, publishers, and money, not reviews by critics in a magazine. In fact, it might be more reasonably argued that the literary flowering during the last ten years is more the product of the money the Canada Council has been giving to authors and publishers to encourage their efforts than through any reviews or articles in *Canadian Literature*, however good these may be.

Peter Hughes' *George Woodcock* is not hack-work any more than its subject is a hack-writer, and its reading is an exhilarating experience in which feelings of delight, frustration, exasperation, and admiration succeed one another as the eye hastens through its pages. There is one constant throughout and it is a good one. The varying feelings apply to Hughes. The vision that the book gives of Woodcock never changes.

books in review

THE CAN HALF

CLARA THOMAS, *Our Nature-Our Voices*. new press, $3.75 paper, $8.95 hardcover.

ELIZABETH WATERSTON, *Survey*. Methuen, $4.75 paper, $8.50 cloth.

IN ROBERTSON DAVIES' *Leaven of Malice* (1954), Dr. Sengreen, the head of the English department at Waverley University, advises Solly Bridgetower to " 'jump right into Amcan, . . . particularly the Canadian end of it.' " Solly, as it turns out, decides to travel without Charles Heavysege, "his Passport to Academic Preferment". In the twenty years since Davies wrote *Leaven of Malice,* however, many Canadians have jumped into "Amcan", especially "the Can half", and produced many books about Canadian literature. Two such books, Clara Thomas's *Our Nature — Our Voices* and Elizabeth Waterston's *Survey,* have recently been published.

To a certain extent, these two works are similar. Each is written by a Canadian professor of English at a Canadian university. Each professor has taught Canadian literature courses for many years and published several scholarly and critical works on the subject. Both books are aimed primarily at those who are not very advanced in their study of "Can lit". Clara Thomas notes specifically that she has chosen her material "with an eye to the likelihood of [its] appeal to students, particularly of the secondary school age group." Both books contain pictures and bibliographies as well as essays. One purpose of each is to trace the development of Canadian literature from its beginning to the present. The subtitle of *Our Nature — Our Voices* is "A Guidebook to English-Canadian Literature"; that of *Survey,* "A Short History of Canadian Literature". But although both books survey "Can lit", in the end each maps out a different route through its territory.

In *Our Nature — Our Voices,* Professor Thomas directs her reader down a fairly traditional road of literary criticism. Her book is divided into three parts: "The Settlement: To 1867"; "Canada and the Empire: Confederation to World War I"; and "The Modern Period 1918-1970". She begins each part with an essay that summarizes the main events of the age she is chronicling. Then, in a series of essays, each on a different English-Canadian author, she describes briefly the life and main works of the writer and adds a selected bibliography of primary material by, and secondary sources on, the writer she is discussing. The essays are interspersed with photographs of Canadian people, places, and events.

Objections can be made to both this kind of survey and this particular guide. The difficulty of saying something valuable about several centuries of Canadian history, over two hundred years of Canadian literature in English, and many authors in less than two hundred pages leads Professor Thomas into several almost inevitable traps. A few of her statements are wrong: John Richardson's *Wacousta,* for example, was first published in England in 1832, not in the United States in 1833, as Professor

Thomas states. Although she describes the life and works of fifty authors, she omits others who might just as well have been included. Such writers as Thomas McCulloch, Oliver Goldsmith, William Kirby, and, for that matter, Charles Heavysege are all left out of Part 1. Several important modern authors are missing from Part 3, although this is partly due to the fact that a second volume of *Our Nature — Our Voices* dealing exclusively with "The Modern Period" is being prepared by Frank Davey. The length and the quality of the content, and style of the essays, vary a great deal. Professor Thomas tends to overuse such terms as "engagement" and "levels" in all the essays, but both her matter and her manner sparkle more brilliantly when she discusses such authors as Anna Jameson whose life she has studied in detail and whose works she obviously admires. Finally, the placement of the pictures among the essays seems a bit odd. The opening paragraphs of the essay on "Ralph Connor", for instance, share the same page as a photograph of a theatre troupe travelling to the Yukon, whereas the essay on Robert Service is flanked by photos of Petrolia, Ontario, an electric streetcar in Ottawa, an industrial plant, and a tanner's shop.

Still, despite these objections, *Our Nature — Our Voices* does achieve its goal of providing "a beginning, somewhere for curiosity and enjoyment to start from — not an ending, a final summation or a solemn pronouncement." *Our Nature — Our Voices* lets the reader discover quickly who some influential Canadian authors are, what they have written, and how they can be further studied. By describing rather than categorizing the writers and their works, Professor Thomas allows the reader to make his own connections and to discover his own patterns of themes and images in Canadian literature. While references are made to Canadian literature in French, the concentration on English-Canadian literature helps the reader digest the more familiar half of his bicultural pie. The photographs also help him see aspects of Canadian life which have influenced the authors and their works.

Like Clara Thomas in *Our Nature — Our Voices*, Elizabeth Waterston reveals in *Survey* her commitment to "Can lit" and arouses the reader's enthusiasm for it, but she draws in *Survey* a map of its territory different from that sketched by Professor Thomas in her book. *Survey* is a collection of eleven short essays, each on a different theme in Canadian literature. Each is introduced by a picture which depicts an aspect of the theme and concluded by a bibliography of works for its "Further Study." On the first page of each essay, a date, a general title, and a specific title of a work are given, and thus the beginning of the theme in Canadian literature, the theme itself, and a work central to it are suggested. The essays themselves are arranged in a roughly chronological order according to the "age" of the themes. Although she concentrates mostly on English-Canadian literature, in her discussion of each theme Professor Waterston usually considers some Canadian works written in French as well as several written in English. In addition to these essays, she has a "Prologue", an "Interlude", an "Epilogue", a "Survey Chart" that lists important events in American, British, and Canadian history and literature, and an "Index".

As with *Our Nature — Our Voices*, the approach to Canadian literature in *Sur-*

vey and specific statements in it are open to criticism. Literary history recorded according to themes leads almost invariably to some repetition and fragmentation. Frances Brooke's *The History of Emily Montague*, for example, is discussed in the essays on the "Terrain", on "French and English Canada", and on the "Canadian Lady". While in each, the reader catches glimpses of the novel, the thematic approach itself never allows him to see the work as a whole. This approach also leads Professor Waterston to make some rather odd statements. In her essay on "The American Presence," for instance, she says that Haliburton's *Sam Slick* was the first book to "focus centrally" on the use of "dialect for comic effect . . . in a fashion that would become standard in American humour." Although the statement is partly true in that Haliburton did influence American humorists, it is exaggerated because he was also influenced by them, particularly in his use of dialect. In *Survey*, as in *Our Nature — Our Voices*, there are some mistakes in fact, and the quality of the essays varies.

But while these criticisms should warn the reader to beware, they do not lessen the essential value of *Survey*, for it is a witty, intelligent, and sensible book. Professor Waterston has isolated several important themes in Canadian literature, traced their development over a long period of time, through a variety of places, and in the works of many authors. By pulling together the views of several authors on the same theme, she illustrates well the continuity and change in Canadian literature. By providing the reader with a survey of the history of "Can lit" from several angles, she forces him through a subtle workout in optics and a complex exercise of his own wit. Thus, she guides the reader through several "states of metamorphoses" from which, entertained and enlightened, he rather regretfully emerges.

Clara Thomas' *Our Nature — Our Voices* and Elizabeth Waterston's *Survey*, then, are each appealing books. Although the first is more suitable for beginners in Canadian literature, and the second for those who have already taken at least one course in it, both are informative. Neither, of course, is a substitute for the careful reading of Canadian literature itself or the close perusal of such publications as *A Checklist of Canadian Literature*, the *Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature*, the *Literary History of Canada*, or *Canadian Literature*. Each, however, gives the reader a valid "Passport" for his travels in "the Can half" of "Amcan."

MARY JANE EDWARDS

IDENTITY LOST AND FOUND

The Oxford Anthology of Canadian Literature, edited by Robert Weaver and William Toye. Oxford University Press. Cloth $13.50, paper $5.50.

An anthology is a slippery animal, whose real substance can easily elude the reviewer's grasp. One can tot up the figures, stick pins in regional maps, divide outputs by inclusions and come up with a statistical who's who. Or list the familiar names which have been selected out. Or analyze the anthologist's premises, prefaces, or preferences. Anything, in short, but attempt to deal with the real subject of the book.

Faced with the task of reviewing *The Oxford Anthology of Canadian Literature*, I am sorely tempted to carp at details, rather than wrestle with the question of the book's true worth. "We know there are omissions — particularly of some younger writers from Quebec — but here we must plead the old excuse of space limitations" say Messrs. Weaver and Toye, in a statement whose brevity can fairly be described as cavalier. A partial list of "omissions" would include enough stellar talent to form a second, rival, volume. Imagine, if you will, a "Canadian anthology" which omits Buckler, Clark, Engel, Godfrey, Gustafson, Horwood, Kroetsch, Haig-Brown, Lowry, Mitchell, Moore, Watson and Wiebe! (Not to mention that group of writers whose sins against the proprieties include the knack of popular success. Stephen Leacock is permitted one selection by the anthologists. But what of Berton, Burnford, de la Roche, Grey Owl, Montgomery, Mowat and Service? Are we so richly endowed with literary giants that we can afford to ignore those who have done most to make some part of the Canadian experience recognized, not only by ourselves, but by the outside world as well?)

Few anthologies, of course, can afford everyone. Publishing costs must be considered. But editors who find it necessary to restrict admissions would do well to re-examine their basic premises before the red pencilling begins. Should historical curiosities be included at the expense of contemporary worth, for example? And what about the problem of balance? If Pierre Vallieres is to be included, why not Claire Martin? And if Robert Fulford, why not Bruce Hutchison? Surely there are occasions when the anthologist must be prepared to excise a selection, rather than offend against others equally as worthy by including it.

We have all read books which inspire us to pursue their subjects in greater depth. Indeed, Messrs. Weaver and Toye have anticipated this reaction by supplying a list of titles "For Further Reading". What they may not have anticipated, and what I suspect they may have generated in several of their readers, is the impulse to compile an anthology of one's own.

With all this said, I freely admit to a regret that this volume was not available in the fall of 1957, when the first full year's course in Canadian Literature was initiated by R. E. Watters at the University of British Columbia. Our text at that time was the now familiar *Canadian Anthology*, compiled in 1955 by Klinck and Watters (and selling, incidentally, for the same price in hardcover as the paperback edition of *The Oxford Anthology* does today. *Sic transit* economy.)

There were 47 Canadian authors represented in Klinck and Watters, a little better than half of whom have survived to appear in the present volume. The text was supplemented by those novels which we students were able to unearth in Vancouver's used bookstores. (I still own a first edition of *Who Has Seen the Wind*, inscribed by W. O. Mitchell for a lady who, considering the place to which she consigned his work, deserves to be nameless.) Although the course both awakened and stimulated, and conveyed the heady sensation of being in on the ground floor, it left us with a curiously defensive attitude towards writing in Canada. We understood that much of what we had studied was derivative. We knew, also, that some of it was first rate. And we felt an instinctive obligation to

shield both from the scorn and ignorance of others.

Although the kind of Colonel Blimpery which once put us on the defensive is not quite dead, it has been dealt a heavy blow by the publication of this new anthology. There are 80 contributors, dating from the seventeenth century to the present and including 13 whose writing has been translated from the French. Viewed as landscape, their work reaches the height of a respectable plateau, with the odd swampy patch more than compensated for by a number of lofty eminences. No one of sensibility, confronted with the evidence of this volume alone, could deny that Canadian Literature has resoundingly arrived.

Generalizations are risky at best, but I will venture a few:

The bulk of Canadian writing (as represented in this volume) is overwhelmingly middle class.

Few writers are angry; the majority observe, reflect, or imagine without heat.

Writers of the middle rank appear self-conscious, whereas our best writers are merely conscious — or even unaware — of self.

If a single theme dominates the work of the English-speaking writers in this volume, it is the theme of survival, but survival in the sense understood by Sinclair Ross and Margaret Laurence: "man emerges as a creature who can survive — and survive with some remaining dignity." Our French writers, on the other hand, are nearly all influenced by the imminence of death, and of a life beyond it.

And one last, reckless pronouncement: our best imaginative writers, if one can rely on the preferences of Messrs. Weaver and Toye as a guide, are Atwood, Carrier, Davies, Laurence, Layton, Munro, Purdy, Richler and Ross.

Canadians who cherish their culture, however, may decide that the most significant aspect of *The Oxford Anthology* is the sheer size and worth of the remainder, once the cream has been skimmed off. The integrity and perception evidenced by so many of our lesser writers seems to me a clear indication of literary vitality.

If, on our literary landscape, we should seek a watershed, I think we can find it in the work of Hugh MacLennan. Once MacLennan had tackled the major social themes of contemporary Canadian life, the old search for identity problem began a gradual decline. Today, if the work of our best writers be a fair criterion, the identity problem no longer exists. And as if to demonstrate that in all things we remain typically Canadian, we have uncovered our cultural identity at a point in time when we appear to be in mortal danger of losing it.

PAT BARCLAY

HOW WE CAME TO WHAT WE ARE

The Book of Canadian Prose. Vol. I. The Colonial Century. Vol. II. The Canadian Century, edited by A. J. M. Smith. Gage.

WHEN A. J. M. SMITH assembled his *Book of Canadian Poetry* and published it in 1943, he not only prepared a pioneering anthology. He also established the shape in which we would afterwards perceive the early record of our country's poetry. Thus the *Book of Canadian Poetry* not only created literary history, but also — appearing in the same year as E. K.

Brown's classic volume, *On Canadian Poetry* — it answered Smith's own early demand, "Wanted, a Canadian Criticism", by demonstrating the grounds on which that criticism could operate. Our view of the nature of Canadian poetry, and our evaluation of the important Canadian poets, were shaped by the *Book of Canadian Poetry* and by Smith's later verse anthologies more surely than by any body of actual critical writing with the possible exception of Northrop Frye's annual surveys of Canadian poetry which appeared during the 1950s in "Letters in Canada" and were afterwards published in *The Bush Garden.*

The Book of Canadian Poetry was issued at a crucial time in Canada's cultural development. In the years between the wars, E. J. Pratt and the McGill school had already shifted Canadian poetry in the direction of modernism and cultural nationalism, and the ferment of poetic activity in Montreal during the early 1940s suggested that the trend would continue. Smith was anthologizing *in medias res*, and as his other collections followed, the *Oxford Book of Canadian Verse* in 1960 and *Modern Canadian Verse* in 1967, he continued to trace the development that stemmed from the trends his first selection has accurately delineated. One cannot suggest that an anthologist, any more than a critic, actually creates a movement in poetry, but once it is on its way he may affect its final development by revealing to the poets as well as to the readers the significance of what they have done and are doing. Such influences are incalculable; they may well be profound.

The difference between the Smith anthologies of poetry, gathered in the stream of an ongoing movement, and the two volumes of his *Book of Canadian Prose*, are immediately evident. Volume I of the latter, which appeared in 1965 and is now republished as *The Colonial Century*, dealt with writings up to 1867; Volume II, which appears for the first time as *The Canadian Century*, presents writings from the next hundred years. It becomes quite evident as one reads through the volumes that a solid and distinctive Canadian tradition of prose evolved long before a similar tradition in verse. The practical expository needs of explorers and traders, of settlers and preachers and politicians, ensured it, even before fictional prose assumed any real importance. What Smith had to do in these anthologies, therefore, was not to delineate an emergent tradition of which he himself was a part, as happened with Canadian poetry, but to describe — in the process of choice — a long established tradition which had already acquired its distinctive qualities from the character of our history.

Smith's insight was basically similar to that on which Carl F. Klinck planned the *Literary History of Canada*: that any attempt to consider Canadian creative prose as merely a matter of fiction and *belles-lettres* would be to miss not only its essential character but also a good proportion of its finest examples. Much of the best prose in Canada was written in response to dramatic occasions, either presently felt or vividly remembered. The explorers travel over the country, the cultured Englishwomen encounter the rigours of wilderness living, the politicians rise above themselves in the struggle for popular liberties, the presence of America south of the border produces the epic moments of 1812 and 1867, Riel dies, and the colonial age expires not long

after, with a new nation emerging with the new century, and the historians looking back and seeing the grand outlines of it all.

All this provokes the kind of strong and eloquent prose which one associates with men of hard experience and passionate opinion, and, considering the special difficulties of a prose anthology, where one so often has to deal in extracts from larger works, Smith has chosen remarkably well and arranged his selections with telling strategy. Beside Samuel Hearne and Alexander Mackenzie and Joseph Howe, the expected men, he puts the fascinating and little-known narratives of Jacob Bailey and Patrick Campbell; beside Sir John A. Macdonald's great 1865 speech on Confederation he puts the moving speech from the dock of Macdonald's victim, Riel, and Laurier's elegy on the Métis leader. And as we come forward into the twentieth century, and inventive prose begins to take the same strength and distinctiveness as expository prose, the novelists assume their appropriate place beside the essayists and the orators and the historians. It is a salutary experience to read Goldwin Smith and, a few pages later, a passage from Duncan's *The Imperialist* that obliquely challenges him, or to read Hugh MacLennan not long after that passionate nationalist of another genre Donald Creighton, or the wilderness fable of O'Hagan's *Tay John* in the same section as the wilderness fact of George Whalley's account of John Hornby's death, or Dave Godfrey in the same ironic company as Ramsay Cook.

What eventually emerges from this fine collection is not merely a realization that our narrators and expounders are in their own ways the equals of our novelists; it is, even more forcibly, a knowledge that from the beginning all our good writers have been engaged — front-liners, as it were — in the effort to understand and so to shape the human world within the indifferent wilderness. These patterns were present of course from the beginning; it is Smith's peculiar insight as a critical anthologist that he has seen them with such clarity and illuminated their outlines so well with his selections and his lucid commentaries.

So these are books for anyone concerned about the Canadian past, whether his interest is cultural or social or political, or the mere many-sided human desire to know how we came to where we are.

ANTHONY APPENZELL

SUPERIOR JOURNALIST

HUGH HOOD, *The Governor's Bridge is Closed.* Oberon Press.

IF WITTGENSTEIN is right in saying, "To the philosopher, nothing is trivial," Hugh Hood, at least in his non-fiction, is a philosopher of the first order. The range and depth of his interests and opinions is remarkable. I can think of no other Canadian writer whose love of "all things both great and small" and whose ability to communicate that love are as great. One comes away from the essays in *The Governor's Bridge is Closed* feeling invigorated.

Whatever the subject, Hood's enthusiasm is infectious. In "The Pleasures of Hockey," for example, he offers the following analysis of skating: "To play the game right you've got to keep moving all the time you're on the ice, at a steady three-quarters, say, of your top speed.

When the time comes to make your play, you go hard. But you've got to be moving constantly. Watch the best players, even at a faceoff, and you'll see them moving in little circles, edging back and forth, flexing their knees. Or go out to watch a bantam practice, and you'll notice there's this one kid who never stops. He'll be the best player on the ice." A couple of times a season, adds amateur hockey player Hood, then 39, "usually down toward the beginning of March, I'll hit a point where my skating comes together. There is no physical feeling I know of that's quite like that, and only one that's better. When my skating finally comes right, it isn't a short intense pleasure, it's a long slow one, spread over my whole body, a sense of great health and well-being. My legs seem to be swinging loose from the hip in a long stride that eats up rink space, and my breathing is close to what it would be if I had the guts to quit smoking."

Hood has a talent for arguing the seemingly unarguable, connecting the seemingly unconnectable, and making it all somehow seem obvious. In "Circuses and Bread," for instance, one of two essays on Expo 67, he celebrates impermanence and gaudiness. "A man complains that the buildings [at Expo] look impermanent, which is like Harold Town saying that the flag is a lousy design in poor taste. The one thing a flag must not be in, is good taste. Like a uniform or a tartan, a flag ought to be loud as hell with a green elephant on it or an orange sunburst. Imagine a field marshal's uniform in modish decorator pastels! Expo is endearingly frail." That just ten pages earlier, in an essay on Toronto's bridges, Hood had been celebrating permanence, isn't inconsistent; it's just a demonstration of the multitudes he contains.

The connection of architecture, flags and military uniforms is a comparatively mild example of Hood's particular brand of radical juxtaposition; Expo, he tells us elsewhere, reminds him of Spenser's *Faerie Queene*: "All over the site are enormous mouths to engorge you, entrails to digest you and rectums to expel you." The total image is reminiscent, he says, of the House of Alma. Joseph Addison, given his priggishness, would have made a good Canadian; like us, Hood argues, Addison "had all the virtues and . . . all in the wrong order."

If for no other reason than that they lack the freshness of the others, Hood's two essays on Quebec, "Swinging Deep: Splendeurs et Profondeurs de Quebec" and "Independance? Blague!" seem out of place in this collection. Both are so typically English-Canadian in their attitudes that there's an air of *déjà lu* about them. In the former, Hood comments, "I know no people who are gentler and more agreeable, less quick to anger or to take offence, than my *Québecois* brothers, whose character remains what it has been since the time of Cartier and Champlain, uncomplaining and humorous, ready to work hard for a tough living in a splendid and exacting homeland." In the latter, he suggests patronizingly that if *Québecois* won't be satisfied without independence, they should be given it, "since it doesn't matter and won't change anything."

Perhaps the most irritating thing about *The Governor's Bridge is Closed* is the actual book itself. Not unlike other Oberon books I've read, it fell apart. Minor irritations include the lack of a table of contents and the fact that it's not clear in which magazines (or when) some of the essays originally appeared.

Hugh Hood persists in the belief that, as he puts it in "Get Yourself a Reputation, Baby!", because "poetry and fiction are the heavyweight division of literature" that's what he ought to be writing. The irony is that Hood is most obviously a heavyweight in his non-fiction. *The Governor's Bridge is Closed*, it seems to me, is Hood's best book, further proof, if any were needed, of the correctness of Robert Fulford's 1967 view that "deep inside [Hood's] personality, a superior journalist is being . . . strangled by an inferior novelist."

MORRIS WOLFE

FUN AND DUTY

PATRICIA MORLEY, *The Immoral Moralists.* Clarke Irwin, $2.75 paper, $4.50 cloth.
FRASER SUTHERLAND, *The Style of Innocence.* Clarke Irwin, $2.75 paper, $4.50 cloth.

THERE'S A DIFFERENCE between wanting to write criticism and wanting to Be A Critic. I suppose most critics' motives are mixed, like those of most poets or novelists — or hockey players, for that matter — but the distinction helps pinpoint an important difference between these two matching studies. On the whole, Fraser Sutherland wants to explore the work of two writers, and Patricia Morley wants to Be A Critic — or so, at least, the books suggest.

Which is not to say that Patricia Morley has not done her homework and does not provide any shrewd insights. But her book lacks the compelling internal drive that marks any good writing, in any form. *The Immoral Moralist* is really a study of Hugh MacLennan, with glances at Leonard Cohen, and one finds oneself forced to imagine the dilemma of a critic who wants to write a study of MacLennan. Four or five such studies already exist, and Professor Morley's view of her man is not so original as to justify another on its own.

But if one adds Cohen — to most readers, a writer at some opposite pole from MacLennan — an Outrageous Hypothesis seems to take shape, a hypothesis the demonstration of which would produce a quirky and provocative view of both writers. Cap it with a catchy title only tangentially related to the text, and you have a controversial book, a book that will attract attention, the academic equivalent of a best-seller.

The difficulty is that the book remains a more-or-less standard study of MacLennan, and the inclusion of two chapters (in eleven) devoted to Cohen seems thoroughly arbitrary. Far from being driven by a passionate need to say something about her subject, Professor Morley is loftily judicious, commenting that a particularly bitter Cohen passage attacking organized religion is "a partial truth, obviously not the complete truth, about the state of Church and Synagogue in Canada today." Hallelujah: but who cares? MacLennan's attack on the Calvinist businessmen of Montreal "must appear inconsistent and somewhat unfair. MacLennan seems to be unable to see this type as anything but hypocritical and materialistic." Well, as a type, the Canadian businessman *is* hypocritical and materialistic, though honourable exceptions exist; and MacLennan's work is permeated by his awareness of alternative possibilities of social order. What is interesting is not whether MacLennan is right or wrong in his view of business, but rather what assumptions he makes about the nature and prospects of man

in society. Instead of exploring such questions, Professor Morley offers her own corrective to MacLennan's apparent extremism. Do we really need it?

I don't want to be unduly scathing: Professor Morley greatly admires MacLennan, treats his work with affection and respect, and obviously wants to understand his relation to the forces that have shaped him. Nevertheless, alas, I closed the book feeling that I had read part of the dossier supporting an application for academic promotion.

Fraser Sutherland begins not with an Outrageous Hypothesis, but with a shopworn one: that Hemingway influenced Morley Callaghan, and that much of that influence can be seen in the latter's early style. Ho hum — but around this dead horse Sutherland gardens vigorously, building a little picket fence of biography and criticism, savaging encroaching couch-grass in the form of rival critical judgments, above all writing with tart precision. I am not sure *The Style of Innocence* offers any striking new insights, but it surveys the territory with droll competence. Cheerfully pugnacious, Sutherland writes with both mischief and energy. "Soon Loretto [Callaghan] and Hemingway's second wife, Pauline, were quietly failing to get on. . . ." Remarking the "tedious length" at which the landscape of *A Broken Journey* is described, Sutherland remembers that "in 1930, Callaghan, so Conron reports, took a two-week camping trip to the Algoma Hills. One wonders what the book would have been like if he'd spent a month there."

In what almost becomes a minor comic theme in the book, Sutherland guns down critics like Brandon Conron with entertaining regularity. "Callaghan does have a few knights to come clanking to his defence, like Brandon Conron. . . . Conron's comparison will do for a start, quoted at length because it is so consistently wrong." Victor Hoar bites the dust: Hoar describes "In His Own Country" as a satire, Sutherland remarks that "of course, it is nothing of the kind." Damning as he praises, Sutherland later points out "one of [Hoar's] rare insights." Not all critics are met with machetes, however; Sutherland is willing to tolerate Edmund Wilson and he is downright respectful of George Woodcock.

If Patricia Morley writes from a sense of duty, Fraser Sutherland writes from a sense of furious fun. *The Style of Innocence* is, finally, a young writer's exercise, but it leads me to expect with pleasure the novel I am certain he is writing.

DONALD CAMERON

LEACOCK'S UNSOLVED PROBLEM

The Social Criticism of Stephen Leacock, edited and introduced by Alan Bowker, University of Toronto Press.

IN *The Social Criticism of Stephen Leacock* Alan Bowker has provided us with a welcome and useful selection of Leacock writings to place beside his better known and easily available humorous works, and, in addition, has written an Introduction which examines Leacock's career as a social scientist and places his writings in a context often neglected by literary critics.

Even though the seven essays are in chronological order, the first having been published in 1907 and the last in 1920, they show a remarkable thematic pro-

gression and cohesiveness. Starting with the strictly Canadian question of Imperialism in "Greater Canada", the selection takes the reader through an examination of peculiarly North American cultural and social problems in "Literature and Education in America" and "The Apology of a Professor" to a consideration of the more universal questions of modern morality, the status of women, and the quest for social and economic justice. The cohesiveness of the selection derives from a persistent spirit of compromise as Leacock searches for an acceptable middle ground between the order and values associated with the European past and a present and future characterized by the material emphasis and rapid technological development of America. That spirit of compromise alone places him firmly in a Canadian tradition.

"Greater Canada", for example, is a call for Canadian nationalism to express itself in an imperial relationship with Britain, so that Canada would stand as an equal partner in the Empire, beyond the limiting nature of colonial status and safe from the political and cultural encroachment of the United States. Imperialism was to be the means by which the incongruity between the unfulfilled spirit of the Canadian people and the inspirational, physical grandeur of the country would be resolved.

Leacock is in accord with many earlier Canadian critics in seeing that incongruity in a literary context. In "Literature and Education in America" he expresses regret that the literatures of Canada and the United States have failed to reflect a "new world rich in the charm and mystery of the unknown, and in the lofty stimulus that comes from the unbroken silence in America". He even invokes the doubtful proposition that Milton or Byron would have made outstanding poetic responses to the grandeur of the Canadian terrain. But here, as elsewhere, Leacock finds his thoughts divided. He regrets essentially that North America is not Europe in its cultural attainments and its educational emphasis; yet he is forced to admit that the character of America is more a product of time than of place. He recognizes that the social and economic progress of the nineteenth and twentieth centuries has radically altered the conditions which made possible the literary achievements of a Milton or a Shakspeare, but on the other hand that progress has ameliorated the vast inequalities and injustices which existed in earlier times, and such amelioration can only be welcomed.

The idea that Canada was born too late to know the conditions conducive to a tragic or an heroic imagination is a familiar one and, indeed, it seems applicable to Leacock. Mr. Bowker notes that various Canadian critics have raised the question: Why did Leacock not write a great Canadian novel? In Bowker's view the answer lies in the basic theme that informs these essays. As a North American, the man's energies were absorbed by a prevailing social concern for institutions and by his fears and hopes for an age of material progress. The instruments he found most suitable to his purposes were essays and humorous sketches.

The other essays in this book address themselves to variations on the basic North American problem. The professor is seen as an anomaly in the eyes of the populace in "Apology of a Professor"; traditional morality is lost sight of in the preoccupation with material gain, and new, fleeting and unjust standards are

grasped at in "The Devil and the Deep Sea"; the deterioration of family life is anticipated in "The Woman Question" as a corollary of the female quest for equality of opportunity. "The Tyranny of Prohibition" seems more of a period piece than the others, although it is dealing with the unworkable and unjust imposition of a law which the social conscience is not really in accord.

The longest piece included here is *The Unsolved Riddle of Social Justice* which deals with Leacock's rather specific treatment of the flaws in classic, *laissez-faire* economics, and his dogmatic and biased rejection of socialism as a cure for social injustice. In conformity to the tenor of this selection, a compromise of limited state intervention is anticipated and approved. In Leacock's view the greatest social justice will result from a combination of individual incentive and state responsibility.

The most interesting facet of this selection for me is that the issues confronted here are not yet solved. Leacock addressed himself to very durable problems, especially with respect to North America. Even Imperialism has a way of expressing our constant desire for a Canadian style separate from the United States, and our quest for a fully mature literature is an ongoing process.

Mr. Bowker, for his part, gives us an Introduction which outlines Leacock's major social and economic ideas. Most importantly, he shows that Leacock is in a tradition which includes Harold Innis, Marshall McLuhan, and George Grant: that he has a place as a prominent figure in our intellectual as well as our literary history.

CARL BALLSTADT

MARITIME MISHAPS

RAYMOND FRASER, *Black Horse Tavern*. Ingluvin Press.

A NATIVE NEW BRUNSWICKER, Raymond Fraser captures Maritime small town life in these stories of very uneven quality with a pathos to be felt only by one who has lived it. In ten stories, he alternates between Newbridge, N.B. and Montreal as settings. Unfortunately the language and technique are not equal to the vision. The process of narrative is often clumsy and appallingly naive; Fraser's narrators work themselves into technical corners from which there are no exits. There are errors in sentence structure to be found only in elementary composition classes, and time-worn clichés intrude at regular intervals.

Fraser is at his best in portraying small town misfits, socially marginal characters who haunt the Black Horse Tavern in a perpetual stupor and live in ramshackle wooden houses. The first story, "They come here to die", establishes the tone of most of the stories. It is the hopeless chronicle of Ralph Ramsay, forty-year drunk, and his twenty-two year old pal, Danny Sullivan, a younger version of Ralph. "What I should do is get out of here." Ramsay tells the unidentified narrator, "Why don't I get out?" In a later scene, Ralph and Danny sit in Ralph's desolate room after being barred from the Black Horse for disorderly conduct. Without a cent, they contemplate leaving town, heading for the big city, anything to escape from this tenement where old men come to die. Our hopes rise momentarily only to collapse when Danny pulls a crumpled bill from his pocket, just

enough to buy a bottle, and the two of them set out in a chill November rain.

> "We can sit in a boxcar."
> "It's kinda cold."
> "A few drinks and we'll be all right."
> "Yeah."

The small town breeds a congenital hopelessness. A few get away; the others drink. That is not to suggest that Fraser's vision is utterly bleak. He infuses a provincial humour into pieces such as "The Newbridge Sighting" and "Spanish Jack"; he captures exactly the New Brunswick dialect that uses "some" as an adjectival modifier as in "some nice, it is."

"The Newbridge Sighting" is the story of an entirely different breed of drinking man from Ralph Ramsay. Alec Mooney is a rather flamboyant middle-age drunk who shovels snow for the CNR but claims to be on first-name terms with "Mr. CNR" to whom he offers regular advice on railroad policy. When Alec sights a flying saucer, the local bartender taunts him and even makes false tracks on the baseball field for the RCMP. Alec blooms with the prospect of notoriety.

> "Yes, yes, Moncton *Times*, Times man called me up and wants story, wants to know all about it. Interview, he wants, he does, interview. Going to talk to man from the *Times*, I am."

It is at this type of dialogue that Fraser excels.

The worst story of the collection and the longest is a sixty-seven page fiasco entitled "The Quebec Prison". The narrator is Fraser's favourite character who appears in some form in all the city stories — the small-town New Brunswick boy, disoriented and disenchanted in Montreal, with a strong urge to drop out of a phony world a la Holden Caulfield or, more locally, Hervé Jodoin. He uses the artistic self-consciousness so fashionable in "literature of exhaustion", but he does it so ineptly and with so obvious a lack of necessary erudition, that the reader feels mainly pity and occasional anger.

Take the first pages of the prison story. After a few corny vaudeville jokes, the narrator tells us:

> I like to pretend I'm creative and a man of great potential. If you have never produced very much in the way of art it's important to believe in your poetential. Observe. I made a typing error and produced a new word, "poetential". By accident I have just described myself perfectly, since I have for some time considered myself a poet ...

This leads him to discuss spelling and to recall an atrociously spelled passage he once found in a Public Library, which read, "Alison Peirson was conuict of the vsing of Sorcerie and Witchcraft, with the Inuocation of the spreitis of the Deuill..." Later our poetential poet mentions that he has a bachelor's degree and has "always been a big reader of books." He dreams of extreme and violent deeds to rid the world of its evil; his gesture of defiance is to pour sugar into the gas tanks of parked cars one night while drunk, for which he is jailed for ten days. We are regaled with forty pages of insight into the isolation and desperation of the prisoner, very existential, but after Genet or the Soledad brothers, like buttermilk after vodka. There are also twenty-four pages devoted to the reminiscences of Dan Kiley, a con artist met in jail. They are simply a list of cheap tricks, a how-to manual for petty larcenists, a watered down version of accounts in any city tabloid. When the narrator is finally released, his "young heart leapt with joy." If this were parody, we could

smile, but it is painfully clear it is no such thing.

At best, a few of these stories merit a place in a journal; the rest had been better laid aside.

LINDA SHOHET

AGAINST ODDS

DON BAILEY, *If You Hum Me A Few Bars I Might Remember The Tune.* Oberon Press.

THE CLASS whose guest I am is an unusual one. These men who ask me interested, intelligent questions about poetry will be in this building for at least ten years — some of them for life. What infinitesimal chance do any of these maximum-security prisoners have to become successful writers? Yet perhaps it is better for them to sit here and talk to me and the talented pretty girl who is their instructor once a week than to learn "skills" that will be rendered obsolete long before they re-enter society.

Don Bailey is one who, against such enormous odds, has begun to establish himself as a poet and short story writer. He's a former car thief and bank robber, as he himself states in the preface to his new collection of stories.

One might have expected the stories would be taken from the criminal world; instead they revolve around a central character, Gus, who drifts through various perfectly legal occupations: used car salesman, part-time comedian, ad writer, milkman, social worker. In the process — such is the sequence of these untitled stories — he divorces his wife, takes up various girl-friends, one of whom, a social-work case, he gets pregnant.

The tone in which Gus narrates his stories is so low-key that each seems to end with a *dénouement* that is like a tired little sigh. The material is unexciting and Gus the narrator even more so; hence the overall effect is monochromatic. I had to fight grimly to get through the book.

Some great writers — one example is Thomas Mann — have used dull first-person narrators, but always to point up some more dynamic figure, or fast-moving events. When neither the narrator nor his material is engaging the story exists in a vacuum which not even Bailey's consciousness of form can invigorate.

In one story Gus is given a try-out for a church hall variety concert. He watches a depressing assortment of amateurs try out — a bumbling dancer, a singer who thinks she can be another Brenda Lee — then delivers his own patter of jokes, focussing on the one girl in the audience who appreciates his humour.

This girl, who "looks like a mild nightmare", is also given a try-out. "She's like this scrawny bird way up in a tree deep in the forest, alone, not knowing she's ugly or giving a damn, just singing it out because she's free to do it, to sing, to fly and like that was her thing. I can't remember feeling that way about too much but I imagine that was the feeling she had."

Gus gives her a lift home; when he drops her off at her apartment building she invites him in but he declines. She gives him her telephone number and they say good-night.

> And I'm embarassed the way she stands on the curb, watching me drive away, as if she'd been hitch-hiking and I'd picked her up but taken her to the wrong place. Well, it was the best I could do, I say to myself and I'm wondering if I'll be able to read her writing or if I'll even try.

The girl represents a goodness, an authenticity that Gus is reluctant to "try" lest he spoil it. He is resigned to drifting, the low aim, anything that makes no demands, like the bus trip at night he takes in the last story of the book. But the inertia of the narrator also enervates the narrative.

As a whole, the book has a few jarring discrepancies which might easily have been corrected. A girl named Betty, described as his friend Vic's "wife of the moment" appears in the first story. The last story also has a Betty, though not the same person. Similarly, in the first story "Jake" is to send over "a couple of tricks" to be looked after by the prostitute who, like Gus, is staying at Vic's apartment. Surely this is not the Rev. Jake Phearson, the "minister of my church" whom we meet in a later story. The minister is a good drinker but nothing leads us to believe he is a pimp! In one story Gus says that he never saw his father; in another he goes fishing with him.

At least two of these redundancies or confusions could have been cleared up by a simple name-change. But the other problem with the book is not so readily corrected. The first person narration undermines Bailey's undoubted skill. Structurally, he knows how to write a story. But the point of view, the story's heart, is defective.

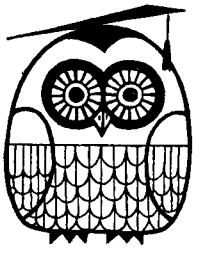
FRASER SUTHERLAND

JOKING DOWNHILL

MATT COHEN, *Columbus and The Fat Lady.* Anansi. $3.25 paper, $8.50 cloth.

MATT COHEN, *Too Bad Galahad.* Coach House.

"THE WATCHMAKER", Matt Cohen's first story in *Columbus and The Fat Lady,* is powerful and moving. The watchmaker is haunted by memories of his childhood years during World War Two. His father had turned him over to the mayor of another town for safekeeping, a gentile who, his father tells him, is his father's "brother". After the war he learns that his parents perished two weeks after leaving him. The mayor was a former lover of his mother; the father had persuaded him that the boy was really his own son. The mayor is reluctant to take the boy; what if the father in revenge lets the Gestapo know he is harboring a Jew? He



strikes a bargain. The Germans are given a message that two Jews are hiding in the town at a certain address. When they enter the house, the watchmaker explains, "My father and mother were waiting in the living room."

After such an auspicious and resonant beginning, the book goes downhill in every way. I had to place checkmarks beside each story to remember I had read it. A sophomoric, dehydrated style takes over, repetitive, numbing, and, I am afraid, Mr. Cohen's version of the literary put-on:

> Elmer was not, however, an amorphous being, a member of anyone's imaginary mass, nor even an undifferentiated portion of the Godhead. . . .
>
> The fact that I light the cigarette with the lighter I gave her, and she returned, will seem slightly melodramatic to her. It will make her feel contemptuous of my weakness, of my need to underline the situation.

Cohen speckles his narratives with digressions about writing:

> This is all getting very chatty. Chatty is something writing is not supposed to be. Good writing is tense, taut, evocative. Words bounce off each other like fleeing gazelles.
>
> The most important rule to keep in mind when writing a short story is that every word must count. Every short story writer and every short story reader knows that rule . . .

Mr. Cohen seems to be perversely listing the very rules he is defying.

Since the trendy and derivative formulas the author is following include a super-cool attitude toward people and life, he can tell us of a character named Arthur: "Talking to him is like taking a shower. Writing about him is like trying to compose the yellow pages from memory." He writes about such boring people with stultifying boredom:

> He moves into empty houses and makes plans for interior decoration. Unfortunately he has no sense of colour or proportion so his plans are completely uninteresting . . .
>
> For example Arthur fills up empty houses. He moves into them and makes all sorts of plans. The fact that the plans are terrible makes no difference: they represent love and it is Arthur's special knowledge that empty spaces need love. That is why they are empty.

Cohen invents words too; then he repeats them. In the story "Straight Poker," we are treated to a word he likes, "necessaries": "There are ablutions to be performed, cogitations on the night before, ingestions of necessaries." The word reappears later.

If all this sounds flat, desultory and self-indulgent, it is. After the first story, Cohen abandons feeling, commitment, and real characterization for a frozen, anonymous landscape. Phrases and paragraphs are repeated over and over again; traces of Vonnegut, Barthelme and Woody Allen abound. It is tame, limpid, pretentious stuff, unworthy of an energetic young writer.

Too Bad Galahad, published as a separate book with good pop illustrations by Margaret Hathaway (Coach House), is included in slightly revised form in the *Columbus* collection. Sir Galahad is a schoolteacher here, Woody Allen the hip inspiration.

The title story starring Christopher Columbus as a sideshow freak doesn't work either. The fat lady in the circus asks Christopher's son about the voyage:

> "What was it like?"
> "It was fun. But the food wasn't very good."

What, then, is Matt Cohen up to? A writer who can create "The Watchmaker" owes us an explanation. The nature of camp-pop culture permits books

like this to get by. They may be poor, but they may be *deliberately* poor. The reader risks being accused of taking seriously what the author can maintain was a joke all along. But is this collection really a joke? Its languor, its enervating effect, its disconnected and laconic language, are not very funny. In fact they are damned depressing. Graeme Gibson takes Cohen very seriously indeed; he includes him in his new book *Eleven Canadian Novelists* in the company of Richler, Atwood and Munro.

I think, though, that while Cohen has abandoned emotion, characterization, coherence and intensity in all of these stories but one, he is somehow serious. Let us give him credit for that, and seek another clue to this collection of stories. Here is a quotation from one of them, "The Empty Room":

> The author sat in his study. He had given up on his memoirs. He thought he might write a novel about a wastepaper basket. His wife brought him a cup of coffee.
>
> Don't forget my mother's coming to dinner tonight. How's the work going?
>
> He stood up and stretched. Terrible. . . .

DAVID EVANIER

NATIVE SONS

HARRY J. BOYLE, *The Great Canadian Novel.* Doubleday, $6.95.

JAMES BACQUE, *A Man of Talent.* New Press, $6.95.

IF THESE TWO NOVELS provide a fair indication of the current trends in Canadian fiction, our writers are becoming much more self-conscious about their place in time and space. They are, to use A. J. M. Smith's categories, more "native" than "cosmopolitan," more in the tradition of Hugh MacLennan than Morley Callaghan.

Read together, these two very different books give us a fairly broad picture of ourselves and our origins. Harry J. Boyle's hero is fifty, unhappily married, alcoholic, an advertising man, and the product of Roman Catholicism, Nonsuch Saskatchewan, and the depression. *The Great Canadian Novel* is a portrait of the Canadian artist as a middle-aged man who has compromised his art and his life by pursuing security and success according to terms that he now finds morally indefensible. James Bacque's central character, on the other hand, is thirty, a "trendy" bachelor, a smoker of pot, a dean of Combined Studies at Simcoe University, the host of a TV show called Mansweek, and the product of an establishment family, Rosedale, Upper Canada College, and Cambridge. *A Man of Talent* records the plight of a man who has successfully served Caesar but is unhappy because he has no god to whom he may render the things of his soul.

While these two books are as unlike as yesterday and today, it does seem fair to suggest that Boyle is not as successful at realizing his particular world as is Bacque. *The Great Canadian Novel* is perhaps most rewarding as a documentary, a chronicle of a generation's beliefs and values as they develop over a fifty-year period. In fact, Boyle touches on so many of the themes that previous writers have taught us to associate with the progeny of the prairies and the depression that his book might better be titled, "The Great Canadian Novel Revisited." It is all there: the vulgar, pre-occupied father and sympathetic mother; the influence of the prairie landscape; the struggle with a repressive religious heritage; the rail-

way as escape; the traumatic sexual encounters; the isolation, the loneliness and the dreams; the society distrustful of the artistic sensibility; the artist's diffident attitude towards his talent; and the beleaguered present that forces a nostalgia-tinged search of the past for roots and answers.

The problem is that Boyle seems merely to have used these themes; he does not advance our understanding nor deepen our emotional involvement in them. He comes too late with what he has to say, and he comes as a popularizer. He is a teller, not a creator. And most of the ideas that he tells us have been so domesticated by time and *Maclean's* that they have lost their ability to engage us in any more than a routine way.

This time lag in Boyle's writing also undermines his attempts to create a hero whose artistic sensibility is worthy of our respect and sympathy. He seems to be trapped in the expatriate romanticism of the twenties and thirties. Shane Donovan, the man who must try to write the great Canadian novel, or rather "exorcise" it before it "tears him to ribbons," turns his back on family and job and flees to pagan Mexico. This setting gives Boyle a chance to mimic the style of the man whose sentimental notions of creativity he seems to have adopted. Here is the simple but noble Hemingway peasant:

> Felipe was okay. Felipe really was glad when [Donovan] didn't drink too heavily. Felipe felt responsible for him.
>
> "There are bad Mexicans — and good Mexicans, Senor Donovan. But I have not been in your country, in Canada, so I cannot say — but some are good, I feel, and some are bad. To me you are a guest. In my family, a guest is to be respected."

Here is the "Child-woman," the sexual thing without which the hard-drinking artist is helpless to emerge from his private purgatory with the great work of art:

> When he started working regularly at the typewriter, he would simply reach for her. She was a dusky idol who sensed exorcism in his use of her body, but she didn't object or appear to mind. How could he tell her moods? Did he only imagine there was a faint trace of greater happiness when he drank and was dependent on her? Wonderful, mysterious people! Dignity edged with tragedy.

If I could believe that Boyle were being ironic in his treatment of the central character, I might be appeased. But he nowhere gives evidence that he knows more than what he makes the very ordinary Shane Donovan tell us.

Shane Donovan, disillusioned by the artificial and irresponsible values of the world of Yankee advertising, decides to reject it at the height of his career. It is otherwise with Jack Ramsay, the "brilliant, young, eccentric, energetic, intriguingly left" hero of *A Man of Talent*. When he is not driving his XKE, flying his plane, skin-diving, writing, teaching, loving, setting up a university press, or hosting a weekly TV show, Ramsay, labours mightily to bridge the gap between anarchists and administrators at Simcoe University. But when the student revolution comes, he is caught in the untenable middle; the world he has chosen and mastered rejects him. At the disconcerting age of thirty he is left with nothing but his money and his unsatisfactory self. It is easier for a camel to pass through the eye of a needle than for a man of talents to enter into heaven.

George Grant, as Bacque makes clear in this admirably executed novel, is right. The effects of American technocracy run much deeper and are much more subtle

than the obvious social symptoms that Boyle discusses. At the fundamental personal level, technocracy encourages a preoccupation with notions of progress and problem-solving at the expense of any awareness of moral values. This is the lesson that Jack Ramsay must learn. He is so involved in the exercise of his talents that, to the detriment of his soul, he cannot get beyond them.

He is tutored by Anna, a brilliant, independent Mohawk girl, and by her father, Chief Sky, who asks the question that Ramsay must answer before he can achieve some sort of inner harmony: "Who do you follow?" As Robertson Davies is fond of reminding us, if man does not have a god, then he will make one of himself.

While some of the characters in this novel are not fully enough developed and some of the incidents only tenuously integrated into its main concerns, Bacque nonetheless manages to offer us a complex and challenging embodiment of the predicament of the well-intentioned intellectual. He achieves this impressive result through his sure handling of a variety of prose styles and narrative points of view. His poetic passages transform the tired cliché of finding a "Canadian type" in the wilds of our north into a felt experience. And his rare but telling visits into Anna's mind provide a devastatingly ironic corrective to Ramsay's sentimentalization of the Indians' psychic reality.

Both these novels, then, in different ways, and perhaps for different generations, face up to the problem of the disillusionment that is becoming the aftermyth of the great American dream of success. Both struggle to find specifically Canadian alternatives to a world in which, as Bacque notes, "Alienation is not a disease. . . . It is a circumstance."

LAWRENCE MCDONALD

ANTINOVEL AND JOUAL

JACQUES GODBOUT, *D'Amour, P.Q.* Hurtubrise HMH/Editions du Seuil. $3.35.

AFTER *Salut Galarneau!* (1967), Godbout has gone back to a more complex form of narrative in *D'Amour, P.Q.* Though not a return to the *nouveau roman* form of *Le couteau sur la table* (1965), this latest novel by the French-Canadian poet and filmmaker is a rich piece of writing that radiates out far beyond its immediate story line, almost allegorically.

The subject of *D'Amour, P.Q.* is the writing of a novel as it is complicated by French culture, identity and aspirations in North America. The novel deals with writer Thomas D'Amour who is having the manuscript of his book typed by a secretary, Mireille. She and her roommate, Mariette, begin to change the literary language of his novel into very colloquial French. The larger concerns of the novel, then, are made more acute by the question of language itself: is standard French or *joual* to be Quebec's literary medium? As in Jean Barbeau's comedies, *Manon Lastcall* and *Joualez-moi d'amour* (both 1970) the source of the satiric humour is a preoccupation with the question of language:

Mariette: J'ai l'impression que ceux qui écrivent couchent avec la langue. Voilà. C'est bien dit non?

Mireille: Et si c'est leur langue maternelle, ils consomment l'inceste, c'est ça?

Joual is not simply a native French Canadian *patois* but a North American jargon which has a large number of *anglicismes*, especially dealing with popular culture, and as such it epitomizes French popular culture on this continent. The relationship that develops between Thomas and the *joual*-speaking Mireille shows the dominance of her physical vitality, physical language, physical reality, an energy which finally leads to her dictating the revised book to him. The question of language, then, is part of a wider problem that concerns not just French literature but the whole creative process and the place of popular culture in art.

In a 1971 film Godbout employed a popular Quebec superhero as a parody in the musical comedy *IXE-13*; similarly we find parody in *D'Armour, P.Q.* The experience of Thomas' re-examination of his art parallels his shifting identities with several super-hero types: Batman, Tarzan, Easy Rider, RCMP. "Je m'identifie à mon personnage, je me glisse dans sa peau, il est fier d'avoir si bien réussi son travail. . . ." The perfect realization of an imaginative creation is to make it real, to live it, to become it — a recreation which could lead to insanity for the artist. The Quixote-like illusion of Thomas living these figures is indication that as the type of the contemporary Canadian artist he is searching for his identity and his role. The references to scores of items from American popular culture and Canadian myth are emblematic of the challenge our creative writer faces: he must bear in mind his roots, traditions and also represent the here and now to produce work which at best could be ephemeral. Are we back at Galarneau's hot dog stand or in a timeless cosmic pattern?

When a work is concerned with social issues the mimetic element seems all important. Yet French culture with its sense of history has produced a great literature which has its genesis in *belles-lettres* not in gut experiences. Godbout's novel, too, by questioning the traditional role of the author is part of the *antiroman* tradition. Thus while it ends with Mireille's declaration: "Un écrivain, c'est pas plus important qu'une secrétaire, oké?" we remain unconvinced. Is the effective manipulation of narrative frames, collage and the realistic reproduction of *joual* due to Godbout's fine skill or to his secretary's tampering? The novel is successful: it entertains, it intrigues, but we find that it states implicitly that *joual* reality is the raw material for literature not its medium. But perhaps this too is Godbout's intention.

JOSEPH PIVATO

SKELETON ODYSSEY

DAVID EVANIER, *The Swinging Headhunter.* November House, cloth $6.95, paper $2.95.

The Swinging Headhunter, whose author — David Evanier — taught for a period in Canada and edited the Vancouver literary journal *Event*, is not in the true sense either a novel or a collection of stories. In its own introduction it is called "an odyssey", through Times Square, The Bronx, Greenwich Village, Israel, Vancouver and back again. The Odyssey of the Jewish hero Bruce Orav begins as a boy; ends as a grown man in a changing world of multi-liberators. Never in any society has there been so many alterna-

tives to "salvation", from Numerology to Hari Krishna to Women's Liberation; flower people, black people and liberal Christians. Bruce Orav knows that the salvation in Judaism or in any honest, deep-rooted belief is an acceptance of the changing world and the totality of suffering: the floundering and madness of being midstream in a human stream.

Perhaps the most important sequence is Greenwich Village Blues. Here, we have the sex-salvation of a little black chambermaid who offers a meal of pork-chops, then herself, without the benefit of love-play to young student Bruce, who cannot accept. In this scene, we come closest to human reality but still can't make precious contact between people, since each is hung up on an individual concept of touching. This is swiftly followed by a scene at a party in Sheridan Square which is crashed by the Bipps and their Liberation Theatre. The Bipps, with their noisy aggressive theatrics, insist that everybody get liberated. "I tell you," yells Hannah Bipp, "there will be no walls between lovers of the world" . . . "We'll break the walls of anyone who opposes freedom and love."

Everyone in this travel through life is as isolated as Orav himself, and each behaves in his own, clumsy, deviate way, trying to break down walls. Indeed the world itself becomes a kind of deviate "Liberation Theatre", bent on conversion.

The most tender comment is implied in the first sequence in which Bruce, as a small boy worshipping his gentle Jewish teacher, sees life personified in him. This chapter is called The Light Of My Father and symbolizes a kind of father-image, which may be contained in any religion — Christ, God, Jehovah. This figure, however, is swept by death and Orav learns his first lesson. The father-figure will not protect a man from life: neither will the mother-figure; neither will the scrambled Liberation Theatre or the various circuses of The World. The relationship with Mr. Silverzweig is so pure, unblemished and real in its simplicity and joy that the young Bruce is unable to mourn his death. This purity is never captured again in Orav's travels except under the blanket with his first, 16-year-old love. Even that tender need is distorted and labelled as dependency by her psychologist Daddy and his professional associates. Nothing remains of original simplicity and joy except what Orav is able to integrate into a quiet acceptance of loss and love.

The Swinging Headhunter is stripped down to the barest prose, so that the swift transitions from one person or place to another are frequently baffling. Stripping down prose is a tricky business, since the skeleton must be soundly proportioned when it has little flesh to round it out. This skeleton could have done with more flesh; many readers will not be patient enough to fill in its spaces for themselves.

LORRAINE VERNON

MERMEN AND HYBRIDS

W. TOWRIE CUTT, *Message from Arkmae.* Collins.

RUTH NICHOLS, *The Marrow of the World.* Atheneum, $5.25.

"O YOU CAN'T go to Heaven on the O.N.R. [Ontario Northland Railway]," we used to sing in Northern Ontario summer camps, " 'cause the O.N.R. don't go that far." The first mild shock for indige-

nous readers of Ruth Nichols' *The Marrow of the World* is occasioned by the protagonists' abrupt transition from a North American lake to a realm with affinities to Tolkien's Middle Earth and C. S. Lewis's Narnia. Somehow an English train or a London attic seems a more plausible point of departure to a world inhabited by witches, wizards and dwarfs.

In some ways Miss Nichols' otherworld is right in the tradition of its European analogues, old and new. For instance, her dwarfs are the traditional mining, gem-loving, treasure-guarding folk, whose avarice is countered, but just barely, by their merchant integrity. The ancient struggle between good and evil is here fought out, as in time-honoured folklore, by a benevolent wizard king and a malevolent witch. And the witch Ygerna's exorcised mother, a spirit of evil memory, bore the same name as King Arthur's sinister half-sister — Morgan.

But the North American strain is also sustained in the book. The atmosphere of Ontario's rocky, watery northland is carried over into the fantasyland in which Philip, the boy hero, and his mysterious young cousin, Linda, attempt to execute Ygerna's errand and obtain release to their natural world. Ygerna, terrified of fire, lights her copper-lined hollow-tree home with imprisoned fireflies. The merpeople are not of the hair-combing, harp-twanging kind; they are quasi-animal phenomena:

> ... the face that gazed at them was human: its hair sleek as an otter's, its dark eyes sheathed with lids of an oriental fold. Between its long fingers, smoothly stirring the water, beat webs of transparent skin.

Herne the hunter could belong as easily to pioneer Canadian stock as he could to the old European woodsmen tribe. He is simply a convincing contender with the wilds.

In fact, the major talent demonstrated in this book is for vivid, plausible description that can carry the reader from recognizable scenes and atmospheres into semi-enchanted ones without missing a beat. Linda's frightening journey, guided by a reluctant dwarf, into the bowels of the earth to obtain a quantity of the supposed germinative essence of all life, the ancient "marrow of the world", is a weird fairy-tale quest through solidly real geological remains:

> Two tiny figures in that enormous silence, they began to descend the steps. In the deep-cut walls, their secrets exposed to view, the tale of ages lay revealed. Here and there the stone was embossed with shells. Farther down Linda saw the bones of a great creature splayed in death, a frozen writhing of fins, swan-neck, and slender tail. Lower still, the trunks of trees were embedded, their bark scaled and stippled like the hides of animals; and above them, traced smoke-like in the rock, the fronds of ancient palms.

Miss Nichols is also adept at conveying nuances of mood that contribute psychological credibility to the incredible: Linda's warring horror, exultation, and despair as she assimilates the fact that she is Ygerna's half-sister, Philip's angry love and repulsion mingled with yearning and protective fear as he watches over her. She thus keeps alive strong character-bound suspense as well as the external suspense generated by knowledge of Ygerna's malign power over both youngsters.

If Miss Nichols ever puts a foot wrong, it is in the odd snatch of dialogue. The book is a dignified, high-minded one, and serious speeches are appropriate, but even so a speech like Philip's "If need be, I'll tell your parents" does not ring quite true. In fact, Philip in speech and Linda by

report sometimes approach sombre priggishness. "My lord, Linda means no disrespect," says Philip to King Kyril, "but she begged me to tell you that she promised to dance with Thawn. She cannot come until her promise is fulfilled."

However, despite a shortage of leavening levity and despite occasional portentousness, the book appeals to idealism without preaching it, and is compulsive reading. The last paragraphs seem to promise a sequel. It should be worth waiting for.

The sequel threatened by W. Towrie Cutt's *Message from Arkmae* is not a literary one but a universal cataclysm. The message of the title is addressed to the human race by a seal chieftain:

> Land sick — air poisoned — sea filthy —
> Dead birds and sea beasts —
> Man wants all fish
> For fun not for food
>
> He fouls his last refuge.

This slim little book tells a slight story weighted down by ecological concern. Set in the Orkneys, it posits a relationship between seals and islanders, especially the "Selkie Wards", an island family with coloration and hand characteristics said to be inherited from a shape-shifting seal woman. The chief characters, eleven-year-olds Mansie Ward and his cousin Erchie and Mansie's elder brother Peter all have the markings, and are thus by appearance and nature qualified to make contact with their seal kin. Mansie and Erchie do so in a hidden cavern they inadvertently visit when their boat capsizes. There they meet the mysterious Finman, last survivor of an ancient race and another link between man and the sea creatures. And with him they witness the anguish of a seal herd ravaged by human hunters. Peter, an initiate in the Finman and seal mysteries, is soon on the scene to provide additional commentary and take the boys home.

Apart from the boat episode, the first encounter with the silvery, bewhiskered Finman, and a brief episode in which porpoises are rescued from a naturalist's sea-pen, there is virtually no action or suspense in *Message from Arkmae*. There are certain charms in its Orkney dialect, nature lore, and anthropomorphic fantasy. But the dominant element is propaganda, not merely against hunting for sport but also against scientific investigations that meddle with creatures' lives. Contradicting Tennyson, the Finman utters a grimly topical prophecy:

> When all are swallowed —
> Bird, fish and land beast —
> Man, red in tooth and maw —
> Man will eat man.

An admirably well-meant warning, no doubt — but I believe that readers expecting fiction will be considerably more interested in Ruth Nichol's sly, slant-eyed mer-people than in Mr. Cutt's remonstrative hybrids.

FRANCES FRAZER

TIES AND THREADS

GEORGE AMABILE, *Blood Ties*. The Sono Nis Press, Hardcover $5.95.

DAVID BROMIGE, *Threads*. Black Sparrow, Paperback.

THE MANY ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS in *Blood Ties* to anthologies and periodicals suggest to me that Amabile's first book, the sift of several years' work, has been earned by a longer than usual (maybe than necessary) apprenticeship in the little mags. At any rate, there are no slips.

There are four sections. Two parts, II and IV are entirely occupied by long poems, "Generation Gap" and "Inner Space: The Light Culture". And part I begins with a fine long poem on the accidental death of the poet's brother, Anthony Amabile. A good many of the poems, more obviously than the title poem even, are about blood ties, meaning variously family (father, mother, brother, wife, children) instinct ("my blood moves/toward gifts of touch at the tips of tongues & fingers"), or the viaducts which carry poetic inheritance and tie one to the past:

> as desired wind eased up *out of thought*
> and took shape under the powdering tip
> of a Greek chisel It rises again has *risen*
> for thousands of years in the blood
> between water & stone

If for blood ties we substitute relationships we get a reasonable description of the themes of many of the poems about relationships not only with family, but with "ancestors" like Blake (named several times) and Van Gogh, the Greeks and the Romans, with America, with women and so on. But mainly broken relationships. Something has gone wrong:

> Blake & Van Gogh are dead
> A pick & shovel
> lean against the garage caked with mud

Irony prevents emulation of one's favourite artists of the past; Rome is "eternal city of decay;" the American flag in fireworks "takes five minutes" "to come apart." The experience of the past hasn't improved us, as this list of place suggests: "Rome Alexandria London Hanoi Chicago / unpronounceable reed villages." In many poems the motive seems to be to

> try to revive the lapsed sentence
> that released silt shadows into the future . . .
> I want to frame them
> in terms that would clear up the past

He wants to atone for thinking, about his dead brother, "he's dead/ I'm glad it wasn't me," or for the "reek" of failure to get close to his father. Reconcilement with the past is never easy, and the more one reads Amabile the more one understands that blood *ties*. The title is as ambiguous as the word wedlock, title of a poem in part I. In fact just looking at the sequence of titles which occur toward the end of I, it may be possible to see a submerged narrative: "Blood Ties," "Wedlock," "Frigidity," "Adultery," "Period." The period is menstrual but it's hard not to find in it something of the end of a sequence closed with the ironic demythologizing of the moon, menstrual goddess, "a bald girl who's never been laid."

To me the dominant tone of *Blood Ties* is elegiac. There is regret for what is gone and understanding how hard-won and temporary are affirmations like this one (which is even a question):

> Is love the whole fire
> that writhes at the center of things
> scattering florid echos
> like tiger lillies blown through a ruined
> civilization?

Scattered flowers bloom, rather like this, throughout *Blood Ties*, but loss, ironic consciousness, is still the keynote. There is a strenuous facing up to the fact that the present is made, like Ithaka, to pass, that what you see even in contemporary pop culture is "a day-glo history of western civilization". "Inner space" uses the imagery of the drug age to chronicle its replacement by the future. In *Blood Ties* there is a tension between the wish to be at one with the things and people one has been cut off from, and the knowledge

that no one gets a chance to do it all again with hindsight.

Re-reading the book I found it slightly annoying that, except for part IV, every poem has a first-person persona, usually identifiable, I expect, with Amabile. Perhaps monotony is the hazard risked by a poet who imposes on his volume such uniformity of tone. Or, and I like this explanation better, perhaps Amabile's I is a seeing centre: nearly everything else is object over against him, and the persona is the agent of his irony. Also, I think there is a good deal of honesty in the reluctance to generalize experience.

Blood Ties is a strong, accomplished book, and the small reservation I have about the dominant singleness of persona may not bother other readers.

Threads is David Bromige's sixth book. It impresses me as a less deliberate, less finished book than Amabile's. It also seems thicker in a good and a bad sense. There is less clarity, more diffuseness, occasional lines which will not come clear, over-punctuation. So there are hindrances on the way into Bromige's poetry. But it is worth persevering, I think, to realize that the difficulty in Bromige is inherent in what he wants to do. Tortuosity of thought and image is what a lot of his poetry is about, as acknowledged in a title like "At the Labyrinth," a "review" of Polyani's *Personal Knowledge*. A strong thread (to use Bromige's metaphor) is the reflexive poem about what it is that sometimes sparks inside a particular person at a particular time and place. And in reflection on the conditions for making oneself receptive, as fully alive, as free, as one can be, ear-open for the sound of the "undine drum/upon the edge of things", Bromige's poetry records the search for vital language to catch insight, an account of the various kinds of comfortable order he has had to eschew, like the old "iamb" that "haunts these signs of feeling," or

> these thoughtful balances I must
> one way or another act to
> overthrow, & yet to save myself
> from altering
> I'd close my ears
> to risk
> becoming more myself. . . .

In "A Note on Translation" (Bromige includes two "versions" of poems by Baudelaire) I find a key to what he is doing: "In my own rages," he says, "I know what force accumulates to tear apart common fabrics when one has been 'for one's — for the family's — own good' suppressed. Then the hope is to disturb assured minds helpfully," to live for poetry's good. The "fabric" metaphor should be read in the context of the title poem, where Bromige talks about the sometimes ravelled "fabric" of his soul — "the story we make of our lives — a warp of dream a weft of actuality."

Threads, like Amabile's ties, are deeply ambiguous to Bromige. Love, for example, is one "of the many [threads] that prevent me from dissolving utterly." But marriage is a thread that suppresses, or has suppressed him, and several poems deal with divorce and its necessity. In "An Imperfect Failure," he asks

> how can I speak for you, but know myself
> more fully alive, for that move
> & the harm, maybe only of a different kind,
> it inflicted on our son, & you. . . .

Threads are necessary, threads are (shift a letter) threats (cf. "An Interlude") and reading Bromige is balancing uneasily with him between the threads that bind and those that open new possibilities

("One wants to find out what he can do, what knowledge is hidden in him").

In Bromige's poetry the search shows, and so do the seams often, but his poetry gains authenticity from its deliberate ruggedness. Bromige may not give you all you expect from poetry — economy or "form," for example — but to give up on him early will be failing to take him on his own terms, and the more you read it the more you understand that *Threads* is an extended definition of his own terms. The important thing about Bromige's poetry is that his self-definition holds emancipating possibilities for us all. What Bromige says in "A Passive Voice" is too true:

> "the mind" is dodgy,
> or, say, the habituation of it,
> wants its hierarchies,
> preserves itself. . . .

This general statement illuminates others, more directly about what happens when the pressure of the free mind is directed at those orderly hierarchies:

> in my mind
> what insists on consistency
> of imagery
> breaks, making a rockpile of,
> my home.

And, in answer to the temptation one might feel to scoff at Bromige's more rambling poems, here are some lines from "Sides of an intent":

> . . . even the words get out of hand when the intent is to hold them to one's rein . . . Slurred-drunken speech, drunkenness would be a kind of health, whole with the near-blindness otherwise so troublesome.

STAN DRAGLAND

MEDIUM OR MAGICIAN

FRANK DAVEY, *King of Swords*. Talonbooks.
FRANK DAVEY, *Arcana*. Coach House Press.
DAVID ROSENBERG, *Leavin America*. Coach House Press.
DAVID DAWSON, *Ceremonial*. Coach House Press.

SOMEWHERE IN THE permutations of Frank Davey's tarot cards, the symbols are mixed. There is no guarantee that when the game is finished truth will be revealed, sword and cup will embrace, or the questor will ever find the chapel perilous. *King of Swords* is an urban romance. The poetic persona, himself Arthur, king and cuckold, wanders through the city labyrinth of marriage and art and friendship looking to the cards, to symbol and legend for explication of his own faltering existence.

As the cards are dealt, the questor finds he is no hero, simply an involuntary medium for events; births, deaths, (horrible deaths with human flesh trapped, burning, in automobiles), marriages and divorces. He knows, but is powerless to prevent, what the cards signify. Like the hare in a paperchase, he litters his path with poems, manuscripts, in an effort to circumvent his own mortality.

They all ride again in Davey's poems; Lancelot, Merlin, Arthur, Gwenevere, Sir Kay, Sir Griflet. Actually, they ride him, weaving on the path in a grotesque mode that is neither comic nor tragic. Gwenevere/Elayne digs her spurs in his flesh and he wonders who is the hero.

> "The uterus
> largest muscle
> of the body, far heavier
> . . . than the powerful biceps
> of a heavyweight champion prizefighter"
> says Guttmacher. Cf. Nineve.
> Elayne. Gwenevere.

He finds the ideal lady of courtly love is no lady, but a soldier too, and strong enough to win. Ideals pursued on horseback, literally sexual, with the sword, literally phallic, are focused on the cup, which bleeds with lunar persistence. The grail is woman. She is a *doppelgänger*, the instrument of perfection, of ideal and physical love, and the agent of his immortality, a cornucopia, but also a warrior and the mother of the child who will replace him as the king and hero of his own daydreams.

There are times when the analogy is a bit strained, and there are no unforgettable lines in *King of Swords*. The best moments are humorous, when the poor, only human knight is able to laugh at himself and the whole game.

> Breasts encrusted with jewels,
> a clitoris of gold: our
> Gwenevere, cloistered
> with her Avan
> lady.

Arcana is more flesh for the bones of *King of Swords*. The tarot cards are dealt again. Indeed the signs are unobtrusively present in the watermarks on the paper; the sun, the wheel, the tower, the horned god. In *Arcana*, Davey abandons the sustained metaphor, giving more substance to reality, letting myth take a back seat in his "used Ford".

The mysteries of *Arcana* are the rituals of life in Anytime. Still, the questor seeks the grail, but in an old motor car on the Hope-Princeton highway. Arthur becomes Menelaus, the most famous cuckold of all, as time shifts from mediæval to Greek, even Iroquois.

The romantic hero has more control over the mysteries in *Arcana*. He writes poems, becomes a father, begins to see himself as magician.

> Even when all the tools of life
> — the cup, the sword, the dish,
> the staff — lie before him on a table
> he wields only
> his wand — his gesture moves
> words to blossom green
> white and red along boughs
> miraculously round him growing.

Sometimes the self-conscious mirror-gazing is disturbing and we hear "the screams of Icarus returning home" as the poet falls, wings melting, in a tangle of his own banalities and conceits. He learns,

> It is rock that makes poetry,
> the shit cakes on the dog's paws,
> the bitches we hurl
> the line toward.

All the magic and the best efforts of the poet are expressed in "The Page of Wands":

> After the geese
> have appeared on the horizon
> flown southward overhead
> silence.

David Rosenberg, in *Leavin America*, takes the romance one step further, leaving out the mythical cast and going directly to the stars. He runs into trouble when he fails to relate the particular to the universal in a group of poems which ostensibly set out to do just that. In one jump, the poet-genius would become

> medium with everything
> Motor City
> under my feet
> pure imagination above.

Most often, the poet is left trapped in his own aging bag of skin, contemplating the cold stars he has counted on to reveal the meaning of his existence. Their light should be the source of his inspiration. He too should be literally elevated to stardom.

The poems in *Leavin America* are arranged on the page in syntactically

divorced clusters, set like points of light against blue paper. The image should explode with enough power to fuse the words both to each other and to the Idea. The Idea should be manifested in relationships between words and between levels of consciousness. This sometimes happens, but when it does not we are left with the fragments. Too seldom is the unity in multiplicity revealed. However, the groping is validated by occasional flashes of light.

Since the stars are cooled in their distance from human existence, Rosenberg looks to three closer sources of energy; sexual love, work (creativity), and drugs. In love, he is Phoebus, or sun, to his moon women; "men have always been one flesh with the sun." As poet and lover, he must be the light, the biggest star of all. Like Icarus, Rosenberg learns that as a mere man he is fallible. Ultimately, cut off by his own ambition, by his self-styled status as poet, he is prevented from taking off on his transcendental journey by the weight of his own expectations.

In "Flower Power", he considers the artificial route to "poems beeping out mysteries", the revelations he expects to experience through drugs

> when plants work
> a blue virginal
> sonnet
> they bestow on the Bard.

But there is no quick recipe for magic. The poet, the magician, must learn his craft, prepare himself as a medium for revealed truth.

Having dissipated his energy in imaginary trips leading to blank spaces in the sky, the poet becomes involuntary. He has failed in the attempt to select with his own camera; "I am more the earth attached to a star." As he dives through the air, he begins to know that there is some machinery he has not yet begun to understand. A mortal after all, he is learning to stand and wait. Truths are revealed in the mundane functions of life, the passing of time. As the days fade and perish one by one, there is comfort and some truth in the rituals of eating, working and making love, waiting like a piano to be played on.

Ceremonial, poems by David Dawson, is an abrupt change from the aggressive heterosexual poetry of Davey and Rosenberg. In these poems, there is no time or energy wasted in the pursuit of cups and moons. Dawson's moon is a mystery that is endured, tolerated and finally called mother, but is never his muse. The poet in these poems is passive, the cup, the stone himself. Creation is not an act of will, but something that happens, like tides, like seasons.

The poem, the poet, wait like a stone on the beach to be created by events, the wind, the tide.

> a slow drip over stone
> wears
> on the flat surface
> of this the essential
> witness.

In a "Canticle for Stones" Dawson articulates a poetic philosophy that would occasionally deny utterance. The medium is controlled by other voices, the sound of the wind and the sea. He speaks from compulsion and because words are his tool.

> Anthropologists tell us that man first made tools
> and used them, made weapons and used them, before
> he could name them before he could count them
> the word was much later.

Dawson's poems are seeded in reflection rather than action. As he waits, listening to sea stories, the history of man recorded in the sound of the waves, he examines his own face in the water. His gods are male, like himself; Manitou, Zeus, and boys burning with angelic brightness. However, there is a curious absence of ego in this acknowledged narcissism.

> I do not claim the world is centred here
> in me, nor did I create it by my existence.
> perception is discovery is perception not
> creation.

The magic is not created but heard. Dawson is shaman rather than magician. The magic conducts through him. It is a gift, not genius.

While the poet sings and dances, the tune is called somewhere else. He is a reed in the wind. The wind, the mysteries are not to be questioned. The truth reveals itself as

> that part of the mind which seldom speaks
> moves through magic to utterance.

Dawson responds almost as the cup to the questors Davey and Rosenberg. We discover he doesn't seek the moon, because he is it. He is a reflector of light. We only miss in his poems the confrontations that make fire, the sun.

Every use of language is at least a small attempt to unlock the secrets of the universe. One of the prerogatives of poetry is the right of the poet to attach some cabbalistic significance to the arrangements of words. In the act of creation or arrangement the poet becomes either medium or magician. The words are the magic wires from which he hangs suspended in the dome of many coloured glass. The rest of us can only watch and hope he won't fall.

LINDA ROGERS

AN ABUNDANCE OF REPRINTS

Canadian Literature and the New Canadian Library were born at almost the same time. Both were given poor prognostications of survival, but both are still alive and flourishing after fifteen years, and if *Canadian Literature* is now at its 61st number, the New Canadian Library has just published 14 new titles (probably the largest single issue) which brings its total to more than 120 volumes, covering the whole range of Canadian writing from the late eighteenth century down to the present.

The new selection is catholic in both nature and quality, but it contains an exceptional number of fine books whose reissue has in some cases been long overdue. One such is Howard O'Hagan's vivid fragment of Canadian mythology, *Tay John* ($1.95), which shares with Sheila Watson's *The Double Hook* the honour of being the best evocation of the interior of British Columbia as a legendary landscape. There is Margaret Laurence's *A Jest of God* ($2.25), too often discussed in this magazine to need further introduction, and Jack Ludwig's *Above Ground* ($2.25), distinguished like all his books by its vivid characterization and its taste for the eccentric in behaviour and attitude.

A different aspect of the bizarre appears in Wyndham Lewis's *Self Condemned* ($2.95), a grim satire on Ontario manners and mores a generation ago, whose appearance in Canada twenty years after its first publication may perhaps be taken to show that we have at least attained the maturity of being willing to see ourselves as others may savagely see us. And finally, available for the

first time in a reasonably priced Canadian edition, is a collection of Mavis Gallant's superb short stories, entitled *The End of The World and Other Stories* ($2.95) and selected and introduced by Robert Weaver.

There are two books that at least lay claim to be autobiographies. One is Frederick P. Grove's *In Search of Myself* ($2.95), which recent events, culminating in the publication of D. O. Spettigue's *F.P.G.: The European Years*, have revealed to be largely fiction, a fact that if anything enhances its interest, since now we may speculate on the motives that induced this strange man so radically to falsify his own past. Ernest Buckler's *Ox Bells and Fireflies* ($2.75) is obviously much nearer to actuality than *In Search of Myself*, yet even Buckler has obviously used many of the techniques he developed in the writing of fiction, and heightens effects with a kind of poetic prose in which nostalgia is persistently stimulated until at times it spills over into sentimentality.

There are no less than four translations from the French, the best being that of *Tête Blanche* ($1.95) by Marie-Claire Blais. The others are *Allegro* ($1.95), a selection of Felix Leclerc's often rather mawkish fables, André Langevin's unexceptional *Dust Over the City* ($2.50), and Charles G. D. Roberts' rather stiff translation of Philippe Aubert de Gaspé's rather stiff historical novel, *Canadians of Old* ($2.95). A much better historical novel is Thomas Raddall's *Pride's Fancy* ($2.75), which is all it ever pretends to be — a fine and racy yarn, while Roberts is represented more directly in his curious and in some ways very appealing fable of withdrawal into the world of nature, *The Heart of the Ancient Wood* ($2.95). Yet another Leacock item appears in the anthology Robertson Davies collected, *Feast of Stephen* ($1.95), in which one of the best items is the long introduction, where Davies emerges as a most perceptive Leacock student. Archibald McMechan's *Headwaters of Canadian Literature* ($2.95) has its interest as a thin but often shrewd survey of Canadian writing up to the 1920s; it was published almost twenty years before E. K. Brown's epoch-making *On Canadian Poetry*, which incidentally the Tecumseh Press of Ottawa has just reprinted. The one book among the new NCL titles on which my endurance failed was Robert Traill Spence Lowell's very Victorian novel of Newfoundland, *New Priest in Conception Bay* ($2.95); it may well be the least readable book ever reprinted in the series, and that is perhaps a kind of distinction.

Those who — as I do — consider Morley Callaghan's *That Summer in Paris* to be the best book he wrote since the 1930s, will be happy to see it reprinted by Macmillan in paperback, at $3.95. G.W.

CANADIAN ANTHOLOGY

A NEW EDITION of the *Canadian Anthology*, selected and edited by Carl F. Klinck and R. E. Watters, has just been published by Gage Educational Publishing ($11.95). One cannot hide one's disappointment at the scanty recognition that has been given in this edition to the changes by which the Canadian literary scene has been virtually transformed since 1955, when the first edition of the anthology appeared. Relatively few of the new poets and fiction writers who have appeared since that time are adequately represented, one looks in vain for evidence of the veritable renaissance that has taken place in drama, and virtually no recognition is paid to the extraordinary development of Canadian criticism during the past fifteen years. None of the important new critics is present, none of the important new dramatists. G.W.

opinions and notes

RUSSIAN VIEWS OF LOWRY

SOVIET publishers are steadily increasing their production of translated Canadian literature and studies of numerous aspects of Canadian life. Translations of Leacock, Mowat, Grandbois, Gabrielle Roy, Anne Hébert, Hood, Ringuet, etc. have appeared, as have general studies of Canadian literature and general introductions to Canadian culture and history.

The appearance of the present collection of some of Malcolm Lowry's fiction[1] is interesting from a number of points of view. First of all, it indicates a widening of Soviet literary horizons to include authors whose work would have been unacceptable earlier. The translations are themselves of interest. Perhaps of most interest for the present readers is the introductory article by V. Skorodenko on Lowry and his work.

It is difficult to imagine a Soviet author writing and, even more, publishing fiction like Lowry's in this collection. The major work is *Under the volcano*, followed by "The Bravest boat", "Strange comfort afforded by the profession", "Gin and goldenrod", and "The Forest path to the spring". ("The Bravest boat" has also appeared in another collection, *Zateryannaya ulitsa.*) The presentation of an ex-diplomat drinking himself to death in *Under the Volcano* has, in the Soviet context, to be carefully explained for the reader.

In spite of its clear political bias, Skorodenko's article is an educated and intelligent introduction to Lowry, showing a sophistication not always found in Soviet critics. Skorodenko clearly considers Lowry a Canadian writer because of his love of Canada, the land least touched by Western civilization, to which he devotes his most poetic descriptions.

After a brief biographical sketch, Skorodenko moves directly to Lowry's work, in particular *Under the volcano*. This novel, it is noted, was to be central in a series of works, *The Journey which never ends*, of which "The Forest path to the spring" was to be the conclusion. The complex structure, briefly outlined, is justified by the concept of the novel: there are two clear levels. "This is a novel about the death of one man taken alone and a novel about the lack of vitality of *all* [Skorodenko's italics] of Western civilization, about the irreversible disease which dooms it to destruction corroding it from within." It is logical for Firmin to perish, for he is not only behind the times; he is finally against history. Time is, thus, the essence of the novel. Although Firmin realizes his situation, he does nothing to help himself because "bourgeois individualism, the anarchistic idea of personal freedom, represented in Byron by the idea of struggle against God, in the twentieth century dooms man's whole life to be turned into Quixote-like oration-spouting." Thus the hell of Firmin is the socially conditioned hell of a civilization doomed to destruction, and, although Lowry may understand and even

[1] Lauri, Mal'kol'm [Lowry, Malcolm], *U podnozhiya vulkana. Rasskazy* [Under the volcano. Stories.] Moscow: Izdatel'stvo 'Progress,' [Progress Publishing House] 1972. Translated by V. Khinkis, I. Gurovaya & O. Soroka, with an introduction by V. Skorodenko. 1 ruble, 70 kopecks.

sympathize with Firmin, he cannot but condemn him. This juxtaposition of what is, and what in different circumstances could and should be, is a primary theme of the novel.

In Lowry's condemnation of Western civilization there is the suggestion of "another" civilization in step with history — that of the Soviet Union: in Skorodenko's view the references to the Spanish Civil war indicate this. Hugh, a typical leftist intellectual of the thirties, is a symbol " . . . not of that weak bourgeois individualism [i.e. of Geoffrey], but of that spontaneous, anarchical and often petty-bourgeois revolutionary-mindedness which can, in certain circumstances, turn into revolutionary-mindedness which is class-orientated. Precisely this kind of revolutionary-mindedness during the Spanish Civil war brought many Western intellectuals into the ranks of the defenders of the Republic. However it was insufficient to help part of them survive the bitterness of temporary defeat and the lesson learned from it, [and] to remain true to the cause." But even Hugh is not completely free of Quixote-like flights, yet he is, nevertheless, "on the side of history". Hugh is the only one of the three main characters to survive because he represents hope for the future. It should be added parenthically that the editors have leaned slightly on Hugh's side by eliminating all references, even jocular, to Trotsky, and all disparaging remarks about the Soviet Union.

Skorodenko is particularly impressed by Lowry's style, with its richness of expression and detail. Lowry's ability to convey the atmosphere of another country is seen particularly in his description of the peasants of Mexico, which is not just a background but an integral part of the novel.

If *Under the volcano* is about man-made hell, "The Forest path to the spring" is a view of an earthly paradise, for "philosophic nihilism in views of man's predestination in the universe was foreign to the author. He was untouched by fashionable existentialist crazes, and even in the novella, where the fate of ancient tragedy appears as contemporary history, and lives are ruined, the author has not concerned himself solely with the destruction of those values which the bourgeois *Weltanschauung* advocates as the only true and proper ones for man." Thus in "The Forest path" we see all the beauty of the world and of life. This story is filled with "true democracy characteristic of Lowry and an exalted reverance for the miracle of life and the world." Its version of love, the highest synthesis of the earthly and the spiritual, reminds one of the *Song of Songs*.

"The Bravest boat" and "Gin and goldenrod" also reflect this exalted view of love. Sigbjørn Wilderness, partially autobiographically drawn, is meant to play the role of the Greek chorus, commenting, in "Strange comfort" on the fate of artists "destroyed by 'circumstances,' or more exactly, by the crassness of the bourgeoisie, deaf to the beautiful."

In spite of being depressed by much of what he saw, Lowry recognized the greatness of man:

> He knew that clear springs do not dry up: they are fed by the earth. "Could a soul, washed there, be cleansed from its filth or quench its thirst?" asks Geoffrey Firmin from his hell.
>
> Yes, asserts Malcolm Lowry by his books. Yes. It could be.

The several translators have produced good translations of difficult confusing texts. Most Soviet readers (the book is

apparently most popular in Moscow) will probably extrapolate the factual information from Skorodenko's foreword, assuming that all else is mere political verbiage intended to get official approval. Nevertheless the article is of interest in its own right and one is gratified to see serious study done on Lowry in the Soviet Union.

PAUL W. AUSTIN

QUE SAIS-JE?

THE *Que sais-je?* series, published by the Presses Universitaires de France, offers perhaps the most condensed of the world's get-wise-quick series of manuals of knowledge. Whole subjects with vast ramifications, ranging from the Roman Empire and the Religions of Tibet to Boxing and Suicide, are presented in slim volumes of about 120 small pages. The pace is always breathless, and even the conciseness of the French language leaves an immense challenge to any author who is attempting to present the range and depth of his subject at all meaningfully. That many scholars have done precisely this is shown by the fact that the series now runs to 1,600 titles. But, at best, *Que sais-je?* books merely open doors, and if, in his recently published 1579th volume in the series, *La Littérature Québécoise*, our frequent contributor Laurent Mailhot gives a brilliant overview of the Canadian writing in French for the benefit of a French readership barely familiar with the field, this will arouse in Canadian readers a hope that he may write in the near future a broader and at the same time more penetrating subject. His knowledge and perceptiveness deserve a wider scope.

A.A.