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CANADIAN LITERATURE No. 63

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WILDERNESS AND UTOPIA

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editorial

CHANGING PATRONS

ALREADY DEEPLY ENGAGED in the massive task of the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography*, the University of Toronto Press has now commenced another scheme equally vast, and in this case of international rather than national relevance. It is the great complete English translation of the works of Erasmus, the first of its kind, expected to fill between forty and forty-five volumes, and to be published — the Press announces — at approximately two volumes per year until the edition is complete in about twenty years' time. Already, in *Saturday Night*, Robert Fulford has made the appropriate comments, after surveying the magnitude of the project, with its thirty-three contributing scholars, located in universities the world over.

> What seems to me admirable — perhaps I mean enviable — about this project is its assumptions. The editors and publishers not only believe that there is a serious need for Erasmus in English right now; they believe that there will be a need for a great deal of Erasmus in English over the next three or four decades. More than that, they believe there will *be* a next two decades, and that there will continue to be scholars, universities and libraries.

Perhaps the one melancholy fact about the project — and Fulford talks of this too — is that it constitutes a kind of viaticum on Latin scholarship, which, if not dead, is in perilous condition. Again to quote Fulford:

> The project is, of course, uniquely a product of our own times — a few decades ago it wouldn't have been necessary; scholars would have assumed that anyone who cared to read Erasmus would read him in Latin.

The first volume of the *Collected Works* is entitled *Correspondence of Erasmus, Letters 1 to 141*; it consists of the letters written between 1484 and 1500, together

with a few replies Erasmus received from fellow scholars. It is an index of the energy of this remarkable man that his correspondence alone will take up about twenty volumes — or half the *Collected Works*.

Though time and fashion have made the literary language Erasmus used archaic in a world that sorely needs a similar neutral and eloquent means of communication, what he has to say is often timeless in its implications. True, like other writers, Erasmus sometimes framed his letters not only for the eye of his contemporaries but also for that of posterity; he was not above gathering them into collections to meet the greed of the early Gutenberg age for new publishable material. But modern authors who hoard their correspondence with a view to a library sale, and who are not above shaping their letters with a regard for how they will eventually look in print, can hardly dismiss such a practice as totally archaic. And in his less self-conscious moods, especially in the later letters in this volume, there are times when Erasmus (whom we have too often been inclined to regard as a titan of pure scholarship), emerges as the prototype of the professional writer, the post-mediaeval intellectual who parlays freedom of thought against precariousness of existence. Consider the following:

> So I entreat and implore you, dear Batt, if you have a single spark of your former affection for me, to give your most earnest consideration to saving me. With your agreeable, easy-going disposition, you possibly believe that you have left me well off; however, I seem to be in a worse state of ruin than ever before, since X offers no bounty, my lady merely extends promises from day to day, and the bishop goes so far as to turn his back upon me, while the abbot bids me be of good hope. In the meantime, not a soul comes forward to give, save only X, whom I have already squeezed so dry, poor fellow, that he has not a penny more to give me . . . At the same time, I have many thoughts to ponder; Where shall I flee, without a rag to my back? What if I fall ill? Granted that nothing of this kind happens, what will I be able to achieve in the literary field without access to books? What can I hope to do if I leave Paris? And finally, what will be the use of literary productions if I have no recognized position to back them? Will monsters like the person I encountered at Saint-Omer be able to laugh at me, calling me a prater?

The age of private patronage has gone, and its passing has removed some of the acuter humiliations from the writer's life. Still, money remains a great subject in writers' letters, as in their conversations, and one could imagine a modern letter very much like that of Erasmus with persons being replaced by institutions, with an impoverished independent publishing house taking the place of the squeezed-dry X, and the CBC, the Canada Council, and one or other provincial

arts council taking on the roles of "my lady", the bishop and the abbot. The very freedom that writers desire creates its everlasting precariousness, and until writers accept to be civil servants, which one hopes they never will, they will always be asking for bread — and snapping like Erasmus at the hand that feeds.

THE UNDUE DWELLING on violence in literature, like the undue dwelling on sex, may appear to the sophisticated a self-defeating process, since for them as readers its more or less rapid effect is a state of either ennui or ridicule. Sade shocks and then amuses and then bores; no sane reader can get through two of his books in close succession without vast skippings. But boredom and laughter — let us admit — are self-defensive reactions, and the fact that brutality and porn or near-porn may seem ludicrous to those who find a sense of balance essential in art and life does not mean that they are any less attractive to others, or any less significant as signs of the times. Nor are the problems surrounding such phenomena made any less complex by the fact that one finds, in censorship of any kind, a solution neither acceptable nor likely to succeed.

Indeed, the question of whether brutality or an exaggerated preoccupation with sexuality should be encouraged or discouraged or forbidden is not the real point. Both exist, and there is a kind of symbiotic sub-culture which unites those who produce extreme works in both directions and those who read or see them on the screen. To a great extent the relationship is a passive one; few of the people who watch violent films go out to imitate the brutalities they have witnessed. The real question we have to face is why in a society that has become theoretically more permissive there should be an upsurge of the kind of fantasies — in literature, in film and to a less extent in the other arts — which one had hitherto regarded as typical products of repression and of the fantasies of liberation it produces. The answer obviously is that if we have to take such extreme advantage of our freedom, then we are not yet free. This, of course, is what many contemporary radical intellectuals say when they argue that violence in the arts is a form of extreme protest against the decaying society in which we live, and which we must destroy before a non-violent world and its appropriate arts can come into being. The essential flaw of such an argument seems to lie in the fact that historic precedents, at least from the triumph of Lenin in 1917, have demonstrated that violence used to destroy the old order has an obstinate tendency to perpetuate itself in defence of the new order, so that the non-violent world and the new art it would allow to flower are indefinitely postponed.

Nevertheless, I could see little realism in the arguments of those writers who

during the 1950s took a quasi-pacifist standpoint and condemned violent art somewhat fatalistically as a sign of social decadence, rather than attempting to understand either its works or its motivations. The last decade has demonstrated that — whether just or not — their condemnations have had little effect. It is therefore rather surprising that we should have had to wait until 1974 for a book that — even in a rudimentary way — attempts a sensible analysis of the causes of violence in literature and the other arts and — without either applauding the phenomenon or condemning it outright — tries to present a sound response.

The book is *Violence in the Arts* (Macmillan, $7.50), by John Fraser, a critic of English origin who now teaches at Dalhousie. It is a brief book — 162 pages plus notes — and it can be regarded as no more than a reconnaissance for the exhaustive survey of the phenomenon that one day needs to be written. But, such as it is, the book is timely and useful. Basic to Fraser's historical analysis — and to his whole argument — is the contention that there is an essential difference between violence in the literature of earlier ages, and violence in literature, film, etc. after the rise of Nazism. Violence in the classic works from antiquity down to the nineteenth century was qualified by concepts of justice and nobility. Unmitigated violence tended to be isolated in highly formalized works like those of Sade and Octave Mirbeau, which had obviously no connection with real life. (Fraser ignores the hints of an emerging preoccupation with gratuitous violence in the works of pre-World War II writers like Gide and the early Sartre.) But by making it a political necessity, the Nazis first made violence part of the "very fabric of society". (Again, not enough attention is paid to the extent the Nazis built on Stalin's transformation of Chekist violence into a political way of life.) To begin, the rest of the world was revolted by the Nazi excesses, but, as often happens in such cases, revulsion was transformed into fascination, and more and more often we have been imitating the Nazis in recent years, either directly — as in Algeria or Vietnam — or vicariously in our arts. Because the Americans lack a tradition of self-criticism, their country has become — as it were — the eye of the hurricane; there is a curious touch of loyalty to the homeland in Fraser's rather gauche argument that the English are saved from American extremities of violence by having the right combination of anarchic instincts and conventional behaviour patterns (though perhaps the murder statistics, which he does not quote, give support to his point).

As I have suggested, there are many weaknesses in *Violence in the Arts*, but these must be balanced against a resolute effort to come to terms with the phenomenon, made in a clear prose that reflects both its writer's sanity and his

admitted debt to Orwell. "When the only options [he argues] are pure non-violence or undiluted violence, it becomes harder for the kinds of intermediate relationship to be worked out that may in fact render violence unnecessary." Violence in action as well as in the arts is what he obviously means, and he suggests that we can grapple with the problem, as earlier ages did, by recognizing that there are different kinds of violence, with different moral aspects. "One still has to decide, sooner rather than later [he goes on] which party one backs and agree that if violence is essential for its survival it must use violence. In other words, one has to come to judgment. And in general, violence or the possibility of violence is a great sharpener of judgment." The flaw in that argument, of course, lies in the fact that the calm self-defences of some of the worst Nazi criminals suggest that they too had come to judgment, but without a sharpening of the kind Fraser might wish. And wrong judgment — which is always a human possibility — is less irredeemable when it is unaccompanied by violence. For all that, *Violence in the Arts* is an honest and welcome attempt to face with candour a problem — or perhaps rather a cluster of problems, social as well as artistic — which so far have been largely avoided, either from prejudice or, worse, from embarrassment.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

ALDEN NOWLAN

Interviewed by
John Metcalf

METCALF: What are your working methods? How much rewriting do you do?

NOWLAN: Well, almost everything that I write goes through two phases. Usually I do the first version of a poem almost as an exercise in free association except that it's tethered to the point that brought it into being. Sometimes I think of these first versions as first drafts and sometimes I think of them as notes toward a poem. Some of them never go beyond this phase. The rest I throw into a drawer and periodically I dig through a bunch of them and pick out those that appeal to me at the moment and then I work at them as objectively and coldly as possible, almost as if they were somebody else's work. Then when I'm preparing the manuscript for a collection of poems I make further changes in almost every poem that goes into the book, not to make them conform to any theoretical principles but according to Robert Graves' dictum that a poet ought to handle his lines and images and words like a housewife separating the good tomatoes from those that are under-ripe or spoiled.

METCALF: What have been the main poetic influences in your career? To what tradition do you feel you belong — the British or the American?

NOWLAN: I think perhaps I belong to the first generation of Canadian poets to be influenced most by other Canadian poets or maybe I should have said: to be influenced most directly by other Canadian poets. I believe Margaret Atwood says that her most important influences were Canadian. None of the older Canadian poets could have said that. Every previous generation turned to England or the United States for models. And as for the younger Canadian poets I doubt if many of them could name even one of their English or American contemporaries. The more I think about it, John, the more I feel that this question is ten years out of date.

METCALF: Have there been any particular poets who have influenced you?

NOWLAN: Oh, there have been dozens and dozens of poets that have influenced me either a little or a great deal at various periods. I've been writing poems and stories ever since I was eleven years old. It would be easy for me to declare that I didn't begin to write seriously until I was twenty-five and then mention some of the poets I happened to be reading when I was that age as being major influences — but that would be essentially false. One of the important influences on me when I got to be reasonably mature, say seventeen or eighteen years old, was D. H. Lawrence. And it's curious. I think someone reading my work would be very unlikely to find echoes of Lawrence but only recently I was intrigued to discover that Lawrence also had a great influence on Orwell. And reading Orwell you wouldn't guess that Lawrence had had any influence on him at all. Lawrence was much more of a romantic than Orwell was or than I am, and so if all three of us were using the same instrument we'd none of us be playing the same tune. Quite often people look at a writer and glibly reel off a list of the people that he resembles who lived prior to his time and say that they were his influences. I've had reviewers say that of course I was influenced by so and so — and it was somebody I'd never read beyond a few things in an anthology, perhaps.

METCALF: I remember your saying to me once that Robinson was a great influence.

NOWLAN: Yes, Robinson was a big influence on me when I was about twenty-five — but I'd come to him through Fred Cogswell, you see, just as I came to the Black Mountain people through Layton and Souster.

METCALF: From your early books to your latest there's been a progressive loosening of form — an abandoning of metre and rhyme.

NOWLAN: That's come about through an almost purely intuitive process. At intervals over the years I've looked back over my work of, say, the previous six months and I've suddenly realized that I've been writing differently. The important thing to keep in mind about the process of development as it applies to me is that my whole intellectual life, the whole growth of my mind, for the first twenty-five years of my life took place in a solitude that couldn't have been greater if I had been living alone on an island. That's so odd that people find it impossible to understand — they think they understand, but they don't. Because

it wasn't necessary for me to verbalize any of the reactions that I was having or to justify any direction that I was taking — because there was absolutely nobody, nobody at all for me to talk with about such things, many of these processes remained on the non-verbal level that we call intuition. I think that's what intuition is: non-verbal thought.

METCALF: What's been the influence of Olson and Creeley and Duncan? Had they anything to do with your formal development?

NOWLAN: Oh, yes, very much so. You see that just as I went from Cogswell who had influenced me directly to Robinson who had influenced him directly, so I went from Layton and Souster and Dudek to their direct influences, which included either Creeley, Olson or Duncan or the people, such as Williams, who had influenced Creeley, Olson and Duncan. There was Kenneth Fearing, for instance, who must have had an enormous influence on Souster. And I like Kenneth Patchen — but I could never write like that. I think it's important to find the right influences, the influences that are sufficiently congenial to be useful. There was a time when like everybody else in those days I read and re-read Dylan Thomas, but it would have been fatal for me to have developed a Dylan Thomas kind of style — simply because we're such different people. You have to begin with your basic nature. There are certain facets to my mind and my manner of expressing myself that are as inescapable as the fact that I'm six feet three inches tall and have blue-gray eyes. And that's true of everyone. I've also been influenced by the Irishman Patrick Kavanaugh. But none of this conflicts with my earlier statement that my most direct influences were Canadian. I came to English and American poetry later.

METCALF: You have written a poem on the death of William Carlos Williams and I wondered if you'd studied any of his or Olson's theoretical writings on poetry.

NOWLAN: Yes, I've read Olson's projective verse essay that old Williams liked so well that he included it in his autobiography, and I've read a lot of Williams' critical pieces. But I've always had the suspicion that with Williams at least the criticism was only a kind of unwilling justification for the work, that he only bothered putting that kind of thing down on paper because he felt that he had to do it in order to obtain critical respectability for his work and work like it. Bertrand Russell said that every philosopher ought to first publish a book written

in jargon that no layman could understand, and once having done that he wouldn't have to bother with such jargon any more. And perhaps a poet ought to begin by publishing a book of criticism with all sorts of high-sounding phrases — adumbrate is a very big word with the critics — and then he wouldn't be expected to waste any more time with that sort of thing, he could simply write poems, which is what a poet ought to be doing. But I think Pound's critical writings are valuable — I keep recommending them to students. I wrote to old Pound when he was in St. Elizabeth's Hospital and he sent me a note saying, "I tray-sure yer replies," whatever that meant.

On this continent and in our lifetime it seems that to justify yourself as a writer you must first proclaim a critical theory and then proceed to demonstrate it. If Shakespeare had been required to do that he'd have spent his whole life in some obscure place writing a critique on literature that nobody would remember and he'd never have found the time to write any of his plays. But, of course, Shakespeare, as they liked to point out in the 18th century, wasn't an intellectual. He broke all the rules. He's been stuffed and mounted for so long that we tend to forget that. One thing that I've come to feel more and more strongly is that because so many North American poets are professors there's come to be a confusion of roles. Take the questions after a poetry reading — I find that 90 per cent of those questions are questions you'd ask a professor, not questions that you'd ask a poet. Now, if it happened that I was a professor as well as a poet I'd slip automatically out of my poet's laurel wreath and into my academic gown and answer as a professor without even being conscious of changing from one role to another. If most of the poets were motor mechanics there would be the same confusion of roles, I suppose, and during the question period after a reading people would say, "Mr. Layton, I'm having transmission trouble. What should I do about it?" Acorn, Purdy, myself, and Newlove, are about the only Canadian poets of my generation that aren't also professors.

METCALF: I'd like to ask you another question about form — about the line divisions in your work. Are they sense units, breath units or purely typographical?

NOWLAN: They're many different things but above all they're attempts to find a typographical substitute for the purely visual and oral things that play such an important part in a conversation — facial expressions, gestures of the hands, intonations of the voice. I might end a line in a certain way in an attempt to create the typographical equivalent of a shrug, for instance. Then, too, some of the divisions are intended to make the reader slow down — to read certain words

in units of five instead of units of ten, for instance. And sometimes the break adds an additional level of meaning in that the reader is led to believe that I'm saying one thing and then an instant later he finds that I'm saying something else which doesn't supersede the first thing, but amplifies it, or modifies it. The thing that he thought I was going to say and the thing that I did say are both there, one strengthening and supporting the other. There's a deliberate instant of ambiguity, you see, which reflects the ambiguity of life.

Now, I have no intention of giving you specific examples — of pointing out how that works or is intended to work in individual poems. That would be like a pitcher walking in before the pitch to tell the batter what kind of a ball he was going to throw him. Somewhere years ago, I forget where, I read the objective of the poet, like the objective of the pitcher in baseball, is to make the batter understand — too late. I was immediately struck by the truth of that.

METCALF: When you give public readings, the enjambment often doesn't follow the printed text of the poem.

NOWLAN: Right. The dominant tradition in poetry written in English has always been that poetry is heightened conversation, an oral art. But the people who carry the Black Mountain theories to their ultimate extreme — and anything becomes absurd when it's carried to its ultimate extreme — they seem to forget that fully literate people don't move their lips when they read. And they also forget that the eye takes in as many as, oh, say, twenty-five words at a glance — whereas when you're listening to somebody reading aloud you hear the words, one by one, in succession. The line divisions on the printed page are for the reader — but if I'm there in the flesh and come to a point on the printed page I used certain line divisions to indicate a shrug — well, I simply shrug. Mark Twain when he was reading his stories in public didn't *read* them at all, he simply *told* the same story. Then there's also the fact that I'm not an actor. I don't have the dramatic ability to indicate verbally the equivalent of, say, a semicolon, and so possibly I insert another word — an extra word that a professional actor might not need to use. Some of my poems now have one printed and one spoken version. Sometimes I change entire lines in them when I read them before an audience. At first I worried about that and I used to feel that I ought to make the printed poem conform to the spoken poem, the poem as spoken by me, and I'd rewrite them — but I found it weakened them on the page. Now you take someone like Allen Ginsberg who is constantly reading to large audiences. Now when he writes a poem he knows that he's going to read it in an auditorium

and there are going to be an enormous number of distractions there — such as lightbulbs breaking and doors slamming, people coughing, and of course people will be thinking about other things, wondering if their wives are being unfaithful, if they can pay the rent, worrying about the pimple on their earlobe. Now if you were reading the book you could close it and go back to it later. You can't do that at a reading and so to express something you need only hint at on the page you may have to repeat the same word or line several times.

METCALF: So, if the poet writes with a live audience in mind he writes less purely than he would were he writing for the eye of the reader.

NOWLAN: Oh, yes. You see I don't write poems for an audience. An audience is a crowd. I write poems for one person at a time. I distrust the kind of thing that can be shouted to a crowd. At the end of that road I see the spellbinding orator. I'd rather talk with one person than speechify to a thousand.

METCALF: Your poems seem to split into two major divisions — poems that are descriptions or lyric (and some of the descriptive poems become poems of total metaphor) and then there are discursive or philosophical poems. There's a third, smaller group of satiric poems. The descriptive and lyric poems seem to belong to the earlier books in general. And the discursive, philosophic and satiric poems to be increasing in your later books.

NOWLAN: Well, I suppose I'm what Neruda would call an impure poet, in the sense that I feel that almost anything that can be experienced can be turned into poetry — and I suppose that most of us tend to become more philosophical, if that's the right word, as we get older. Possibly one reason why I now publish more poems of ideas is that earlier on I didn't have sufficient experience and it didn't come off, I mean that the poems of that kind that I attempted didn't come off. As for the satires, well, Bernard Shaw said that if you told people the truth you'd be well advised to make them laugh, because then they'd be less apt to kill you. But mostly I think of the satires as a type of light verse.

METCALF: You say you didn't have enough experience earlier to write more philosophic poems yet some of the descriptive poems, and certainly those that become total metaphor, are just as sophisticated and possibly even more profound.

NOWLAN: Yes. Yes, I think I may have phrased that very badly. Some of the earlier poems which were articulating ideas were doing so at a non-verbal level

— no, what I mean is, a non-abstract level — because that's how my mind was working. It goes back to what I said about working out my ideas in isolation. In those days I *thought* in total metaphor to a greater extent than I do now and so inevitably I wrote in the way I thought. The ideas were expressing themselves not only on the page but in my mind almost wholly through *things*. You know, William Carlos Williams said, "No ideas but in things." You must remember that I was born and grew up in a very primitive society. I suppose in some senses I'm like one of those 18th century Tahitians that were brought to England and thrown in among the London literary men. Even when they learned Greek and Latin they couldn't change what they'd been, don't you see?

METCALF: In seemingly simple poems like "Hens" and "Palomino Stallion" they work simultaneously as pure description and pure metaphor. There is a total fusion. Did you see these poems from the start as metaphor or did the fusion come as you were working from the thing seen?

NOWLAN: Well, the thought came from the thing seen and the poem came from the thought that had been provoked by the thing seen — and in another and maybe truer sense it all happened at once. [*Pause*] There was a time a few years ago when I had this worry, and it was a very real worry at the time, that I had no inventiveness. Not no imagination, but no inventiveness. In other words some people can sit down and invent an incident to illustrate an idea, but I find it almost literally impossible to do that. I'm a born liar, but that's different. Born liars don't invent things, they simply can't bear the unvarnished truth — or I ought to say the naked fact, because there's a great difference between a fact and a truth. I'm sorry to be blathering around so much but I have to keep hesitating to think — which is what prevented Stanfield from winning the last election. The poor bastard stops to think when he's asked a question and then he looks like an idiot because nobody does that any more.

METCALF: In some of your later work as the forms have moved further from the traditional, it seems sometimes that the colloquial — that speaking voice you were talking about earlier — falls into the prosaic.

NOWLAN: It's one of the risks you have to take. To be a writer you have to run the risk of making a fool of yourself. When I run the risk of sounding prosaic I run the risk deliberately — just as I sometimes deliberately run the risk of sounding sentimental. I think you have to risk sentimentality if you're going to write

anything that matters because after all sentimentality is very close to the things that *genuinely* move people — it's not a falsity but simply an exaggeration.

METCALF: "Ypres 1915", which you've said is one of your favourites among your work, is a poem that plays on the edge of sentimentality the whole time.

NOWLAN: Sure. That poem is essentially a dialogue between the brain and the guts, the cerebral and the visceral. The tension between the sentimental or the near-sentimental and the cynical or near-cynical is deliberate. Which reminds me that I wrote a poem called "He Raids the Refrigerator and Reflects Upon Parenthood," and because the emotion that evoked the poem was a maudlin one (for we all of us *do* feel maudlin at one time or another, provided we're human, and to be a poet is to express what humans feel) — I actually began the poem with the words, "Nowlan, you maudlin boob." I feel now that I should have entitled it "A Maudlin Poem", because there was one reviewer who said, "Unfortunately, Mr. Nowlan has one maudlin poem in his book called 'He Raids the Refrigerator'." And so this particular reviewer didn't know enough to know that the poem was *supposed* to be maudlin even though I'd said so in the poem. But then I don't suppose he'd read the poem. Many reviewers don't.

Any poet who deals with the emotions that move some people to tears is going to be accused by some people of being sentimental because sentimentality is by definition an excessive emotion and what to one person may seem excessive to another may seem perfectly normal. Thomas Hardy was also accused of being sentimental. I happen to be a very passionate person who is very readily moved to both tears and laughter and if I denied this I would be false to myself. Now I assume that T. S. Eliot was a very cold person, but he was also a very great poet. That coldness was natural to him, presumably.

But by God! I'd rather have spent an evening with Charles Dickens or Thomas Hardy than with T. S. Eliot.

METCALF: Your poetry is far more visual than oral. Is the musical element in poetry unimportant to you?

NOWLAN: If you mean by "musical element" what I think you mean — the use of pleasant sounds merely for the sake of using pleasant sounds — I try not to put anything into my poems that isn't functional. And, then, too, it's not entirely a matter of choice. I suppose the music that I respond to is very simple, unsophisticated music — the visual equivalent would be Norman Rockwell. In so

much criticism and in so much of the pretentious bosh uttered by writers when they're discussing their craft there's the unspoken assumption that everything you do as a writer is the result of choice or in accord with some critical theory. In reality, of course, a poet born tone-deaf is going to be an entirely different poet from a poet born with perfect pitch. You have to work within the limitations of what God made you. A moose might prefer to be a butterfly but he'd be a damned foolish moose if he wasted any time feeling sorry for himself because he wasn't one.

METCALF: *Things*, their physical appearance and texture, dominate a lot of your poetry. Is this a religious position? Do you believe in immanence?

NOWLAN: I have a very strong, almost primitive, sense of the sacredness of objects and things. Animals. Someone once pointed out to me that in all my poems there wasn't a single animal called 'it' — they were always 'he' or 'she'. In my poetry I try to tell the truth. It's a losing battle because there are so many truths you can't really tell but I try to show the thing as it *is*. That's the reason why I named one of my early books *The Things Which Are* after St. John the Divine being told by the angel to write 'the things which thou hast seen and the things which are'. (I think *now* it was a rather bombastic title — but at the same time it was trying to express this devotion to the truth of things.) There is a kind of truth in a beer can, you know. If you say, "There's a beer-can" that's something everyone can establish. They can go and see if it's there. But if you say "The ineluctible Providence is shining down upon you," you don't know whether it is or not. Yes, I believe in immanence very strongly.

METCALF: Yours is a sophisticated and "high" art, yet I've heard you quoted as saying that you write for truck drivers. Were you drinking that day or just annoyed by someone?

NOWLAN: As I remember, about that truck driver business, I said to someone who later wrote a newspaper thing that *if* there comes a time that truck drivers read poetry, mine will be the poetry they'll read, and I think that's quite true. I hope that you're right when you call my poetry "sophisticated". I like to think it's *elegant*. But it seems to me that the very greatest literature has all sorts of levels. *Huckleberry Finn*, you know. The biggest risk a person runs who tries to write as I do is the casual, superficial glance. "Oh, that's all there is to it", you know. I'm always quoting Mailer who quoted Gide, who probably quoted somebody else —

"Please do not understand me too quickly". That's one of the things I've always been frustrated by, so much so that sometimes I've been tempted to introduce deliberate obscurity — and that seems the one valid argument for self-conscious obscurity — to make the reader read it more carefully.

METCALF: How would you justify yourself, then, for practising what is essentially an elitist art?

NOWLAN: I don't feel obliged to justify myself. If I were called into court like that poet in Russia and charged with wasting my time I'd probably come up with some arguments in my own defence — but otherwise why should I bother? I don't think of myself as an elitist, but even if I did, and even if what I'm doing is absolutely useless — like Oscar Wilde saying, "all art is utterly useless" — even if that were so, I don't see where my elitism and uselessness would matter to anyone else. I have a friend who is a painter, Tom Forrestall, and one day I asked him what he'd been doing that afternoon, and he said, "looking at windfalls." He'd spent the whole afternoon simply sitting and watching the changing pattern of sunlight on apples. Now the president of the Canadian Chamber of Commerce would probably consider that a useless act. But who knows? Maybe there is a God like the god described in the Old Testament and he saw Tom Forrestall looking at the windfalls that day and decided that on second thought he wouldn't destroy the world. Maybe the whole show will fall apart if there ever comes a time when there's nobody left to look at the windfalls.

WILDERNESS NO WILDERNESS

Norman Newton

> *We have had to wait until the middle of this century for the crossing of long separated paths: that which arrives at the physical world by the detour of communication, and that which, as we have recently come to know, arrives at the world of communication by the detour of the physical. The entire process of human knowledge thus assumes the character of a closed system. And we therefore remain faithful to the inspiration of the savage mind when we recognise that, by an encounter it alone could have foreseen, the scientific spirit in its most modern form will have contributed to legitimise the principles of savage thought and to re-establish it in its rightful place.*
>
> *The Savage Mind*, Claude Lévi-Strauss

In his *Mythologiques*, Claude Lévi-Strauss presents a revolutionary but deeply satisfying analysis of the formal principles of that class of Amerindian myth which depends on the symmetrical balancing and transformation of fictive events. Meanwhile, Giorgio de Santillana and Hertha von Dechend, in their *Hamlet's Mill*, show the origin of a great many mythological motives, including some very important Amerindian ones, in an early but systematic form of astronomy. The result is an earthquake. A tremendous corpus of theory about myth disappears from intellectual view: Frazer, Jung and Freud (though Lévi-Strauss reaches out a hand, Freud misses it) go clattering into the abyss. Robert Graves manages to grab the branch of an oracular tree on the way down, but his Muse, pierced by a sharp twig of the same tree, deflates with a hissing sound and rockets erratically away. Several lesser poets and literary critics disappear, never to be heard of again.

Simultaneously a revolution is taking place in literary criticism which is bound in time to affect poetic practice. Structuralist critics, fascinated by interlocked symmetries, are putting forward a view of poetry which is likely to pull it out of

the post-Symbolist phase in which, with decreasing profit and despite countless minor excursions, it has remained for several decades. The result is a sort of geometrodynamics of the imagination, which derives thought from mathematical operations implicit in the structure of the mind. If the making of poetry is to remain an intellectually respectable activity, it will probably move into an area of close calculation of a mathematical or pseudo-mathematical kind: we can expect the poetic equivalent of the serial revolution which Schönberg initiated in music so long ago. If the semiologists have their way the image, up to now recalcitrant to absolute intellectual control, may well become a completely manipulable construct, like the tone-row in music. We may expect something like that combination of emotional brutality or vacuity and sensuous ugliness with intense, and in its way very rewarding, intellectual excitement which distinguished the music of a few years ago. Certainly the present state of English poetry, in which an art once as formally complex and learned as traditional music lies crushed and smothered under the spreading buttocks of half-dead amateurs and "professors of Creative Writing" who would be hard put to it to scan a line of verse correctly, seems to point to the advent of new forms of technical rigour. A vacillation between chaos and formalism, between ignorant violence and frigid intellection seems typical of the art of this century. I would suggest that contemporary poetry can only escape this horrible seesawing between rotten flesh and dead bones by seeking intellectual excitement in imitation of the patterns found in nature. The immediate alternative is a secular scholasticism more deadening than any found in the medieval period, with no prospect of a Renaissance at its end: Lévi-Strauss's "closed system". Indeed, the discoveries of Lévi-Strauss are of great importance: taken in one way, they spell out death to the imagination, taken in another, they signify its release.

Certainly the implications of such discoveries, which seem to remove the "mystery" from myth, appear at first to be disastrous, so far as the poetic imagination is concerned. But only dilettantes and charlatans will inevitably suffer; I mean those who have for years uttered such vaguely sonorous phrases as "the myth-making imagination", "primitive spontaneity" and "archetypal images", without ever bothering to tell us what they meant. It is not likely that any real poet will reject insights which make it possible to unite the poetic and scientific imaginations in a manner which has been almost impossible since the days of Milton. Structuralism itself may be profoundly anti-poetic, but one is not obliged to accept Lévi-Strauss's total theory of man, which is full of inconsistencies, as is the whole structuralist position.

To Canadian writers, such discoveries are of special importance. Up to now we have never really come to terms with the intellectual history of our country, which is preponderantly the intellectual history of the Indians. Instead, we have invented the idea of "wilderness", simply to avoid facing it. The "wilderness" never existed.

At last we may enter into the mythical past of the continent; indeed, we cannot avoid doing so. It is now clear to any rational person that Amerindian thought was, on its highest level, fully comparable to that of the pre-Socratic Greeks. Thus it forces itself into our tradition, not only because it is part of the history of the country we or our ancestors chose to settle in, but by sheer authority. Not to know it, that is, is to be ignorant.

One must first, however, know how to read Amerindian myth. In order to derive an æsthetic from mythical tales we must first determine their non-literary uses. Otherwise we are likely to consider a form of esoteric "tech talk", to use a phrase of de Santillana's and von Dechend's, as resulting from the free play of the imagination. Northwest Coast myths — our present concern — look very strange when they are regarded as works of the purely literary imagination and there is a temptation to believe that we are dealing with mental processes of impenetrable obscurity.

One does not have to be professionally skilled in mathematics or the physical sciences to understand the cosmological aspects of Northwest Coast myth. Amerindian cosmological thought might legitimately be said to organize the directly observable phenomena of nature into vast coherent structures comparable to those of music, an analogy found, by the way, both in de Santillana and von Dechend and in Lévi-Strauss. For that matter, the German musicologist, Marius Schneider, has shown in his remarkable *El Origen Musical de los Animoles Simbolos en la Mitologia y la Escultura Antiguas* (Barcelona, 1946) that the musical analogy was completely and consciously applied in several cultures around the world. Certainly the process was analogous to mathematics, even higher mathematics, but if we were to express this aspect of mythical thought in a form of notation we would have to use quasi-musical not mathematical symbols, the clusters of myth-concepts dissolving into each other in the manner of clusters of notes rather than mathematical functions. The reason for this is that mythical language is built up from an accepted set of cultural symbols, just as musical scales themselves and indeed all systems of musical construction including the most recent are; it is not built up from "pure" mathematical relations. Nevertheless, some idea of mathematical relations helps to sharpen

one's sense of the intellectual subtleties in myth-patterns, just as it can in the analysis of works of art: think of the interest of Greek and Renaissance artists in geometry, of composers of all ages in acoustic theory and its mathematical implications, and of poets in the art of time measurement and the geometry of symbolic worlds.

OBVIOUSLY this article can neither be exhaustive nor profound. The intellectual world of the coast Indians was a very complex and reasoned one (the incoherence of its reflection in most anthropological literature is hardly the fault of the Indians) and it would take several books to lay out even its main outlines.

We will take the briefest of looks at three stories recounted to the anthropologist John R. Swanton (one of the most responsible of the researchers in this area) by the Haida, Walter McGregor, in 1900-01. McGregor, I have been informed by Mr. Solomon Wilson of Skidegate, was very knowledgeable in the Haida calendrical tradition, a fact which is also clear from the stories themselves. They are to be found in Swanton's *Haida Texts and Myths: Skidegate Dialect.*

The first of these is the story of Shining Heavens.

Shining Heavens, who begins life as a tiny creature found by a princess in a clam-shell, shoots certain birds and learns to fly in their skins. In time he becomes a sky-god.

First he catches two varieties of sea-bird, a cormorant and a goose. His mother, Fine Feather Woman, who is presumably a sea-goddess in one of her aspects, eats them. He then shoots and dries the skins of a wren, a doubtful bird which is perhaps the red-winged blackbird, a bluejay and a woodpecker.

In the wren skin "he sat as broad, high cumulus clouds over the ocean." In the bluejay skin he sat "blue, broad and high over the sea." In the woodpecker skin "he sat over the sea, the upper part of him being red". For some reason he does not fly upward in the skin of the (presumed) red-winged blackbird.

The symbolism of the birds in this story is part of a network of bird-imagery which extends over most of the northern hemisphere. The naturalist Edward A. Armstrong has examined these linked metaphors in his *The Folklore of Birds.* Such resemblances are satisfactorily explained by a theory of Lévi-Strauss (referred to in his *Tristes Tropiques*), which would have Scandinavian, Celtic,

aboriginal Siberian, Eskimo and Canadian Indian cultures linked in a cultural continuum extending around the Arctic Circle.

Armstrong suggests a relationship between the wren and the thunderbird, the latter being related, in his argument, to Zu, the stormbird of Sumeria. This gives us a clue as to why the wren is identified with clouds. In this case, because of the benign nature of Shining Heavens, it is not stated whether the clouds are fair-weather or storm clouds: "cumulus" is suitably ambiguous.

The bluejay (actually it is Steller's jay) is a fairly obvious image of blue skies. But the jay is a member of the crow family and indeed appears in Chinookan myth as the Transformer, performing the same function that Raven performs among the Tsimshian, Tlinglit and Haida. As the bird of the clear sky, it reminds us of the tremendous authority attached to the figure of Raven who has, as Armstrong points out, solar connotations in China, Japan and Northeast Asia as well as in Northwest America.

In the Old World the woodpecker is usually thought of as a harbinger of rain, thunder and lightning. Here Shining Heavens in his woodpecker-skin robe is associated with clouds but not rain ("red sky at night, sailor's delight"), a choice of the "positive" aspect of the function over the "negative" one. This is also true of him in his wren-aspect and his bluejay-aspect.

Thus the birds in whose skins Shining Heavens appears represent three stages of the day.

The wren is the morning. More specifically, perhaps, he is associated with the clouds of early morning, when the sea is still warmer than the land. He also represents the sun's position near the horizon: the wren, of course, is a ground-dwelling bird, living in brush-piles and among tangled roots; it is rather like a mouse in its habit of disappearing down one hole and suddenly appearing from another. By extrapolation of the kind common in pre-literate astronomical systems, the wren also stands for the dawn of the year, which may be thought of as beginning just after the winter solstice. In this sense, the wren is the sun as troglodyte, emerging from the ground to climb into the heavens.

The bluejay (Steller's jay) represents the sun at noon position, also the cloudless sky of an idealised noon. By extrapolation, the bluejay also represents the noon of the year, the summer; bluejays are most easily seen in British Columbia in June and July when family groups forage along the edge of the woods. As the noon the bluejay would also represent the sun at the zenith.

The woodpecker, with its bright red head markings, its body black or spotted black and white, would represent the western sky at sunset, with its bright red

clouds (the head) and the darkness creeping up from beneath the horizon (the body). By extrapolation, it would represent the autumn or winter. The woodpecker is a rain and thunder bird in both the Old World and "on Vancouver Island", as Armstrong points out. Autumn and winter, in the mild wet climate of the coast, are the "rainy season".

At first sight these interpretations may seem somewhat fanciful, but "Sin", the Haida word Swanton translates as "Shining Heavens", is the ordinary word for day as distinguished from night and also for an entire period of twenty-four hours. It applies as well to the sky vault when it is illuminated by sunshine. Thus "Shining Heavens" is not strictly a sun-god, but stands for a more abstract concept: he represents the day in its three stages, in which the sun only serves as a marker. The story of Shining Heavens is a kind of imaginary clock in which the qualities of the year and day are combined. It might be thought of as an analogue of the simple but ingenious and effective mechanical devices which were part of the stagecraft of the coastal theatrical tradition: the coastal peoples were fascinated by moving models and the technology of illusion.

The calendar was regulated by close observation both of celestial bodies and of seasonal phenomena. Observations of seasonal phenomena — the behaviour of birds, fish and animals and the growth cycles of plants — are recognized as having been detailed and accurate. Anthropologists, unfortunately, have consistently underplayed the practical astronomical knowledge of the coastal peoples. Yet much of the material they have themselves collected proves them wrong. For example, the Bella Coola "model" of the physical heavens, as described in both Boas' and McIlwraith's books on this people, could only have arisen out of a fairly elaborate and systematic astronomy, based on naked-eye observations and on "common-sense" deductions as to the relative distances of celestial bodies. A similar model is implicit in most coastal cosmologies. It is true, however, that by the time most anthropologists began to collect such material, Indians had become completely dependent on the European calendar and compass, and most star names had been forgotten. Indians have told me that their ancestors did have specialists in astronomy and the calendar but that their knowledge is now lost. Only a few star names survive and it takes the utmost patience and much trial-and-error to work from these to a broader understanding of the system. It seems that this knowledge was a secret, the possession of certain guilds or initiation-groups. According to the Haisla Gordon Robinson, who has published a small book on the folklore of the Kitimat region, it extended to the ability to

foretell eclipses. Unfortunately, our knowledge of observational methods, while it indicates a high level of competence, is incomplete in several vital areas.

FEW STORIES are so enigmatic as *Canoe People Who Wear Headdresses*. I quote it verbatim, as told by Walter McGregor to J. R. Swanton. I hope the reader will bear with this apparently boring and incomprehensible tale: it will repay his attention.

There were ten of them, and they went to hunt with dogs. After they had gone along for some time it became misty about them and they came to a steep mountain and sat there. Their dogs walked about on the ground below. They yelped up at them.

Then they started a fire on top of the mountain, and one among them who was full of mischief put his bow into the fire. But, when it was consumed, it lay on the level ground below. Then he also put himself in. After he had burned for a while and was consumed, lo, he stood on the level ground below. Then he told his elder brothers to do the same thing. "Come, do the same thing. I did not feel it." So they threw themselves into the fire. They were consumed and stood at once on the level ground.

And when they put the next to the eldest in, his skin drew together as he burned. His eyes were also swollen by the fire. That happened to him because he was afraid to be put in. When he was consumed he also stood below. The same thing happened to the eldest. This mountain was called "Slender-rock."

Then they left it. After they had travelled about for a while a wren made a noise near them. They saw a blue hole in the heart of the one who was travelling nearest to it. And after they had gone on a while longer they came to the inner end of Masset inlet. When they had travelled on still farther (they found) a hawk feather floated ashore. This they tied in the hair of the youngest. He put feathers from the neck of a mallard around the lower part of it. It was pretty.

Now they came to a temporary village. They camped in a house in the middle which had a roof. They began eating mussels which were to be found at one end of the town. He who was mischievous made fun of the mussels. He kept spitting them out upward. By and by they set out to see who could blow them highest (through the smoke hole). One went up on the top of the house and held out his blanket, which was over his shoulder. By and by he looked at it. His blanket was covered with feathers. They did not know that this was caused by their having broken their fast.

And after they had walked about for a while in the town they found an old canoe. Moss grew on it. Nettles were also on it. They pulled these off, threw them away, and repaired it. Then the mischievous one made a bark bailer for it. On the handle he carved a figure like a bird. He carved it in a sitting posture. They

tied a bunch of feathers in the hair of one of their number, and he got in forward with a pole. Another went in and lay on his back in the stern. They poled along.

After they had gone along for a while they came to a village where a drum was sounding. A shaman was performing there. The glow (of the fire) shone out as far as the beach. Then they landed in front of the place, bow first, and the bow man got off to look. When he got near (the shaman said): "Now, the chief Supernatural Being Who Keeps the Bow Off is going to get off." He was made ashamed and went directly back.

And the next one got off to look. When he got near (the shaman said): "Chief Hawk-hole is going to get off." And he looked at himself. There was a blue hole in him. He became ashamed and went back.

The next one also got off to look. When he got near he heard the shaman say again: "Now the chief Supernatural Being on Whom the Daylight Rests is going to get off." And he went back.

The next one got off. He (the shaman) said, as before: "Now the chief Supernatural Being on the Water on Whom is Sunshine is going to get off."

And another got off to look. When he got near (he said): "Now the chief Supernatural Puffin on the Water is going to get off." He was also ashamed and went back.

And another got off. He (the shaman) said to him: "Now the chief Hawk with One Feather Sticking out of the Water is going to get off." He looked at the shaman from near. He had a costume like his own. Then he also went back.

Still another got off. When he, too, got near (the shaman said): "Now the chief Wearing Clouds around His Neck is going to get off." He remembered that he had been thus.

And yet another got off. When he, too, came near the door (the shaman said): "Now the chief Supernatural Being Lying on His Back in the Canoe is going to get off."

Then he got on again, and the oldest got off to look. When he came near (the shaman said): "Now the chief who owns the canoe, Supernatural Being Half of Whose Words are Raven, is going to get off."

Then the eldest brother said: "Truly, we have become supernatural beings. Now, brothers, arrange yourselves in the canoe." Then they took on board some boys who were playing about the town. They put them in a crack in the bottom of the canoe. And they pulled up grass growing at one end of the town for nests. They arranged it around themselves where they sat.

Then they started around the west coast. When the one who had a pole slipped his hands along it, its surface became red. He alone pushed the canoe along with his staff.

As they floated along, when they found any feathers floating about, they put them into a small box. If they found flicker feathers floating about, they were particularly pleased and kept them.

Then they came to a town. A woman went about crying near it. They took her

in with them. When this woman's husband came from fishing with a net (he thought) some man had his arms around his wife. Then he put burning coals on the arms about her. But it was his wife who got up crying. It was she who was going about crying, whom they took in.

[It should be noted, parenthetically, that the husband mistook his wife's hands, which she held clasped about herself, for those of some man.]

Then they made a crack in the bottom of the canoe for her and put her hand into it, whereupon it ceased paining her. They made her their sister. They placed her above the bailing hole.

Then they came in front of Kaisun. And the woman at the head of Dju (*a stream near Kaisun*), Fine Weather Woman, came to them. (She said): "Come near, my brothers, while I give you directions. The eldest brother in the middle will own the canoe. His name shall be Supernatural Being Half of Whose Words are Raven. Part of the canoe shall be Eagle, part of it shall be Raven. Part of the dancing hats shall be black; part of them shall be white. The next one's name shall be Supernatural Being with the Big Eyes. The one next to him will be called Hawk-hole. The next one will be called Supernatural Being on Whom the Daylight Rests. The next one will be called Supernatural Being on the Water on Whom is Sunshine. The next one will be called Puffin Putting His Head out of the Water. The next will be called Wearing Clouds Around his Neck. The next will be called Supernatural Being Lying on his Back in the Canoe. The next will be called Supernatural Being Who Keeps the Bow Off. He will give orders. Wherever you give people supernatural power he will push the canoe. And the next younger brother will be called Hawk with One Feather Sticking Out of the Water. And the sister sitting in the stern will be called Supernatural Woman Who Does the Bailing. Now, brothers, set yourselves in the canoe. Paddle to Stangwai. It is he who paints up those who are going to be supernatural beings. He will paint you up. Dance four short nights in your canoe. Then you will be finished." That was how she spoke of four years.

Immediately, he (*Stangwai, the spirit of an island a short distance south of Kaisun*) dressed them up. He dressed them up with dancing hats, dancing skirts, and puffins'-beak rattles. He pulled a skin of cloud around the outside of the canoe. He arranged them inside of it. Where they sat he arranged their nests. All was finished.

This is the end.

Certain motives in this story occur again and again in a group of Haida myths which, it seems to me, are clearly related to astronomy, the calendar, and the supernatural celestial beings presiding over certain forms of shamanism and magic. They are the stories of *Sacred One Standing and Moving, Supernatural Being Who Went Naked, He Who Had Panther Woman for His Mother, Laguadjina, The Story About Him Who Destroyed His Nine Nephews, He*

Who Was Abandoned by His Nine Uncles and *How a Red Feather Pulled Up Some People in the Town of Gunwa*, all of which may be found in Swanton's *Haida Texts and Myths, Skidegate Dialect.* These stories usually concern themselves with eight or nine brothers and a varying number of female relatives.

There are ten brothers in *Canoe People Who Wear Headdresses*:

1. Chief Supernatural Being Who Keeps the Bow Off
2. Chief Hawk-hole
3. Chief Supernatural Being On Whom the Daylight Rests
4. Chief Supernatural Being On the Water On Whom Is Sunshine
5. Chief Supernatural Puffin On the Water
6. Chief Hawk With One Feather Sticking Out Of The Water
7. Chief Wearing Clouds Around His Neck
8. Chief Supernatural Being With The Big Eyes
9. Chief Supernatural Being Lying on His Back in the Canoe
10. Chief Supernatural Being Half of Whose Words are Raven.

The woman in the set, and the eleventh person, is Supernatural Woman Who Does the Bailing.

It is clear from the story that much importance is placed on the order in which they sit in their canoe. There are two seating arrangements. The first is that shown in their order of disembarkation at the village in which the shaman is performing: this is the order indicated above. The second is the order they take on the instructions of Fine Weather Woman. Admittedly her use of the word "next" may be interpreted in more than one way, but since she begins with the man who is to sit in the middle, Chief Supernatural Being Half of Whose Words are Raven (Number 10), the most obvious interpretation of her instructions is that she is counting off from the middle. Thus Supernatural Being with the Big Eyes (Number 8) is next to the middle man on one side, Hawk-hole (Number 2) is next to him on the other side and so on respectively to the bow and the stern. Fine Weather Woman's seating arrangement would thus be —

1 7 4 2 10 8 3 5 9 6 (11 sits in the stern)

Let us assume the ten brothers represent ten thirty-six day months of a year. This is not entirely arbitrary. In one Tsimshian story (*Sun and Moon* in Boas's *Tsimshian Myths*, pp. 113-116) an artificial year of forty-day months is referred to; the ancient Mediterranean system of decans divided the year into thirty-six ten-day periods; the Aztec year was divided into eighteen solar months. Supernatural Woman Who Does the Bailing may be the five intercalary days, but since we do not know where they came in this form of the year we must leave her out for the moment. But we do know that among the Haida the year was

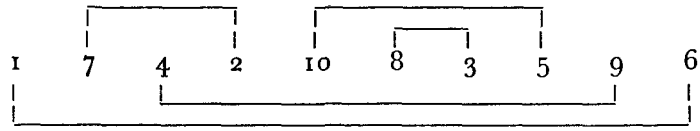
thought of as beginning in March or April, so the spring equinox, March 21st, may be taken as the beginning of our hypothetical year, as follows —

1. March 21st
2. April 26th
3. June 1st
4. July 6th
5. August 11th
6. September 16th
7. October 16th
8. November 28th
9. January 3rd
10. February 8th

This would correspond to the order of the supernatural beings as seen by the village shaman. Of course these dates are arbitrary, in the sense that they are not based on astronomical observations, or on any specific information from a native source, but on successive counts of thirty-six days from the spring equinox. However, I do believe that at one time there did exist an "astronomer's calendar" divided into intervals roughly similar to the above. It must have been based on the dawn rising, or evening setting, of prominent ecliptic or near-ecliptic stars or constellations at intervals of thirty-six days.

The former existence of an "astronomer's calendar", which was used to correct the rough popular calendar based on lunations, is the best way of accounting for the extraordinary confusion as to month-names found in the anthropological records. Lists differed and still differ from informant to informant, even in the same village, and there was much confusion as to the times when the great festivals were supposed to begin and end. Several informants expressed sadness over the dying-out of calendrical experts and the resultant loss of knowledge. It is clear that only a complex calendar, based on stellar observation, could fall into such disarray. A calendar in which the months simply ran from new moon to new moon, and which was corrected by observing the point of the horizon where the sun rose at the solstices, would have remained more or less intact during a period of cultural breakdown. Many family heads would have been able to keep track of it themselves. Some such elementary calendar did in fact survive, as we know from the anthropologists. The fact that these simple observations did not suffice to keep the total calendrical system in order indicates that it must have been based on more complicated principles of observation, probably both stellar and lunar.

We revert to Fine Weather Woman's arrangement. This time, though, we connect the figures which would be in opposition if we were to place them at equal distances around the rim of a circle



Months 3 (June 1st to July 5th) and 8 (November 28th to January 2nd) are closest together in this scheme. These are the months in which the summer and winter solstices occur. Months 1 (March 21st to April 25th) and 6 (September 16th to October 22nd) are farthest apart. These are the months in which the spring and fall equinoxes occur. Months 2 and 7 are, after the pair 8-3, the next closest together: these precede or "announce" the solstitial months. Then follow 5 and 10, which precede or "announce" the equinoctial months. Finally we have 9 and 4, which precede 5 and 10. Since we do not know which is bow and which is stern in Fine Weather Woman's arrangement (either 1 or 6 could be at the bow: spirits sometimes act "in reverse.") we do not know whether to place Supernatural Woman Who Does The Bailing next to the spring or the fall equinox, but we know she must be one of the two. Thus there is a clear indication that the intercalary days are associated with the equinoxes. This is also indicated in the month-names of a calendar which is known to have been in use at Masset. March in the Masset series is referred to as "russet-backed thrush" month, and the great Haida goddess, Dzilaqons, is involved in a scandal with Swimming Russet-backed Thrush in the related story of *Sacred One Standing and Moving.*

There is another significant element in the story which tells us that the arrangement in the canoe as seen by the village shaman is meant to be carefully distinguished from the arrangement set out by Fine Weather Woman. When the brothers leave the village in which the shaman is dancing they take some of the village boys on board and pull up grass from the village for "nests" (as celestial bodies, they have the characteristics of birds). They are thus placing themselves in the lower regions of the air, those closest to the earth. But when they have been allocated their places by Fine Weather Woman — a very exalted goddess, the mother of Shining Heavens — they are given a skin of cloud, which the island-god Stangwai pulls "round the outside of the canoe". They are then placing themselves in the higher regions of the sky, thus closer to the timeless realm of the gods and overseeing spirits, and the realm of secret knowledge.

The bark bailer carved by "the mischievous one" must be a constellation, since one of the very few constellation-names we have from the Haida is that which refers to the Pleiades as a "canoe bailer". "The mischievous one" is identified by Swanton as "Chief Supernatural Puffin on the Water", whom I have tentatively and approximately identified with the month from August 16th to September 18th. It is therefore of some interest that the inhabitants of Kodiak Island name the month of August as "the Pleiades begin to rise", even though this constellation is only prominent after midnight in this month.

Nobody could pretend that the mathematical operations involved in this story are very complicated. It is something like a "farmer's almanac" and embodies the kind of calendrical and meteorological knowledge one would expect to find in an illiterate village society. What is fascinating, "elegant" indeed, is the manner in which it finds verbal counterparts of ideas which we can only express in diagrams. Poets were at one time masters of the calendar, as Robert Graves points out in his highly valuable if extravagant studies of myth; they have been trying to reclaim it ever since. But only stories such as those of Walter McGregor can take us back to the time when poetry and science were one and the poetic fiction was not a mere commentary on the scientific "fact", the possession of the professional astronomer, but a verbal model of it.

It can be seen that this story is only a little more complicated than the story of Shining Heavens. Walter McGregor no doubt thought of it as elementary stuff. For this remarkable man also told Swanton one of the most intricately constructed stories I have ever come across.

IN THIS STORY, which is called *Laguadjina* in the Swanton collection, many of the images from the Canoe Beings and Shining Heavens stories reoccur, but in a totally new context and subject to an entirely different set of transformations. It is as if one had passed from arithmetic to calculus, or, to use a perhaps more valid image, from elementary harmony to advanced counterpoint.

Obviously I cannot analyse it here: properly to spell out the implications of this story, with its dizzyingly rapid succession of "shorthand" images, would (and this is not hyperbole) require a small book. In it, nine brothers and their sister, creatures half-dog and half-human, travel through a number of very strange adventures in a totally improbable landscape. It seems clear from the context

that the children, seemingly children of the sun and the moon, are abstract entities of calendrical-astronomical significance.

The behaviour of these beings is utterly incomprehensible in human terms. They offer their sister as bait to catch a supernatural sea monster; their sister commits incest with one of the brothers (the trickster Pitch, who seems to represent the fall equinox) and is later caught lying with "North", a sort of Cold Giant associated here with the winter solstice. Certain passages occur which are obviously intended to be taken "in reverse": Heron, who talks entirely in contradictory and nonsensical terms, offers them three canoes, those of a bird, a rainbow trout and a jellyfish: they choose Jellyfish's canoe as the fastest. There is an utterly obscure and puzzling (puzzling even on second or third reading) adventure in which one of the brothers, hunting groundhogs, becomes a groundhog himself and is caught in a deadfall by the others. Yet, by means of a breathtakingly ingenious use of doubledged and ambiguous imagery, it turns out that he has at the same time ("thinking himself to be a human", so to speak) caught his brothers, who have themselves been turned into groundhogs, in his own deadfall.

The use of "reverse language" seems to arise out of the necessity to consider two sides of the year-circle at once, to establish, for example, that the sun is in constellation A when the full moon appears in constellation B, which is opposite to A on the year-circle. The necessity of keeping the movements of the sun and moon in the mind at the same time, which we would treat as a mathematical problem, is handled here by inventing two contradictory actions which are presented as a sort of paradoxical single action. I know of no precise analogy in literature, outside of Mallarmé's *Un Coup de Dés*, which Octavio Paz has, in his *Claude Lévi-Strauss, an Introduction*, compared to Lévi-Strauss's *Le Cru et le Cuit*; the nearest analogy is in music, in that form of counterpoint in which a cantus firmus and its mirror image are played at the same time. But here it is an episode in a very complicated fugue.

The story is a sort of verbal planetarium whose chief purpose seems to have been the regulation of the calendar. It also identifies constellations presiding over intermediate periods of the solar year. It seems to concern itself with reconciling an "astronomer's year", based on the rising of the sun in certain key constellations, with the "popular" lunar year, based on the phases of the moon. In its simultaneous concern with "opposite points" of the year-circle and the relative positions of the sun and full moon it would indeed seem to make it possible for the adept to predict at least some eclipses, something which, accord-

ing to tradition, native astronomers could do. Such a statement could not be proved, however, until sites known to be used for celestial observation had been surveyed according to methods similar to that established by A. Thom for the study of British megalithic observatories.

One such site was the hill named Andimaul, near Kitsegeucla. In his book, *From Potlatch to Pulpit*, the Tsimshian clergyman, W. H. Pierce, described how native astronomers belonging to different tribes would gather on this hill, whose name means "Seat of Astronomers", to observe the setting of the sun, the spring and the fall being particularly significant times. They had done this so long, he said, that certain observation points, used as seats, were worn away from constant use. After consulting among themselves, they would send out messengers to the different tribes with their predictions of events for the following season — weather, the size of the salmon run or the berry harvest, and possible epidemics. Astrology of this kind, pseudoscience though it was, must have depended upon an elaborate form of astronomical symbolism.

THE READER may have been asking himself what relationship such matters, interesting enough in themselves, bear to literature. The answer must be that the imitation of the abstract rhythms of nature, temporal or geometrical, has in most ages been considered as much the work of the artist as the imitation of the patterns of human life or the depiction of plants and animals. Ovid's *Fasti* and its congeners in classical and Asian cultures are more than mere aids to scientific memory; they are true poems, and if we cannot enjoy them as such, it is our loss. Yet these are already far removed from the tradition: they are discursive poems about astronomy and the calendar. In *Laguadjina* we have a much older form, a story which is, so to speak, a set of astronomical formulas, in which the movements of the heavenly bodies dealt with are imitated as literally as possible, in the form of a fictional adventure. The result, even when the story is only partially understood (and we cannot hope to interpret it in full), affords keen æsthetic satisfaction.

The interesting thing is that a good deal of the high verbal art of the great period of European literature did much the same thing, though in the context of pure art. Recent investigations into the use of numerical symbolism in the English poetic tradition have uncovered the frequent use, as formal skeletons, of astronomical-calendrical cycles and sequences of significant numbers. Alastair Fowler and A. Kent Hieatt have examined Spenser in this light with astonishing

results: the works of Chapman, Milton and others have also been examined, though in less detail. The existence of Chaucer's work on the astrolabe would make one suspect similar patterns in his work. This great tradition seems to have died out, at least among the poets during the late seventeenth and early eighteenth centuries, though Tennyson, a more intellectual poet than is usually realized, returned to it to some extent in his now stupidly underrated *Idylls of the King*. Lowry rediscovered it in part in *Under the Volcano* by an agonizing process of trial and error, but he had composed a great work of counterpoint "by ear" and the effort so exhausted him that he could never repeat it. Its death must be related to the disappearance of the ability to write effective and shapely long poems and verse plays: it was no longer understood that the very skeleton of the work must be a kind of abstract image, and would-be epic poets merely constructed a plot and draped imagery over it. Only in music was the great work still possible: elaborate forms such as the fugue and the sonata arose out of the decay of major poetic form and took over many of its devices. The final collapse of traditional harmony and counterpoint (with their double roots in ancient acoustical symbolism and post-Renaissance acoustical science) has now brought the age of the musical masterwork to an end as well.

In our day, however, the literary stream seems to be seeking its old channel, assisted by strange and perhaps unknowing engineers. Structuralist critics such as Roland Barthes, searching for a model which will best represent the manner in which artistic form may govern the use of words, have found themselves using an image of a vertical systematic axis crossing a horizontal syntagmatic one, which is very similar to the basic Amerindian "model" of the structure of the universe. The most interesting current researches into poetic form, therefore, are discovering structures similar to those which Lévi-Strauss has found in Amerindian myth.

One can even say, staggering though the claim may seem, that close study of the native tradition makes it possible to reconcile international culture at its most abstract and "universalist" with local culture at its most concrete, to find, so to speak, that Parnassus where local wild-flowers grow and on whose slopes one may find such homely Canadian animals as beaver, porcupine and black bear. One may find, for example, links between such an apparently wild British Columbian tale as *Laguadjina*, Ovid's *Fasti* and *The Faery Queen*, a link which is not arbitrary, but is based on the survival of a very ancient calendrical tradition in all three works. In such intellectual adventures we may follow the Romans who, in a spirit of syncretism, discovered the faces of their own gods in

the gods of the European tribes they conquered — a process which at first intuitively impresses one as right, which further study seems to condemn as naive, superficial and unworthy of a modern mind, and which yet further study restores to its first position, though vastly enriched. The process appears as the humanisation of the wilderness, though this too would be a superficial description, since it is really the discovery of the humanity of what was not wilderness at all.

Could not one of the missions of Canadian literature in both English and French — if the two may be allowed a common mission — be that of showing a certain absurdity in the split which one finds in both United States and Spanish-American literatures, and which is caused by conflict between a European tradition and a native one? To show that the conflict is not inevitable, though, one must dig deep enough to find the common root. The point of conjunction, I would suggest, is to be found in the most local tradition of all — Indian mythology — and in that mythology at its apparently most strange and alien, the cosmological myths.

FINCHES FEEDING

P. K. Page

They fall like feathered cones from the tree above
sumi the painted grass where the birdseed is
skirl like a boiling pot
or a shallow within a river —
a bar of gravel breaking the water up.

Having said that, what have I said?
Not much.
Neither my delight nor the length of my watching is conveyed
and nothing profound recorded, yet these birds
as I observe them
stir such feelings up —
such yearnings for weightlessness, for hollow bones,
rapider heartbeat, east/west eyes
and such wonder — seemingly half-remembered — as they rise
spontaneously into air, like feathered cones.

NORTHERN UTOPIA

Allison Mitcham

A VERY GREAT NUMBER of contemporary Canadian novelists, both French and English, have focused on the northern wilderness in the belief that it is what makes Canada distinctive and original. For novelists with styles and attitudes as diverse as Gabrielle Roy's and Margaret Atwood's, Yves Thériault's and Henry Kreisel's, Claude Jasmin's and Harold Horwood's[1] (and the list could go on and on . . .) the northern wilderness has become the dominant Canadian myth.

For all these novelists the northern wilderness is a place where men and women in flight from what they feel are the decadent and sterile values of the "South" may seek a heightened self-awareness — perhaps even perceptions so transcendental as to be termed "salvation". In their terms the "South" frequently becomes not only the towns, cities and outposts of civilization in Southern Canada or even the United States, but by implication all Western civilization. The North thus represents a vast and pure, though at the same time a terrible and cold, reservoir of enchantment, where the disenchanted individual can hope to escape from the false utopia in which he feels trapped. His choice, if he remains in the "South" appears to be between a mechanistic, communal and soft "brave new world" and a mechanistic, communal but humiliatingly brutal and ugly world approaching that of Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*. The North — a new utopia, as many seem to see it — stands out frequently in contemporary Canadian novels as perhaps the only place left, not only in Canada but in all the Western world, where man can yet pursue a personal dream — where he can hope to be individual.

The farther north they go, our novelists feel, the more likelihood there is of their protagonists fulfilling their dreams. Thus Paul, the terrorist-protagonist of Jasmin's *Ethel et le terroriste*, who is an expatriate to the United States after his act of terrorism in Montreal, engages in a mental flight to the North Pole. If he could only get there, he feels, he would be able to purify and renew himself:

> Nous roulerons vers le nord et nous dépasserons le pays. Nous irons jusqu'au pôle, chez les Esquimaux. Et là, on se déguisera avec de la loutre, de la martre, du phoque. Nous nous construirons un joli peti iglou. Nous serons bien, au propre, au frais, au blanc. Le pôle sera notre retraite, notre ultime voyage de noces. Et là, on se laissera geler. Mais bien geler pour un temps infini. Nous hibernerons, Ethel. Jusqu'à ce que cette crise passe. Quand nous nous réveillerons de notre long sommeil, il se sera passé peut-être tout un siècle et nous serons demeurés jeunes et frais, dispos, prêts à rouler de nouveau, à fuir autre chose. Et quand on sera fatigué de nouveau, eh bien, on reviendra, on remontera encore une fois tout là-haut, au pôle et de nouveau ce sera un long sommeil congelé.

It is also to the far north, the Ungava Bay area — and once again Eskimo country — that Pierre, Gabrielle Roy's artist-hero in *La montagne secrète*, goes in pursuit of artistic truth; and it is there that he finds his inspiration, his magic mountain. Pierre's love of the North produces a magic glow in his work. Consequently, the expansive and genuine feelings behind his northern drawings stand out in contrast to the cramped and bleak feelings which seep from drawings such as those produced by Sinclair Ross's artist-minister Philip Bentley in *As for me and my House*. Philip, in contrast to Pierre, has lost the capacity to dream, the imaginative quality so necessary to the artist, by being confined within the false-fronted limits of a series of Southern Canadian small towns such as Horizon.

ARTISTIC IMAGINATION and fulfilment are again linked with the North as inspiration in Yves Thériault's *Tayaout, fils d'Agaguk*. Tayaout, an Eskimo boy inspired by visions of past Eskimo traditions, dreams of travelling alone northward, far beyond the present habitations of man — and of finding there the mystical lost stone of his people. When he does make the perilous northern journey and does find the stone, he dreams of forms which he must extract from this special stone. In turn he tells other members of the tribe that they must consult their own dreams so as to perceive and bring out the individual soul dormant within each stone. Art thus becomes the province of every individual able to heighten his perceptions through meditation and exclusion of the materialistic values which rule the "South". All goes well until the tribe is lured into selling sculptures to a "Southern" trader and consequently betraying their dreams and their traditions.

Yves Thériault and Harold Horwood are the two contemporary Canadian novelists who are perhaps most convinced of the ideal or utopian aspects of the North. Both subscribe to the notion that the Northland is, as Horwood put it,

"such a splendid land — . . . splendid like a country in a vision",[2] and that the Eskimos are, potentially at least "a nation of visionaries".[3] Heroic characters are the result of the authors' subscribing to this thesis. Tayaout, Agaguk, and Gillingham are epic heroes — legendary figures who stand out in stark contrast to the usual non-heroes of contemporary Western fiction. All three work toward achieving an ideal which is at once physical and spiritual. Physically, they are all of exceptional strength, with an ability to survive in the world's harshest climate. Spiritually, they are committed to an ideal: Tayaout and Gillingham to restoring to the Eskimo the past traditions which the white man, whether missionary or trader, has in his meddling intrusions into the Arctic almost succeeded in destroying; and Agaguk (and his family) to living a solitary Thoreauvian type of existence in a Walden wilder than anything Thoreau imagined even in the wilderness of the Maine woods. The magical aura which has surrounded the lives of Gillingham and Tayaout persists during their final disappearance and presumed death, and we are led to believe that, in much the same way as Saint-Exupéry's "petit prince", they are endowed with immortality for those who sympathize with them.

The Eskimos alone among the peoples of the Western world have at their best, Thériault and Horwood maintain, an ideal of excellence divorced from materialism. Thus if an ideal society is to exist anywhere, they see the far North — the North well beyond the greedy reaches and the endurance of the men from the South — as the land where dreams can be pursued and sometimes fulfilled, provided that the individual has extraordinary strength of body and of spirit. The land itself, the Arctic, moreover demands the preservation of such qualities as generosity, trust and loyalty as the price of survival: "If you live in the Arctic your life automatically is in your brother's keeping."[4] Affection and loyalty then are shown to be, ironically, much more in evidence in the Arctic than in any "Christian" country paying lip service to such ideals because of the Eskimos' natural personal warmth and the fact that "the people they love are left free."[5]

Another Canadian novelist who is also aware of the dream of a northern utopia is Henry Kreisel. Kreisel's immigrant, Theodore Stappler in *The Betrayal*, in his flight from the remembered horrors of Nazi Germany finds Canada generally an "innocent country" because it has been spared the mass betrayals and the gas ovens. However, it is only when he goes to the Arctic as a doctor that he finds peace and fulfilment: " . . . he found there, in the Arctic wilderness, a kind of peace, and a sense of unity with elemental forces." For Stappler, as for Dosteovsky's Raskolnikov, the northern experience is a healing one — an experience

which dissipates his intellectual arrogance and endows him with the faith to commit himself to life. Like Gillingham and Tayaout, Stappler is at last mysteriously swallowed up by the strong and violent forces of the North.

Margaret Atwood in *Surfacing* and Gabrielle Roy in *La Rivière sans repos*, like Henry Kreisel, give only fleeting glimpses of the ideal possibilities of the North.[6] The ideal is quickly obscured, they show, by Southern and particularly by "American" invasions which result in the destruction of the natural environment and the disruption of established patterns of life. The heron killed only to satisfy a crude blood lust and left hanging putridly from the tree on the portage represents for Atwood the destruction of Northern purity and innocence sacrificed to Southern lust and insensitivity. Roy's novel begins with the rape of Elsa, a gentle Eskimo girl, by an American G.I. during his brief stay at the Fort Chimo base. The rape seems for Roy symbolic of a more general American (and Southern Canadian) rape of the North. Such a rape results in the birth of a new sort of individual who really belongs nowhere — a being out of tune with the traditional rhythms of the North. Despite the wilderness flights of the central characters in both Atwood's and Roy's novels, they remain unhappy and dissatisfied because they are too firmly caught in the nets of civilization to be able to escape permanently — to fulfil themselves in the wilderness as Tayaout, Gillingham and Stappler do.

Nevertheless the pattern of northward flight in pursuit of a utopian dream is clearly a dominant pattern in contemporary Canadian fiction.[7] The farther into the northern wilderness the characters go the more hope there seems to be of their dreams being fulfilled. Indeed all the novelists looked at in this essay seem to agree that "This land gets better as you go north. . . . Cleaner."[8] They also seem to subscribe to the Thoreauvian pronouncement that: "In civilization, as in a southern latitude, man degenerates at length, and yields to the incursion of more northern tribes."[9] Obviously then, according to our novelists, we would do well to learn from the North and from the Eskimo — and to learn our lessons well — before we destroy him and his environment, and thus perhaps our dreams of a northern utopia.

NOTES

[1] Gabrielle Roy (particularly *La Montagne secrète* — 1968 and *La Rivière sans repos* — 1970), Margaret Atwood (*Surfacing* — 1972), Yves Thériault (particularly *Agaguk* — 1961, *Tayaout, fils d'Agaguk* — 1970, *Ashini* — 1963, *Le ru d'Ikoué* — 1963), Henry Kreisel (*The Betrayal* — 1964), Claude Jasmin (*Ethel et le terroriste* — 1964), Harold Horwood (*White Eskimo* — 1972).

[2] Harold Horwood, *White Eskimo*, p. 59.

[3] Ibid., p. 67.

[4] Ibid., p. 174.

[5] Ibid., p. 72.

[6] Roy's idyllic episode is longer and more memorable: her depiction of the happy and productive life which Elsa, Jimmy and L'Oncle Ian live at the old Fort-Chimo before Roch Beaulieu, the policeman, is sent across the river to bring them back to civilization so that Jimmy can attend school.

[7] Some other novels dealing with this theme are: André Langevin's *Evadé de la nuit* (1951) and *Le temps des hommes* (1956), Bertrand Vac's *Louise Genest* (1957), Ethel Wilson's *Swamp Angel* (1954), Roger Lemelin's *Pierre le Magnifique* (1952), Robert Harlow's *Scann* (1972), Harry Bernard's *Les jours sont longs* (1951).

[8] Harold Horwood, *White Eskimo*, p. 130.

[9] Henry David Thoreau, *A Week on the Concord and Merrimack Rivers*, Signet Classics, p. 57.

POEM

P. K. Page

Prince, to whom three ladders lead,
dreams and dreaming are my lot.
Waken me and help me up
rung by glittering rung until
fetters fall from me and free
those I fetter, those I love
locked in my entwined embrace
like an endless knot.
Let us move as air in air
skywards up the Cosmic Tree
and where its blueness fades to white
and the Tree begins to shine,
let us through its silver leaves
glimpse its golden fruit.

SERIOUS WHIMSY

R. D. MacDonald

IN THE MIDST of World War II, George Orwell wrote:

> And this period of [the last] ten years or so in which literature was mixed up with pamphleteering, did a great service to literary criticism, because it destroyed the illusion of pure aestheticism. It reminded us that propaganda in some form or the other lurks in every book, that every work of art has a meaning or purpose — a political, social and religious purpose — and that our aesthetic judgements are always coloured by our prejudices and beliefs. It debunked art for art's sake.[1]

Orwell's statement is useful to the reader who believes that Ethel Wilson's *Hetty Dorval* was written for more than the sake of art, escape or pleasure and who suspects at the same time that her novel is far more than a simple moral sermon. Orwell forces me to ask in what respect Ethel Wilson is a serious novelist, especially when her tale seems to cater uncritically to the escapist fantasies of a female readership.

The answer lies in a whimsy which permits Wilson to render, as the playfully serious Emily Dickinson does, the sudden, often confused and always innocent shifts of the inner-I or the raw self. The whimsy exhibited in the quotation below is both amusing and disturbing as the narrator, Frankie, betrays the incredible impropriety of the childish mind: this mind lies at the base of Wilson's own whimsy and so often becomes the "subject matter" of Wilson's fiction.

> I felt sorrier for Ernestine than for myself because no one likes to be snubbed. And she loved dogs so dearly that when she was fifteen she waded into the Fraser River just below the Bridge, and swam out a few strokes to save a little dog, and was carried away by the current and was drowned. It was terrible.] [*The little dog was drowned too.* [italics and brackets, mine]

This is not simply the child-like and innocent whimsy of a Huckleberry Finn employed to expose the pompous deceits of the adult world. Nor is it simply the scatter-brained and inverted whimsy of a Leacock displaying ironically the inevitable absurdities of the human condition, though both kinds of whimsy,

particularly Leacock's, are often apparent together in *Hetty Dorval*, especially in the digressions/progressions of Frankie's mind and words.

Throughout *Hetty Dorval* whimsy is also apparent in a larger sense as Wilson's (not Frankie's) whimsy continually holds up possible opposites of meaning against the simple drift of Frankie's tale. Wilson's whimsical attitude generates a richly complex dialectic which moves outward exploring and questioning the bases of our human solidarity ("No man an island"), and yet at the same time through Hetty and through Frankie herself exploring and questioning the bases of our human separation or insularity.

Though the tale often seems a simple, extended parable, it is really a starting point, an image or shape in the mind, like the Eskimo carver's bear tooth, to be fondled, turned this way and that, reshaped until its inherent reality is released to both artist and spectator. Seeing *Hetty Dorval* as a serious work of exploration, I must fully agree with Desmond Pacey's statement:

> It would be almost possible to treat the novel as an allegory, in which Innocence meets Evil in the disguise of Beauty, is temporarily enchanted thereby, is made wise by Parental Wisdom, and succeeds finally in cheating Evil out of another victim. But although there is just enough of this element in the novel to make such a summary possible, and to set up interest-analogies with Spenser's *Faerie Queen* and Bunyan's *Pilgrim's Progress,* the summary grossly over-simplifies the moral and psychological subtlety of the book.[2]

I only wish that Pacey and Orwell had gone further in emphasizing that an allegorical work can be more than didactic or partisan and in recognizing that novels like Crane's *The Red Badge of Courage*, James's *The Turn of the Screw* and Wilson's *Hetty Dorval* become beautiful and serious works of art as each explores and questions the very premises upon which each allegory or tale seems to be built.

What I have written does not go far in resolving the conflicting claims of art and morality, beauty and duty. But it should help to draw attention to the central dilemma presented in *Hetty Dorval*: which way is Frankie to incline? Toward the languid, self-indulgent narcissism of Hetty? And similarly towards the composed, self-contained and reflected beauty of Sleeping Beauty, i.e., the framed and mirrored reflection of a British Columbian coastal mountain?[3] As Pacey indicates, the other alternative is that of "parental wisdom", which seems occasionally no more than the constrained and conventional response of a garrison mentality, but which is referred emphatically again and again to the humanist tradition as expressed by Donne's "No man is an Iland, intire of it selfe" and

to the moral realization embodied in the close, loving union of Frankie's parents. How opposite are the conflicting claims of art and morality, beauty and duty, the private and the public, is made clear: Frankie soon learns after her secret visits to Hetty that such private actions belong to the public domain, that she "lived in a glass goldfish bowl where the behaviour of each fish was visible to all other fishes, and also to grown-up people outside and in the vicinity of the glass bowl." And she learns that the hostile silence of her parents has been caused by her own artifice, her cunning silence, which has established empty links between her parents and herself.

Which way then is Frankie to incline? The epigraph, her own moral imperatives, and the description of the pain caused by false consciousness assert unequivocally that duty precedes beauty. And yet Frankie's language again and again betrays a falsely precocious realization of all this, a "wisdom" which is not won or not genuine even as she speaks retrospectively. Moreover as with the death of her friend Ernestine, Frankie speaks too easily, too glibly about matters which should be alluded to only indirectly or in a hushed tone. The bright impropriety of her voice suggests occasionally a creature who is as illegitimate, as natural, and thereby as removed from "human" feeling and propriety as Hetty Dorval herself. My response to Frankie's voice is anticipated by Frankie's own confused response to Hetty's bright glibness as Hetty speaks ecstatically about the thrusting, integral and natural flight of the migrating geese:

> "Can we often see that?" [Hetty] asked. "Will it ever come again? Oh Frankie, when we stood there and the geese went over, we didn't seem to be in our bodies at all, did we? And I seemed to be up with them where I'd really love to be. Did you feel like that?"
>
> That was so exactly how the wild geese always made me feel, that I was amazed. Perhaps Mother and Father felt like that because they, too, dearly loved watching the geese passing overhead, but somehow we would never *never* have said that to each other — it would have made us all feel uncomfortable. But Mrs. Dorval said it naturally, and was not at all uncomfortable, and it gave me a great deal of pleasure to agree with her without confusion and apology.

Is Hetty's kind of speech "natural" or "unnatural"? Certainly throughout much of *Hetty Dorval*, both the "natural" and "artificial" are construed as "unnatural" — somehow "dishonest". And certainly there is a false ring to Frankie's meditation upon her departed friend Ernestine. And are we to take the rather abstract meditation below as if it were spoken in retrospect by an older and wiser Frankie? Or are we to see the abstract language as a hint of a premature and rather empty speculation?

> When we are young we have, by nature, no concern with permanent change or with death. Life is forever. Then suddenly comes the moment when death makes the entrance into experience, very simply, inexorably; our awareness is enlarged and we move forward with dismay into the common lot, and the bright innocent sureness of permanency has left us. There had never been a time when I could not remember my almost daily companion Ernestine; she was my very particular friend and I was hers, and nearly all our fun (and that was nearly all our life) had been together.

The tinsel quality of this is betrayed surely by the exaggerated schoolgirlish insistence upon an uninterrupted constant friendship: how could it really be such when Frankie has described the remoteness of her ranch-home from the town, school and boarding home of Lytton? And if "our" collective awareness is so "inexorably" enlarged, how is it that Frankie so easily reverts to the arrogant "closed corporation" of youth when she and her mother are aboard ship? And how is it that after the death of her father and her sudden quickened concern for Rick, she forgets for ten days in Paris her duty to protect Rick and Molly from the charms of Hetty Dorval?

I acknowledge the inappropriateness of my above priggish quizzing because it is obvious that Ethel Wilson is no Puritan satirically belittling Frankie as she sets her against a high and supposedly achievable ideal: instead Wilson renders the inevitable and thereby, paradoxically, the natural and innocent movements of the amoral mind. That Wilson is lightly indulgent I infer from her playfully coy presentation of her coy narrator — this Frankie who must be like Wilson herself, far from frank. As an example, note, as Frankie is professing her tremendous love for Molly, Richard and Uncle David, that she has immediately before this been checked by her mother for her youthful arrogance and unkindness, upon which Frankie attempts, in schoolgirlish style, to cover up in a way that should make the reader wonder about the authenticity of her tone and observe Wilson's own ironic play over her fictional narrator's voice:

> I should like to describe Molly and Richard and their guardian, 'our' Uncle David Trethewey, because they are *very* important to me and have meant *a great deal* in my life and *now* [now? what does this mean, that she succeeded in marrying Richard?] they *always* will. But this is not a story of me, nor of them, in a way, but of the places and ways known to me in which Hetty Dorval has appeared. It is not even Hetty Dorval's whole story because to this day I do not know Hetty's whole story and she does not tell. I only know the story of Hetty by inference and by strange chance.
>
> *(italics and bracketed words, mine)*

The narrative technique here is like that of Ford Madox Ford in *A Good Soldier* where the unreliable narrator, Dowell, insists that he cannot get his story going properly and each time he is obviously on the verge of self-discovery insists that he does "not know". The emphatic adjectives and adverbs crowded into one sentence surely suggest a questionable emotion. And surely, despite Frankie's protestations, this *is* the story of our less than candid or less than aware Frankie, especially as it is Hetty's effect *upon Frankie* which is continually relayed to the reader — Hetty as one of the affecting "places" or "ways" drawing forth Frankie. And surely it is the reader also who can know only by inference what Frankie is because even Frankie as a fictional presentation is not to be known "directly". In this passage then I see Wilson warning us of how little we know of *our*selves, *our* friends, *our* acquaintances in fiction, and *our* novelist herself who is at all times betraying and yet cloaking her self in her fiction.

Is this an excessive elaboration from such a short passage? Perhaps. But in the same paragraph Frankie and her coy shadow, Ethel Wilson, continue to insist upon the impossibility of having a direct knowledge of Hetty. This insistence reflects back all too appropriately to the narrator herself. Because even she cannot know fully what she herself is, she too is relayed to us in a rather removed, indirect and fragmentary fashion:

> But one cannot invade and discover the closed or hidden places of a person like Hetty Dorval with whom one's associations, though significant, are fragmentary, and for the added reason that Hetty does not speak — of herself. And therefore her gently impervious and deliberately concealing exterior does not permit her to be known. One guesses only from what one discerns.

This, I contend, is true on the literal level of Hetty, but also true of our less-than-candid narrator who insists "but this is not a story of me", and by extension true of the novelist herself smiling behind the mask of her narrator.

Occasionally in *Hetty Dorval*, it would seem that Wilson is being more than playfully indulgent with her narrator and the languid Hetty, that she approves as Nietzsche might of the unknowing and natural forces welling within, behind and below the thresholds of the controlled and civilized mind. Something of this is suggested in Hetty's and Frankie's ectstatic absorption in the powerful and free flight of the migrating geese.

A similar kind of natural force, undivided and exhilarating, is experienced by Maggie Vardoe in Wilson's *The Swamp Angel.* After Maggie chooses to

leave her narrow prison of marriage for a fuller life, she soon finds that her new relationships bring the constraints of new obligations, and she is tempted once again to leave, this time in impatience with her employer's foolishly jealous wife. She stays, but the magnitude of her decision to stay is emphasized by her contrary temptation to unchecked freedom. This urge is caught in an almost Freudian metaphor of swimming. In the passage below, one can see Maggie's realization of that raw, unimpeded surge of power which the swimmer feels:

> There was this extra feeling about the swim: Maggie's life had so long seemed stagnant that — now that she had moved forward and found her place with other people again, serving other people again, humouring other people, doing this herself, alone, as a swimmer swims, this way or that, self-directed or directed by circumstance — Maggie sometimes thought It's like swimming; it is very good, it's nice, she thought, this new life, serving other people as I did years ago with Father; but now I am alone and, like a swimmer I have to make my own way on my own power. Swimming is like living, it is done alone.

Another consciousness, however, overlooks Maggie's swim and her temptation to a primitive insularity:

> Her avatar tells her that she is one with her brothers the seal and the porpoise who tumble and tumble in the salt waves; and as she splashes and cleaves through the fresh water she is one with them. But her avatar had better warn her that she is not really seal or porpoise — that is just a sortie into the past, made by the miracle of water — and in a few minutes she will be brought to earth, brought again to walk the earth where she lives and must stay. Who would not be a seal or porpoise? They have a nice life, lived in the cool water with fun and passion, without human relations, Courtesy Week, or a flame thrower.

Here more, than in *Hetty Dorval*, Ethel Wilson recognizes the attraction and yet the impossibility of a life lived for its own sake, just as she implies more indirectly the attraction yet impossibility of art for art's sake.

Occasionally, similar representations of raw force are suggested in *Hetty Dorval*; one minor instance is when Frankie, like a cat, senses that if she will, she can, through gossip lightly dropped, destroy Hetty's chance to gain a refuge or security in marriage to General Connot. Another instance (one which Desmond Pacey misrepresents as sentimental) is to be seen as Hetty, who has found temporary refuge in Frankie's bed, is observed by the precocious, catlike, musing child. I think the scene is one calculated to raise chills, because as the "Evil" one lies helpless asleep in the "Innocent's" bed, the "Innocent" muses in a language which *appears* to be the embodiment of charity, while in fact the drift of her

thought begins to take on the shape of an angry, crouching cat. The scene possesses the dream-like qualities of a fairy-tale. Hetty has just conjured in memory and word the unrestrained flight of the geese, and the queer night yelling of the coyotes and then their even more queer silences. Hypnotically this shared memory, for the moment, takes on a greater reality to the two women than the fact of Frankie's drab flat in London. Then as the older and "lined" Hetty falls asleep grumbling for the moment about "people", those who prevent her from being a free spirit, she instantly reverts in sleep to that sweet beauty and innocence of appearance which one might expect of a child. Frankie now appears to muse charitably over the sleeping body of her helpless opponent, only to betray the same brutality of selfish will which she despises in Hetty:

> There is that in sleep which reduces us all to one common denominator of helplessness and vulnerable humanity. The soft rise and fall of the unconscious sleeper's breast is a miracle. It is a binding symbol of our humanity. The child in the lost attitude of sleep is all children, everywhere, in all time. A sleeping human being is all people, sleeping, everywhere since time began. There is that in the sleeper that arrests one, pitying, and that makes us all the same.

For the moment Frankie's language and scope suggest an onrush of magnanimous understanding. But in the next sentence, the "fancy language" and "sentimental" tone are brought up short and made questionable by the shrillness of Frankie's perception of human helplessness as it is enclosed in the grotesque Donne-like image ("the frail envelope of skin") and yet more bluntly by the violently plain word "prodded":

> The rise and fall of the frail envelope of skin that contains the microcosm of wonder is the touching sign. If one had an enemy, and if one saw that enemy sleeping one might be generously moved in pity of spirit by what lies there, unconscious. I looked at Hetty and could almost forgive her because she was Hetty, sleeping; but that did not prevent me from prodding her and saying "Hetty, *move* over. I've got to sleep!"

Frankie's understandable rancour is seen more emphatically:

> I lay there trying to be as comfortable as I could in one third of my own single bed, and trying to go to sleep. Little by little Hetty relaxed into a spacious S again. I got out of bed, furious, turned back the bedclothes, woke her and said, "HETTY, MOVE OVER" and gave her an almighty smack on her round silken bottom.

The capitalized and alliterated S's, the obviously unwanted touch, and throughout the book the lurid suggestions of Hetty as the Scarlet Woman — all this

suggests that the contact here is sexual and is to be violently resisted. And yet even here, Wilson's playfully deliberate language, especially her alliteration, suggests a droll undercutting of this kind of serious moral or sexual allegory.

EVEN GREATER COMPLEXITY is to be found in the climax of *Hetty Dorval.* Comic counterpoint, melodrama and ominous overtone are arranged in strange combination. Before the scene of confrontation where Frankie challenges Hetty (like the governess in the *Turn of the Screw* confronting her evil apparitions), Hetty is presented as an ominous force in opposition to any natural (in this context, "humane") harmony. This presentation is achieved in part by a simple juxtaposition implying conflicting opposites. Speaking of Cliff House, Frankie says:

> It was all natural and completely young and happy. Nothing spoiled the harmony and confidence of our lives together, whether we were all together, whether we were apart, or whether in Cliff House by the sea.] [*I had not thought of Hetty Dorval for a long time.*]
>
> *(italics and brackets, mine)*

In the next chapter and next sentence, Frankie abruptly reports the death of her father. I am not arguing that Hetty is presented as the cause of this death, but I am arguing that Hetty and destruction are continually associated together. Again, as Frankie has returned to London and is musing upon Hetty, she explicitly links destruction and Hetty: "And I was sure that if Hetty in an idle or lonely moment entered the integrity of Cliff House, she would later as idly depart and leave a wreckage behind." Then as she describes the London night "growl[ing] gently about [her] for miles", she moves abruptly and, apparently, digressively to a "prevision of craters, rubble and death". The passage relates obviously to the motif of our fragile mortality, a recurring echo of Donne, and is more obviously a prevision of the air raids of the World War II. Here then large demonic forces and Hetty Dorval are closely associated:

> *For what you are destined, you arrogant man, walking unhurriedly along St. James's Street? And you, you rolling bus with your load? And you, hurrying waiter? What awaits us all?* But as I walked through the rain in Hyde Park to take my bus to Hetty's, the skies above London were still empty. Paula's father was a journalist, whose territory was Middle Europe, and from him Paula and I had caught the feeling of pre-vision with the oncoming months, but more than anywhere in London, which speaks through air and stone, wall and pavement.

This forbidding vision of general disaster encloses and magnified the smaller drama of Hetty and Frankie, and anticipates the close of the book. There, in two sentences, the reader discovers that Hetty has found no pleasant refuge in Vienna: instead she exists at the centre of the imminent war which is about to unleash its destructive forces upon the whole world. There is more here surely than the ironic justice of an imprisoned Hetty receiving her due, for throughout the whole novel Hetty herself has been represented as the embodiment of an attractive yet destructive force of nature. The last passage:

> Six weeks later the German Army occupied Vienna. There arose a wall of silence around the city, through which only faint confused sounds were sometimes heard.

As always Hetty has apparently desired to be left alone in peace but has become instead the source of chaos for others.

It would be wrong then to emphasize too much the harmlessness and insignificance of Ethel Wilson's droll and often indulgent whimsy: Hetty too obviously stands as a warning against self-indulgence. And yet even here Wilson's whimsy and her heavy artificiality serve to undercut and to bring into question Frankie's high sense of mission as she sets out to check the self-indulgent and destructive Hetty.

The climax then is strangely mixed. A serious confrontation and revelation are being worked out, and yet the verisimilitude of character, action and thought is being undercut by a whimsically and yet deliberately inappropriate language. Immediately before the confrontation, Frankie's purposes are made questionable by her high, almost euphoric sense of mission. Already I have alluded to Frankie's disposition to abstract or allegorize her conflict with Hetty into a crusade of manichaean proportions, especially as she speaks of herself and Hetty in terms of "forces". Unlike Henry James's governess, however, she is presented as having sufficient self-awareness to be "wary enough to suspect the queer exhilaration that [she] felt". As Frankie approaches Hetty's lair, Mrs. Broom is mistakenly reduced to the simplistic image of the woman who does "nothing but close doors all her life". And yet this false reduction of Mrs. Broom and the misplacing of Mrs. Broom outside the focus of light in which the two antagonists are to meet is beautifully and dramatically appropriate because the light, like the small drama, and like the polarization of simple opposites, is false. The scene then, at this point, instead of becoming tragic, becomes comically inverted. Though it *would* be appropriate for Hetty in any event to reduce her opponent in her easy and

feline way, she does it so aptly that the reader must question the mainspring of Frankie's actions and smile at the right thing done for the wrong reason.

> "*What* is it, Frankie?" she asked beguilingly, "you funny child. You appear — I remember before — with the air of one making portentous announcements. Is it your rôle? You have become too serious, Frankie. Wasn't Paris gay enough? I like your hair. It looks nice. Very smart. Pull up that fat little chair."

Not only does Hetty point to Frankie's false, histrionic gestures; she construes Frankie's desire to protect as really the desire to possess: " . . . my dear little prig. . . . you're in love with Richard yourself and you're very jealous".

If then the over-simplified opposites of the confrontation have been presented as false, one might expect a straight and more genuine statement in Wilson's naturalistic rendering of Mrs. Broom's declaration that she is Hetty Dorval's mother. But even here, there is a strange combination of the artificial and the real. Such an unexpected revelation, one might argue, belongs only as an acceptable convention in a melodrama or romance. And yet, Wilson is surely creating an artificiality which draws attention to itself. Note in the quotation below, how much the language suggests the self-conscious, analytic and geometric conceptions of the cubist painter:

> Hetty and I stared at this controlled woman who stood shaking by the table, steadying herself with her strong hands *flat* on the table within the *circle* of the *lamplight*. I stood up *straight* and saw her hands *square* and rough and the fingers short and *square*-tipped pressed down hard on the table to prevent their shaking as Mrs. Broom was shaking. The lower part of Mrs. Broom's face was in *shadow* but on her forehead I saw the veins stand out on the temples and then I saw that the whole face was distorted. I cannot tell you how horrible this was and how frightening, to see this woman of wood and of closed doors opened violently from within with great suddenness and without reason. Hetty put her hands on the couch each side of her and leaned backwards as though to spring away. She looked in horror at Mrs. Broom who, still leaning toward the table, struggled to *compose* herself.

Out of the elegant lines, then, of a drawing room comedy breaks forth the unexpected and violent announcement of Hetty Dorval's parentage, and the heroic yet ugly strength of Mrs. Broom. The ugliness of this strong woman is emphasized by her lamplit hands, "red . . . swollen and congested", and by her coarse language which breaks out like a curse against the measured, elevated and false language of the heretofore drawing room comedy:

> She flashed round at me. "A lot you know, you comfortable safe ones. Wait till you've had your baby in secret, my fine girl, in a dirty foreign place, and found a way to keep her sweet and clean and a lady like her father's people was, before you talk so loud. Shut your mouth!"

I am not attempting to suggest that Wilson so modulates the tones of her novel that she achieves here a sudden and powerful and naked statement which transcends the rather ironic whimsy that has characterized so much of *Hetty Dorval.* Certainly an unexpected door is opened by Mrs. Broom's words and a level of meaning much larger than the false confrontation of opposites: the roughness and ugliness of this loving woman is very far removed from the definitions of love to be found in traditional humanism and in the elegance and detachment of Donne's *Meditation (xvi).*

Mrs. Broom, a discordant note of naturalism breaking out of the ritualized confrontation, indicates once more the richness of Ethel Wilson's vision, her ironic and serious awareness that this powerful, even heroic, love of Mrs. Broom's is founded upon a force as natural, violent and irrational as the blindly possessive instinct of a female cat or dog for its own offspring, a force not unrelated to the raw impulses of both Hetty and Frankie. Though nowhere else in *Hetty Dorval* is there such plain speaking as one finds in Mrs. Broom, even here Wilson renders her character in such a way that she is more than an allegorical type, more than a simple vehicle expressing the novelist's message. For Mrs. Broom is not the naked embodiment of an idea: she has too contrivedly been dramatically presented in her naturalism as a counterpoint to the melodrama of the simplistic confrontation of opposites. The nakedness of her plain speaking opens up new vistas of ironic meaning as Ethel Wilson uncovers once more the unexpected or overlooked foundations, both beautiful and ugly, of human impulse, especially the "human" impulse of love.

I end this essay abruptly because the book ends abruptly and undramatically. We do not know what becomes of Mrs. Broom. We do not find out whether the fruit of Frankie's battle is marriage to Richard. And we do not know whether the "confused sounds" sometimes heard from Vienna are the trapped sounds of a Hetty Dorval wanting to get out, or whether they are simply the discord of war, or the cries of an inevitably distressed human condition. Like Wilson's whimsical voice, this ending provokes the reader to question and to explore "obvious" realities like "love" and "responsibility" without expecting simple answers. In this sense, *Hetty Dorval* is a serious or genuine work of art.

NOTES

[1] George Orwell, "The Frontiers of Art and Propaganda", *The Collected Essays, Journalism and Letters of George Orwell*, Vol. II, (London, 1968).

[2] Desmond Pacey, "The Innocent Eye: The Art of Ethel Wilson", *Queen's Quarterly*, No. 61 (Spring 1954), 48-49. And see Pacey's *Ethel Wilson* (New York, 1967), especially chapter 2, "Hetty Dorval" and the concluding chapter. I think Pacey makes Wilson sound far too tame, too harmlessly optimistic, especially in his consideration of Frankie's "innocence" and her later "responsibility". Pacey's statement below can only lead to unfortunate simplification if it be applied to *Hetty Dorval*: "The Development is *almost always* in the direction of greater wisdom, tolerance and understanding: life, for Mrs. Wilson as for E. M. Forster, is largely a matter of development of the undeveloped heart. In *almost all* her novels, her chief protagonists confront a crisis or series of crises which shock them out of complacent egoism into some kind of self-surrender or self-transcendence." My italics point to Pacey's own awareness of the limitations of his generalization, but I still insist that generally he makes Wilson and particularly he makes *Hetty Dorval* far too tame.

[3] This artificial beauty, an analogue of Hetty Dorval, Frankie finds far more pleasing and memorable than the "real" mountains or "real" people — "more lasting even than the cheerful reality of old Mrs. Richards beaming anxiously behind a large brown teapot. . . ."

[4] In the terms of this book, can such a closed or insular harmony and pleasure be genuine? Similarly, can the insular closeness of Frankie's parents be genuine? See the innocent but still mushy account in Sister Marie-Cécile's letter, p. 61. Wilson at least does manage to achieve some credible distance from this embarrassment by speaking through the nun.

KERAMEIKOS CEMETERY

Al Purdy

So old that only traces of death remain
for death is broken with the broken stones
as if convivial party-goers came
and talked so long to friends they stayed
to hear the night birds call their children home

All over Athens rooster voices wake
the past converses with itself and time
is like a plow that turns up yesterday
I move and all around — : the marketplace
where something tugs my sleeves as I go by

GEORGE ELLIOTT

The Kissing Man

Denis Duffy

> *Certainly the world is immeasurably beautiful, but it is quite horrible. In a small village in the country, where there are few people and nothing much happens, "old age, disease, and death" are experienced more intensely, in greater detail, and more nakedly than elsewhere.*
>
> Karl Jung, *Memories, Dreams, Reflections*, trans. Aniela Jaffé.

1. AN "UNDERGROUND CLASSIC"? Perish forbid, but I read the book at Clara Thomas' insistence, in the same way friends had pressured me into reading *A Clockwork Orange* and *Dune* before they had caught on. Once I had read Elliott's book (he published it in 1962 and hasn't had a thing out since), I began passing it on, to the extent of reading it aloud to (willingly) captive guests. It's catching.

2. CAGEY in public converse ("A very tough cookie," muttered one of my students after a class Elliott attended), the author has let the following drop:

a) "nostalgia" means going home, but *with pain*;

b) it is a feeling we seek refuge in because the pain nostalgia brings is preferable to the anguish of the present;

c) if themes and passions in various of the stories in the collection remain unresolved, it is because nothing in life is ever resolved.

3. RITUAL as resolution: rituals attempt to congeal life's fluidities. The wedding feast states that a relationship both social and sexual has or ought to have reached a solidity sufficient for proclaiming it to all the world; the funeral party that a person's existence has now been "framed" and that the world can analyse and reminisce over that existence as if it were now an *objet d'art*. Undertakers,

with their rage for the-person-as-artifact, are the last dandies. In a secular, provincial society, lonely people come up with their own rituals: Honey Salkald ("An Act of Piety") turns upside-down a set of empty milk cans as a way of marking off a time of life, Young Audie Seaton's nameless mother ("The Listeners"), blows out the insides of eggs and places them on a shelf after passing on to one of her sons an account of her lifelong frustrations. The Tsars had Karl Fabergé to do this for them; Southwestern Ontario farmers must make do with whatever's around.

The actions are double-edged. From one viewpoint, they are the pathetic gestures of the socially atomized, feeble attempts to graft a meaning onto life through the equivalent of macramé or kinky sex. The gestures are puny, eccentric microcosms of those larger pomps and ceremonies and thus tend to undercut all that is grand in social existence. Seen in another fashion, they assert man's need for ritual, his tireless effort to fashion a dwelling-place amid the chaos of existence. Like symphony orchestras in the death camps or birthday parties for leukemic children, they seek not to hide cruel realities, but to proclaim a vision of an existence bigger than those tortures. Honour to the strivers, honour to us fools!

4. Our literature has conditioned us to look on small towns as hotbeds of obsessive, private re-enactment of essentially magical gestures, ways of social intercourse seeking to create changelessness. A shrewd portrayer of that life gives us that sense of a film loop perpetually running in the following ritualised cross-talk:

> And a little further down they passed the Shingle Beach, and Dr. Gallagher, who knew Canadian history, said to Dean Drone that it was strange to think that Champlain had landed there with his French explorers three hundred years ago; and Dean Drone, who didn't know Canadian history, said it was stranger still to think that the hand of the Almighty had piled up the hills and rocks long before that; and Dr. Gallagher said it was wonderful how the French had found their way through such a pathless wilderness; and Dean Drone said that it was wonderful also to think that the Almighty had placed even the smallest shrub in its appointed place. Dr. Gallagher said it filled him with admiration. Dean Drone said it filled him with awe. Dr. Gallagher said he'd been full of it since he was a boy and Dean Drone said so had he.
>
> Stephen Leacock, *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town.*

Twenty-nine years later, the rituals remain, but only to chafe the sensitive/neurotic soul enmeshed within them:

> Mrs. Finley, for instance: she must have spent hours preparing for us, cleaning her house, polishing her cut glass and silver — and if I know anything at all about Main Street economics she'll spend as many more hours polishing her wits for ways and means to make ends meet till next allowance day. Yet as President of the Ladies Aid, and first lady of the congregation, she had to do the right thing by us — that was Propriety; and as Main Street hostess she had to do it so well that no other hostess might ever invite us to her home and do it better — that was Parity.
>
> Sinclair Ross, *As for Me and My House.*

As a background to these rituals pounded into daily life, the small town life-cycle possesses its greater shows, Leacock's Marine Excursions of the Knights of Pythias, the prayer-meetings for rain in Ross's Partridge Hill, the L.O.L. convocations bedevilling Doc Fletcher in Elliott's "You'll Get the Rest of Him Soon". Elliott's small town fulfils the reader's expectations. Without ever finding out the name of the place (the author grew up in Strathroy, Ont.), the reader learns of the location of Weaver's Barber Shop, the Queen's Hotel, the Fair Grounds (with the W.I. lemonade booth), the base-line road along the eighth concession, and Geddes' dry-goods emporium. Not that this wealth of precious knowledge pours over the reader at once. Rather, it all happens in passing, since the gossipy speech of the faceless narrator ("Aunt Cress said the store was something like the street dance the Lodge puts on every fall. . . . ") burbles on as if the reader were naturally *au courant* with the movements of this all-inclusive, self-confident society. It is the authentic tone of successful provincial literature, whether it come from Hugh Hood or Sherwood Anderson, whether it relates of life in the Russian town of F..... or in Cranford. It is the voice of the wise or wise-assed insider, the fellow whom everything placed, with a story to relate whose dimensions he doesn't quite grasp but whose effects upon his society he realises acutely.

Southwestern Ontario has produced some fair literature of this sort (as well as Galbraith's delightful memoir, *The Scotch*): James Reaney's Stratford (*Colours in the Dark*), Alice Munro's Wingham (*Dance of the Happy Shades, Lives of Girls and Women*), Robertson Davies' Thamesville (*Fifth Business*), towns seen with a sturdy sense of place and positioning.[1] Let Western Ontarians ascribe this to the breezes from Lakes Huron and Ontario; I only note the regional fact. George Elliott has speculated in conversation that perhaps because Western Ontario "peaked" in the 90s and has gone nowhere since ("One by one they'll all clear out/Thinking to better themselves, no doubt/Never caring how far they go/From the poor little girls of Ontario"), its liveliest spirits migrating West or

to the cities, the place provides that sense of a golden age gone bust, that old-bitch-gone-in-the-teeth, botched-civilization sensibility that good writing thrives on. Certainly the region has produced considerable writing about childhood pain and humiliation.

5. *The Kissing Man* differs from the works I've mentioned in that the realistic aspect of the collection is balanced by its sense of another dimension of existence. In practise, this means that detail is thinner than in the works above. Between those town landmarks listed in the preceding note lie vast stretches of the diffuse, the opaque, the reality that cannot always be conveyed through concrete detail. Let two passages illustrate this:

> The years went by. Doctor Fletcher kept on delivering babies. The secretary of the Aid got old. Jacob and Esau, for they were boys as the doctor had promised, grew up in the orphanage in the city.
>
> Esau developed a nervous affliction in the orphanage as he came on to adolescence. Jacob was shy and didn't talk or play much with anybody but Esau.
>
> Shy Jacob and nervous Esau came back to the town where they were born. They had to, because there came the day of their sixteenth birthday and the people at the orphanage in the city and the people at the Aid in town had no alternative. And there was a wedding going on in the Anglican church the day the twins, Jacob and Esau, came back to the town where they were born.
>
> George Elliott, "When Jacob Fletcher Was a Boy", *The Kissing Man.*

Contrast the first two paragraphs of this passage with the final paragraph. They have about them an air of the parabolic and timeless that is not a product alone of their subjects' Biblical names. The three short, simple sentences in the first and the repetitions of the names in each of the brief paragraphs, the prosaic yet genteel tone ("a nervous affliction"), convince us that the story is told in a manner seeming to deny any individuality to the twins. The prose crawls along, never bothering to accumulate detail. We are not told how the boys look, and can only infer what extent of woe and/or madness lies behind the euphemisms, "nervous affliction" and "shy".[2] "Went by," "kept on," "got old" — we are watching events from a very great distance indeed.

In the third paragraph, we re-enter the "real" world. Now the twins are re-located in time (but with those very heavy adjectives looped about their necks), and within a social context (those stymied bureaucratic Siamese twins, the orphanage in the city and the Aid in town), and finally at a particular moment within a social framework (a wedding-day). The final clause brings the wheel full circle — the boys have been away from that world of tick-tock time into

which they were born, but now they are back, and that moment too has been firmly re-located in time.

A passage from another tale in this collection of inter-connected stories[3] presents a differing aspect of the book's strange realism:

> There was a way down the high bank to the flat lands below, to where the cedar clumps were. It was along the top of the bank for a way, to the rail fence where there was a crude stile. Here there was a grassy lane cut out of the side of the bank in a gentle slope for maybe forty rods. At the bottom, little tracks were worn in the clay by the farm animals on their way to the river. At that time of year it was easy to step across stones in the river and get to the other side.
>
> Bertram stood up, then, with Froody in his arms. Honey's first feeling was weakness because he knew how strong Bertram was. He had seen the yellow callus pads and the dusty hair on his wrists. When Bertram started walking away from the blanket where the food was spread and where Honey and Lillian sat, Honey was filled with horror because he was now so small and the sky seemed far off. There was nothing to hold to. Lillian was there, not looking, only staring down the clay bank. ("The Commonplace")

The first paragraph presents a pastoral landscape, a section of humanized natural space. The rail fence with its stile and the tracks made by the farm animals confirm that the spot has known the hand of man. The landscape has been moralised into a pattern of accessibility. A mountain/valley duality exists in the setting (banks *vs.* flat lands) but "there was a way." That way isn't so much described in itself as shown in its relationship to the land ("cut out of the side of the bank"). It is a way — not the cut-out road of the engineer — and thus not subject wholly to human control. "At that time of year" it is open to the other side of the river — a traditional mark of accessibility, especially in hymnbooks — but obviously not at other times. No less than a freeway cloverleaf, the scene observed has "limited access" posted over it.

Just how limited is that access comes across in the next paragraph, where Honey watches another fellow literally carry off his girl (new life in a pop cliché). The view, once displaying a way to and through, turns into empty space ("he was now so small and the sky seemed so far off"), that empty space that is so persistent a feature of the Canadian literary landscape. Bertram carries Froody *away* from the communal meal into a realm that Honey can see only as the void ("nothing to hold to"). As we shall see later, the movement is from a humdrum polite ritual to a movement, a dance, of far greater moment than a picnic usually offers. We know already that there is no void, or rather that it is inside Honey, in his feelings of impotence. The accessible, friendly countryside exists alongside

this momentarily crazed vision of it. There has been no preparation for this shift from pasture to void, communal to individual, outer to inner; it has happened instantly as Honey senses the assured masculinity of his rival. This is realism, but of a complex sort. It is an effort to convey to the reader the fullness of the world we inhabit, and it therefore has to include a view of our primitive as well as our socialized selves, our unconscious as well as our conscious. Another way of expressing this dualism that is our reality is to realize that the former self is far less timebound than the latter. The second passage complements the first one I treated, which is a less psychologically-oriented expression of this complex nature of reality. The first passage presents this duality through traditional narrative strategies — the twins move into the story from outside, accumulating more concrete detail about them as the narrative proceeds — while the second moves from the detailed and controlled to something greater and terrifying. But the movement is within a single consciousness. The "Commonplace" passage, we can say, ultimately employs psychology as a figurative language for a reality lying outside the individual psyche, a reality we contact fitfully and dangerously.

6. GILBERT RYLE has pointed out that just because there are more things in this world than are dreamt of in your philosophy doesn't allow you to put more things in your philosophy than are in this world. When this sort of thing happens in literature, we speak of a failure in tone. For example, the devices and conventions of fantasy may be used to smooth the narrative or moral progress of a work chiefly realistic in dialogue and setting. When this happens in Victorian novels we accuse them of being evasive, melodramatic or cheating, but what we are expressing is an aversion against any attempt to express one of those dual aspects of reality in terms of another. The Kingdom of Wish has to be kept distinct from that of Must. When this is carried out by persons in a socially approved fashion, it is known as sanity.

Literature, like the other arts, revels in blurring the boundaries; it is filled with talking animals, living urns and blushing angels. Such naughtiness is excusable because it is the result of conscious choice; everybody knows it is make-believe. Some make-believes, even in fiction assumed to be realistic, are more fantastic than others, and unrealities in the telling are more acceptable than the same in what is told. We all assume that *The Stone Angel* is a more realistic novel than *Fifth Business*; is the latter's magic any more fantastic than the former's controlled inner monologue? We demand a consistency in the amount of credulity a writer tries to squeeze out of a reader. A suspension of disbelief remains willing

only so long as the reader suspends a steady one ton per hour. If he has to shift back and forth between one cwt. and two tons within a thirty-minute period, his muscles will strain. After all, when Judy Garland laments that birds fly over the rainbow, why then oh why can't she, only a fool would deliver an explanation of gravity in reply.

7. ELLIOTT'S PROSE STYLE is laconic, elliptical even. As the passages cited demonstrate, the reader is left to fill in the blank spaces with feeling, a characteristic demand of the modern writer.[4] This demand on the reader is a foundation of the narrative structure, in that facts are presented about characters and their setting in no particular order, only as they arise in various contexts. Thus Froody, the principal character of "The Kissing Man", is also the girl taken from Honey Salkald in "The Commonplace", while another glimpse of her and her husband, late in their life together, is given in another story, "A Room, a Light for Love." Not all the blanks can be filled in; for example, we know that Froody dates Dougie Framingham for a long time and eventually marries him. Does her relationship with Honey in "The Commonplace" precede or occur in the middle of the lengthy courtship? Probably it happens before, because we are told the characters are still in high school, but we cannot be certain. Elliott is skilled in the placing of detail, forcing the reader to review each story in the light of the entire collection in the same way a reader learns to pause at a passage like: "He had a real name all right. John something. It's sure to be on the desk pad at the Queen's. Nobody used it" ("The Man Who Lived Out Loud"). The gross defects of one of the greatest of collections of small-town *contes, Winesburg, Ohio,* are for me summed up in the following:

> Before such women as Louise can be understood and their lives made livable, much will have to be done. Thoughtful books will have to be written and thoughtful lives lived by people about them. (Sherwood Anderson, "Surrender", *Winesburg, Ohio*)

It is so trudgingly earnest, so padded-bra uplifting! Elliott avoids this browbeating of the reader, yet tries to give him a world in which feeling still exists.

8. "I never said that people were terrorized but that they were terrorists. I said that a lot of people were satisfied and that a terrible unease prevails none the less." Henri Lefebvre, *Everyday Life in the Modern World.*

The first things we find out about Froody in the title story are visual: "A real Gibson girl Froody was. . . . " Strong black lines against a white page outline the willowy beauties of Charles Dana Gibson, and the narrator next mentions the

way the July sun drained the colour from the town's main street. Garbed in white blouse and dark skirt, cool-looking in the sun (Gibson's girls always have a pout upon their lucious lips), Froody is cooler still in the shade of Geddes' dry-goods store where she works. One way of summing up the story is to state that an initial black/white version of reality (reality is *here*, fantasy over *there*) melts like a Dali watch in the face of an awareness of the raw emotions governing our lives. Briefly, Froody sees a mysterious stranger arise out of nowhere to kiss three of her store customers and evaporate. Related baldly, it seems the soppiest of sentimentalities, a quite illicit intrusion of the Land of Oz into the Upper Canadian store of Jethro Geddes one Thursday in July. But the story is about the onset of maturity in Froody; the appearance of the Kissing Man (sounds like an Errol Flynn-romantic bandit movie) is incidental to this, however large it may loom in the actual reading experience. "Froody was a dreamy girl," we are told, "Sometimes it was a bother to her to keep her mind on the work." Dreamy girls of a strong sexuality ("Froody, in a get-up like that, was just what it took on a hot day to put gumption in a fellow") are forever having things happen to them in literature, from *Pamela* to the brilliant Gothic imaginings of Joyce Carol Oates. But the scene is rural Ontario, a little while after the Great War, so that the Kissing Man will not be a dark rapist-deliverer. Instead, what could have been a romantic archetype becomes a fantasy of another sort. The dreamy Froody watches him kiss the three women (one on Thursday, another on Saturday, the last on Monday; after all, the business is closed on Sunday and it wouldn't do to have anything unreal in the story), and finally questions him after his last foray. The kisses are not gestures of comfort, as the term is generally used, but rather marks of a new awareness on the part of the recipients. Each of them, after the experience, sees some cruel fact of life in sharper relief, and responds either with "It's not fair at all" or by weeping. The comfort extended is the harsh one of knowing where they stand. In a sense, it has been a consciousness-raising[5] rather than a healing that Froody has witnessed. When the Kissing Man assures Froody that she has been one of the lucky ones, not needing him *yet* (emphasis mine), she is branded by maturity, seared by the knowledge that it must all come to this: knowing what it is that makes one hurt so badly. "She knew more than she wanted to know, ever."

But how seriously can we be expected to take this sci-fi device of a Kissing Man for Froody's lapsing from Innocence into Experience? Of course, a young girl's fantasies could indeed take the form of a Kissing Man, as is apparent from my noting of his resemblance to the sort of dashing figure who sweeps in and

out of women's fictional lives. But if he is merely a dream, an hallucination, why does he so kick against the wishes of the dreamer? He doesn't offer the stuff of adolescent fantasy, but the urgent insight of a mature dream. Two italicized reflections by the Kissing Man on the pain the Women suffer follow his encounters; they give him a flesh solider than a ghost's. What the story is saying, I think, is the truth that there is more to dream than cookie-castle wish-fulfillment. The man represents Froody's struggle to attain maturity, no matter how steep a price it may exact in unhappiness. She has watched the facades of placidity crumble away from the three women, and we know she pays for her moment of insight by what will probably be a hum-drum married existence (the story alludes to the routine nature of Dougie Framingham's courtship, and we are told that "she finally married him.") Well, an eagle is not fine a thing as a truth, and all the truth in the world cannot give it literary value if it is clumsily put. The Kissing Man as a device intrudes upon the action of the story, putting forward too glib an evocation of the more charged state of existence surrounding our everyday one.

9. In examining the work of an admired author, we discuss "Patterns", "Rythms", "Recurrences"; anyone less esteemed is talked of in terms of "Formulae", "Repetitions", "Limitations". The basic pattern of the stories in Elliott's collection is that of the small-town organism reacting to stimuli it eventually numbs itself to. Some of these disturbing tremors come from within. The insiders either die off or go mad — Alison Kennedy in "A Room, a Light for Love", Doc Fletcher in "You'll Get the Rest of Him Soon", Young Audie's mother in "The Listeners" — or else, in the case of a young boy, hop it out of town ("A Leaf for Everything Good"). In other stories, the disturbers hail from outside and either die in frustration ("The Man Who Lived Out Loud") or pass back to where they came from ("The Kissing Man", "The Commonplace"). It is typical of the author's entire approach that, while the last stories concern a spiritual or metaphysical distance between townees and outsiders, the collection's opener, "An Act of Piety", treats in passing the commonplace social ostracism visited upon a goitre-ridden Irish family seeking to settle in the town. Since I admire the work, "The Commonplace" doesn't strike me as a repetitive piece, but a successful handling of this pattern of entry and withdrawal. As well, it develops successfully the opposition between the two aspects of reality that is treated with less skill in "The Kissing Man."

The idea of a small community shaken by the entry of a dynamic stranger

occurs especially often in the literature of fantasy, though it is one of the themes of *Middlemarch*, *The Pied Piper*, *The Mysterious Stranger*, Westerns: they all deal with upsets among the good burghers, whether the strangers arrive on horseback or (a trendy development) motorcycles. Perhaps the story of Jesus, especially as diagrammed in the opening chapter of *John*, offers the central Christian source of this narrative type. In "The Commonplace", the town is invaded by a clan of strangers. The Sunbirds, who remind us a little of the role played by the Bens in *Who Has Seen the Wind* (1947), proceed to raise chicks in an abandoned hotel they occupy. Of course, in the last line of the story the Sunbirds move on at winter's onset (if a writer is to be that heavy-handed in his naming, he might as well go all the way). The tale is saved from being an easy put-down of provincial narrowness by its focus upon the effects of the Sunbirds on Honey Salkald, the principal character of the collection. This prevents it from becoming another raggle-taggle-Gypsies-oh romance.

The story climaxes during a private ritual-dance in which Bertram Sunbird, having whisked Froody away from Honey, puts before his rival a pattern of a life too rich in its style and satisfaction for him ever to reach. What in a townee would be the stripping of a girl before feeling her up becomes with Bertram the prelude to a deeper act:

> He took the two ribbons from her hair and hung them up in the branches of a bush. Then he took her hat and placed it on another branch. He took off his tie and hat and put them on branches. He took out his handkerchief and hung it up. The little bits of cloth fluttered in a breeze that Honey couldn't feel on the river bank, and the horror of it hurt his stomach.

Honey's pain and confusion even before this act of stripping away of all that is fluttery and likely to blow away has been examined in Note 5. His turmoil is not the product of sexual jealousy alone. It is also the feeling — most notably expressed in English Literature in *Hyperion* — of pain that comes from a lesser being's understanding that, however devastating its upshot may be for him, the work of a rival compels admiration and is beautiful in itself.

> Bertram stood before Froody in the little clear area. He took her hands in his and they walked sideways around the cleared area. Then he walked sideways in the other direction, still holding hands.
>
> Gradually the pace of their sedate step was quickened and Honey realized it was a kind of dance. He couldn't hear from that distance, but he thought he heard, now and then, Bertram's voice singing.
>
> They were skipping lightly round in a circle by now, and Froody's dress flared out. There seemed to be no weight to her at all.

He is watching a ritual whose music he barely hears, as if Bertram were Dionysius and he, Mark Anthony. The patterned movement seems to have more to it than the eccentric, lonely steps taken earlier in the book (see Note 3). I am reminded of Atwood's "The Animals in That Country", where the stylization of killing gives a drama and urgency to the slaughter of animal life that is not attainable in the secular, rationalist society we know, with its routine zapping of raccoons along the highway.

> Thus there are other things besides capital that are subject to accumulation: for instance knowledge, techniques and even . . . populations. . . . But everyday life is not cumulative. . . . Emotions and feelings change but they are not stored up; neither are aspirations. . . . Physical performances, erotic achievements, the time required for growing up or growing old and natural fertility oscillate on a relatively limited scale. . . . In short the effects of accumulation on everyday life are superficial though they cannot be completely eliminated. Everyday life, when it changes, evolves according to a rhythm that does not coincide with the time of accumulation and in a space that cannot be identified with that of cumulative processes. (Henri Lefebvre, op. cit.)

Honey weeps because everyday life is not cumulative and it is not a matter of him saving up his pennies or his energies until he can acquire Bertram's *mana.* In the unsuccessful "What Do the Children Mean" Elliott explores the difficulties of inventing an emotional calculus, and Honey is here shown sunk in the knowledge that it never can be. There is that in life which can redeem it from the banal; behaviour informed by the sense of things that gives a glimpse of greater dimensions to existence. Not everyone is born into a society that can teach such behaviour. The townees, with their tea-table mumbo-jumbo, cannot grasp that it is stronger medicine they require. The more they immerse themselves in codes of manners, the further they get from what ritual is really about.

The story twice emphasizes Bertram's strength, in its description of him as a harvest hand, and in the ease with which it shows him lifting Froody. The strength is not the mindless compulsion of Big Audie Seaton ("The Listeners"), it is instead the flow of energy a man can put himself in touch with, if he only lives deeply enough. (And if — ascetic moral here — he is willing to forego the conventional delights of stability. Bertram does not, after all, have Froody. That will be left to her townee lover, Dougie.) I think this is what Sheila Watson conveys about Kip, that very ambiguous character in *The Double Hook.* A prying fool, blinded, he is also a more serene figure even than Felix in his acceptance of the pattern of things and his place — for weal or woe — within it.

Bertram's dance is a liturgy in a society that knows only theatre. Moderns can be patronizing about those philosopher-killing Athenians who also reacted so violently to Euripides, our brother. Shallow folk, not to see the devastation that matchless playwright represented. From ritual to stagecraft, moral intelligence to intellect, Pericles to Alcibiades. Who but the leanest technocrat would willingly let go so rich a portion of reality?

> "All he did was sing and dance with me a little, Honey. Bertram, he's very much older than you and me. Very much older."

Such a statement needn't be literally true to be truthful. A family of nomads who stick to the older ways of doing things would easily freak the good townsfolk upon whose territory they light. The effect of even the most offhand courtship ritual on a shy, insecure boy grown up in a flat and petty place makes Honey's trauma over Bertram's far from casual gesture credible.

10. I HAVE a deep liking for these stories, even when they do not work. When they do, they become themselves metaphors for grace, for man's refusal to slog along in an impoverished existence, whatever pain it may cause him to take larger views and gaze upon a world that may not even have room for him.

NOTES

[1] Compare Davies' Deptford with his Salterton: the latter is Provincial Society, the former a sharply felt place in time.

[2] One recalls the private code of Victoria R.I. and John Brown when she was scurrilously known as "the Empress Brown." "Shy" meant passed-out drunk, enabling Her Majesty to explain her servant's absence from a function in an unembarrassing manner.

[3] A popular enough form in our literature; see *Sunshine Sketches, Around the Mountain, A Bird in the House, Lives of Girls and Women.*

[4] In a time of films like *A Clockwork Orange* and *Straw Dogs*, when behavioural scientists bemoan "the loss of affectivity" in language that adds to it, students of literature can no longer assume that the general reader is putting back into a scene the moral elements a hard-boiled prose style excludes. I suspect, for example, that *Men Without Women* is a very tricky work to teach because it is unthinkingly equated with such brutal crime novels as (say) Richard Stark's "Parker" series. The process by which, in our collective sensibility, Nick Adams became the Continental Op offers a paradigm of a brutalisation in public taste and feeling.

[5] I thank Miss Heather-Jane Sanguins for pointing this — as well as many other things about the story — out to me.

THE UNENDING CYCLE

Leonard W. Sugden

IN HIS CRITICAL ESSAY on the poetry of Emile Nelligan included in *Une littérature en ébullition*, Gérard Bessette has pointed out that, besides being able to appreciate each poem for its intrinsic value, one may also study the poems together as a single integrated story. They constitute the drama of the poet's own life and tragic breakdown, and contain, for Bessette, all the essential elements of a French Canadian myth.[1]

The meaning of *le Cycle*, Bessette's most recent novel, is greatly clarified by his comments on Nelligan: the title not only represents the mutations in Quebec life from generation to generation, it suggests at the same time that this novel is identifiable with the Quebec myth, it is a symbolic recreation, a remodelling and commentary on this myth, and, what is even more interesting, it is an ominous prophecy of things to come.

That the author had intended to project into *le Cycle* the main facets of a mythology is clear from its very structure. Since it is written in the form of a number of interior monologues presented in a virtually insignificant sequence, each monologue appearing to illustrate a different set of values and attitudes of mind, it is difficult to locate this novel at any one stage in the evolution of French Canadian prose. When we read the first chapter, which is comprised of the infantile ramblings in the mind of tiny Jacot, we feel we are in the presence of one of those perverse children found in the pages of Marie-Claire Blais or Réjean Ducharme. At the same time, when we come to the third monologue, which contains the tormented reflections of the mother, Vitaline, with her intense religiosity, combined with a fierce desire to maintain her children within the traditional flock, we have the impression that we are not far removed from the turn of the century world of Laura Conan or Louis Hémon. It is true, of course, that many French Canadian works of fiction present the everpresent conflict between younger and older generations, but few succeed, as does *le Cycle*, in sustaining so well the basic tensions between them. *Le Cycle* appears thereby to incorporate within its structure a number of phases in Quebec's spiritual evolution.

If Bessette's preceding novel, *l'Incubation*, is a deep, powerful and highly

imaginative commentary on the modern world, *le Cycle* is an even more ambitious analysis which is limited in its interest to French Canadian society. In *l'Incubation*, for the first time, the author had incorporated into his work the methods of the French New Novel and shown the strong influence of the "conscious stream" method pioneered by James Joyce and Virginia Woolf.[2] In his latest work he continues the same trend, though now, rather than portraying a single subjectivity, he endeavours to present the thought processes of seven different individuals, all members of the same family. The relative truth that we, as human beings, can know about any one of these personalities is revealed to us through the reflections of each of the six other participants. If we add to this the fact that, by employing this structure, Bessette proposes to encompass some four generations of family relationships, if, moreover, one considers the numerous relatives, friends and associates who are also brought into focus in these seven monologues, we have an idea of the breadth of perspective that the author attempts to capture in his novel.

In *le Cycle*, Bessette demonstrates once again his interest in probing the most intimate thoughts hidden in the obscure recesses of consciousness. His very original undertaking has been to fix in a vivid, abstract and highly stylized form the spontaneous movements of the human psyche. To this end, he has made a certain number of modifications to the already quite effective techniques used in *l'Incubation*. After the early novels, *la Barre* (1958) and *les Pédagogues* (1961), which had been written in accordance with the conventional percepts of Flaubertian realism, Bessette had moved in evolutionary sequence to the first person narrative in *le Librarie* (1960) and from thence to the more completely subjective style of *l'Incubation*. In *le Cycle*, as the title suggests, the course of his work comes full way around. This last novel is an original effort to integrate within its structure the different qualities of his previous fiction and to establish thereby a superior form of realism.

Le Cycle contains the usual Bessettian themes: a pervading pessimism, irremediable situations, human ineptitude and defeat, the preponderant human motives of lust and money, the grossness of sexuality and man's physical repulsiveness, oedipal relationships and the sublimatory origin of ideological drives — and, last but not least, the monotonous and useless tasks imposed on many by a mechanistic society. The rapprochement between literary invention and scientific theory so apparent in French prose in the latter half of the 19th Century is here vigorously introduced into French Canadian letters. Freudian concepts strongly enhanced by the principles of environmental and physiological determinism

form a systematic framework on which the narrative is built. There is also a greater effort on the author's part to reproduce the subtleties, chaotic movements and utter crudity of notions welling up from the subconscious.

WHILE IN *l'Incubation*, Bessette had advanced his own personal rendition of the perennial theme of love, in *le Cycle* he turns to explore a subject which is equally universal to human experience: the significance of death. The focal point of the entire story may be traced to the passing of the father of the family in question, Norbert Onésime Barré. The central scene is a funeral parlour. It is at the moment when the mother and children are gathered around his coffin to pay their last respects that the author lets us enter the inner domain of each, and we learn what meaning this death has had for them all individually.

We learn that when Norbert Barré met Vitaline Francoeur some thirty-seven years before, he had been an enthusiastic suitor as well as an impeccable and very mature citizen already established in insurance. It is for this reason that the girl's family pushed the match and Vitaline refused another young beau who stirred her heart, but who was not as "solid" as Norbert, twenty-five years her senior. It was from this loveless marriage that the Barré family came into being and from it stemmed all the unhappiness that these pages retrace. The unbridled Sophie, mistress of the Barré's rebellious son, Julien, is rather justified then in claiming that, "la famille il n'y a rien de plus dangereux."[3]

Steadily worn by his routine debates with clients and by quarrels at home, reduced to silence by years of nagging, exacerbated by rancour after his estrangement from his wife's bed, Norbert Barré, insurance agent, had slowly weakened and finally, morally and physically broken, had succumbed to his fate at seventy-three years of age: death from arterio-sclerosis. Partly due to the fact that he was of gentle character and never manifested any qualities of leadership or of parental authority, his first son, Roch, had been a failure in most respects and his other son, Julien, had become a beatnik and a revolutionary. It is the intelligent Roch who observes that "Dans n'importe quel couple . . . il y a toujours un des deux partenaires qui domine." Between Vitaline and Norbert, it had been the husband who proved to be the weaker.

But Norbert Barré had been truly loved: his children all mourn him sincerely and his wife, Vitaline, recognizing that the years had built a certain affection, is tormented with grief, remorse and repentance at his passing. After all, the

defeats he had known were largely beyond his control and we must look further to uncover their source. The complexes and personality attributes (or impediments) of each of these individuals must here be ascribed to Freud's well consecrated formula: the behaviour of the adult is directly related to the events of early childhood, for there is a mysterious life going on beneath conscious experience — a secret life which, moreover, determines consciousness itself. For this reason, we must examine the question of another death hovering over the story, a death even more pertinent in its effects on the lives of all these persons.

Vitaline had known all her life an intense love, or, might one say better, an oepidal bond, with her father, a strong and domineering figure. At the same time, when only very young, she had experienced the wrathful violence of a fiercely devout and puritanical mother who had one day caught her exploring anatomical differences with her tiny brother, Joachim. And so we find years later a mature Vitaline, as pious as her mother, but deeply neurotic and with a subconscious fear of the flesh. In her marriage, her intimate relations with Norbert were considered as "mes devoirs d'épouse"; her husband's early ascendancy over her soon fading, the enormous father image began to find a poor reflection in her daily partner. Three children came: Anita, a happy first arrival, Roch, stubborn with his mother and more attached to his father, and Berthe, who, as a further burden, was relatively undesired. Then, the cataclysmic event occurred: the maternal grandfather became partially paralysed and Vitaline Barré, shocked and crushed, fell into a torpor of grief which was only intensified by his death. The stout and passive Anita was now beyond the emotional needs of early childhood, but Roch and Berthe, pale and emaciated, who arrived during this painful period, experienced deeply the bane of the unwanted.

Norbert's meeting with Vitaline had been a fatal accident, his relations with her being, from the start, more or less determined by events out of her past of which he was completely unaware. As is subtly shown in the novel, Vitaline's unconscious quest after her father's demise was that into her life there should enter once again, "dans l'outre-tombe une immense et fantômatique figure". The atmosphere in the home became unbreathable. Vitaline, for her part, was like a pale and lonely phantom harassed by the incessant presence of an attentive husband and three children. In the interim, however, the messiah came, but in the form of another son, Julien. It was this boy, always fondled and admired, who became the model, the chosen one for his mother's devouring ambitions. But Julien, resentful of an aging father who was of little guidance, could only find a solution to this suffocating mother love in revolt and escape.

The eldest daughter's life appears to have been subconsciously patterned on rivalry and emulation of the maternal image. Anita, too, marries at eighteen a man much older than herself, Charles Bachand, whom she easily dominates and scarcely loves. Thoroughly sated with affection during her infancy, she knows no great emotional disquiet later. Seven years after their union, Charles dies in sexual congress (trying to give the mother hen a larger brood) and she is left with two offspring plus independant means. Thenceforth, the only visitor to her home is the vicar Aurélien Latour. Her affective needs are now sufficiently sublimated by religious fervour and her admiration for this attentive priest. Bessette hereupon satirizes mercilessly the Quebec clergy and religion as a whole (much as he had done in treating mother Vitaline's piety and hypocrisy). Neither Anita nor Aurélien seem to understand the real motives for his frequent visits: "Cesse de rêvasser Anita vaniteuse mets fin à ces folies d'adolescente jamais ton nom (pardonnez-moi mon Dieu) jamais n'apparaîtra en grosses lettres sur la couverture d'un livre content-toi de faire ton devoir d'aider humblement l'abbé Latour à faire son devoir." The passage where Anita awaits in horror the departure of the dawdling abbé while her adolescent daughter unconsciously discloses some of her fleshly charms is one of the funniest in the book.

Roch Barré resembles in certain regards Bessette's apathetic anti-hero in the 1960 novel, *le Libraire*, but with Anita's brother there is no question of an assumed detachment; his defeat in life is total and irreversible.[4] Roch lives in an attic hovel where he spends his time drinking bourbon to calm his nerves and poring over blueprints for the profit of the British American Company. His natural talents are undermined by his past. Roch is the first to hurry to his father's deathbed; his affection for this man has been his most lasting bond.

Berthe has been the least loved of all the Barré children, which doubtless drives her to become the sexual slave of the bestial Roberto. Berthe had criticized her husband, Albert Laverdure, and treated him contemptuously, for the ex-athlete had failed to satisfy her craving for affection. Even at school, as a miserable, lonely, neurotic adolescent, Berthe had succumbed, in search of relief from her frustration, to a lesbian affair. Now, since Albert has fled, her attention is almost completely absorbed by the uncouth and hawklike Italian. It is Roch who understands the real reason: "Il la tient par la peau".

But the death of Vitaline's father not only blighted the lives of Roch and Berthe, and confirmed Norbert Barré's moral destruction; it also visited its curse upon the following generation in the person of the infant, Jacot. Between the strain of her job in an office, under the tyranny of a vicious female accoun-

tant, and her own emotional problems, Berthe had little time for her son. Jacot's hatred of his father's replacement and his own distress are expressed in obsessive activity of his excretory system; his refusal of self-control is the one way he has of punishing his elders and getting attention.

The various inter-relationships between these brothers and sisters are carefully delineated in respective monologues. The most striking device the author utilizes in order to illustrate these complex psychological reactions is also one he shares with Henri de Montherlant. By the use of "alternance", the French author presented that fundamental duality whereby any thought entering into consciousness simultaneously suggests its converse. In other words, it is not at all illogical that Gaétane should sneer one moment at Berthe's shameless conduct and then suddenly declare: "Pauvre Berthe la protéger lui donner de bons conseils la délivrer de ce corsaire." Roch sardonically refers to Julien's mediocre intelligence and his socio-political beatnik behaviour stirred by his unseemly girl friend, Sophie, then proffers instantaneously: "il a peut-être raison il est peut-être plus libre que toi Roch Barré dessinateur squelettique." For Bessette, as for the heroes of Montherlant, man's interior drama springs from this basic ambiguity; it is the keyboard of fatality.

Julien is held by the Flemish Sophie Teunebroker in much the same way as Berthe by her Roberto. To begin, Julien was a refined young man, adulated at home and gaining top marks at school, but then he began to frequent a slovenly crowd of drifters and dope-takers. There he met Sophie, an unkempt European leftist, with her expressionless face, her dirt and her limitless sensuality. In their abject apartment, she and Julien lie on their grubby mattress, making fierce love and discussing how they plan to revolutionize society, destroy bourgeois capitalism, overthrow a claustrophobic system which breeds hate and misunderstanding. In complete incomprehension, Vitaline prays, "qu'il oublie pour une fois la contestation la révolution les assemblées socialistes fascistes maoïstes séparatistes qu'est-ce ça veut dire toute cette salade."

In a portrayal which recalls Huxley's *Brave New World* or Orwell's *1984*, Bessette pushes to an extreme what could possibly be the traits of a new order. His early solidarity with resurgent Québécois unionism is now tempered with much irony and scepticism. Julien and Sophie in their revolt aim to thwart a system which has bred such irretrievable creatures as Anita, Roch and Berthe. Julien's soul cries out for vengeance against a society which has made of his father's life a living hell. In his eyes his brother Roch's work as draftsman for the Anglos symbolizes his people's plight after a hundred years of injustice. Yet the

suggestions of a new fascism are evident in his attitude, for he accepts an unswerving self-discipline in the name of the cause. The leader, Stanislas, stands on the podium beneath the fleur-de-lys flag with his enormously muscular legs spread so as to form an indestructible X. Dressed in shining black nylon and high leather boots, he roars his message through loudspeakers to an infatuated crowd propelled towards the mystique of a new Calvary.

The most appealing figure in the novel is Gaétane. Delicate and intelligent, this teenager has been deeply affected by the death of her father, but it is her older brother, Julien, in whom she finds an enthralling masculine image. The love of these two borders on incest, but Gaétane is really an innocent girl passing through a crucial moment in her life. She is in the process of questioning her environment, forming her opinions. Her inner debate is perhaps the heart of the novel, for the side she and those of her generation fall on will determine the future direction of her homeland. She, for example, is going through a very serious religious crisis: "Dieu existe il est là-haut quelque part (non il n'est nulle part il n'existe pas il se fiche de nous)." The other characters, except for Gaétane and Julien, may be seen as lost souls sold to the system of money and conformity to bourgeois rules. The young girl has the intelligence to question such values. She is drawn to her brother, Julien, but as yet she does not yield to the temptation of complete intellectual revolt. For what do people like Julien and Sophie, the rebels of the younger generation, have to offer in place of what has been? Bessette's satire makes it quite clear in the naming of the great leader towards whom the new youth aspires, Stanislas Auguste Casavant — or as it may be deciphered: Stanislas Box-of-wind.

THE MYTHICAL QUALITIES of *le Cycle* are unmistakable. Once again, as in many a French Canadian work, we have the story of a family and its symbolic struggle to survive against forces lying within as well as outside itself; we observe, moreover, among the members of this family a characteristic "complexe d'aliénation",[5] or deep-seated fear of estrangement, whether on the individual, social, cultural, or political plane. In all of Bessette's novels, as in much recent Québécois fiction, the characters live in the closed milieu of a modern city away from nature's balm: in other words, they are threatened as well with alienation from their natural heritage.

At the moment of Norbert Barrés death, the family's disintegration is imminent. The established order is definitely breaking up. Yet the thwarted Vitaline

and her children still express inwardly a nostalgia for reconciliation and reunion. Roch says of his sister Berthe: "pourquoi ne pas tenter avec elle un rapprochement pourquoi ne pas l'appeler ou même aller chez elle." Julien overtly refuses his family and all it stands for; he is the only one not to come to the funeral. However, we discover that he has in fact prowled around the Funeral Home, only to flee at the last instant from his father's corpse, the religious observances and the presence of the others. A moment of penetrating insight reveals to the young rebel exactly what he has been doing subconsciously through his political initiatives: "est-il possible qu'un antique implacable Oedipe antéconscienciel ait même alors au fond de moi crié réclamé exigé vengeance) la révolution le socialisme la revance prolétarienne damnés de la terre unissez-vous qu'eussent-ils perdu et Stanislas-Auguste Casavant Carlos Ramirez Sophie Teunebröker de quoi les aurais-je privés en quoi les aurais-je trahis si je m'étais alors jeté à genoux ou simplement approché de ce lit."

In *le Cycle*, Bessette delivers his prophetic vision. French Canada's survival is strongly threatened. (That Gaétane's daily routine at school should involve the English tongue is another symptom of this.) But fanatical leadership will go to all ends to see that the threat does not materialize. The present may be filled with disorder and one may wonder what form the new order will take. The signs portend that the future will not be "august". The "Casavants" are at work and, for the sake of a race and a language, the pattern of a rich and beautiful cultural heritage may be extinguished. In any case, it is vigorously implied that the tragedy of the lives of such people as the Barrés cannot alone be ascribed to the evils of a system and an establishment. Catastrophe is, after all, often the necessary consequence of human relations, the tragic fates of men being frequently irremediable. The design of the Quebec myth, of which *le Cycle* is a further representation, is itself founded upon the primordial instincts of the human psyche, impulses that may be traced back through all the great legends of man's past. Human nature cannot be fundamentally altered. Although ideological fervour may interrupt its course for a time, the cycle will go on.

NOTES

[1] Bessette, *Une littérature en ébullition* (Montreal: Editions du jour, 1968).

[2] Glen Shortliffe, *Gérard Bessette l'homme et l'écrivain*, "Conférences J.A. de Sève," Université de Montréal (Montréal: Thérien Frères, 1960), p. 16.

[3] Bessette, *le Cycle* (Montreal: Editions du jour, 1971), p. 91. Henceforth references to this work will be designated by the first letter of the title.

[4] Shortliffe, *op. cit.*, p. 18. In his conference on Bessette, Glenn Shortliffe points out

how Hervé Jodoin, protagonist of *le Libraire*, embodies a modern phenomenon which he calls "schizoidism." Finding the various demands which contemporary society thrusts upon the individual difficult to bear, the "schizoid" learns to develop a psychological distance, a sort of built-in non-reaction, towards all persons and objects making up exterior reality. Jodoin's bizarre indifference recalls Camus' famous hero, Meursault, in the novel, *l'Etranger*.

[5] Yvon Daigneault, "*Menaud maître-draveur* devant la critique 1937-1967," *Livres et auteurs québécois 1969* (Montréal: Editions Jumonville, 1969), pp. 248-262. In his article on Félix-Antoine Savard's novel, Yvon Daigneault states as his principal thesis that "Menaud serait l'expression pour nous des grands mythes fondamentaux de l'âme humaine." Daigneault further mentions how Gilles Marcotte considered *Menaud* as being essentially "l'illustration du complexe d'aliénation des Canadiens français" (p. 257). While *Menaud maître-draveur* and *le Cycle* are exemplary, all Québécois fiction may be said, in general, to follow this pattern.

THE DEAD CHILD

P. K. Page

I dreamed the child was dead
and folded in a box
like stockings or a dress

I dreamed its toys and games
its brightly coloured clothes
were lying in the grass

and I was left behind
adult and dutiful
with ink instead of blood.

I could not bear the grief
accommodate the loss.
It was my heart that died.

But wakening I saw
the child beside my bed
'Not dead, not dead!' I cried

and startled by my voice
and fearful of my glance
the child ran off and hid.

(Poems from Melanie's Nite-book.)

DUNCAN'S WEB

Carole Gerson

WHILE THE OVERT subject of *The Imperialist* is indeed imperialism, the novel's deeper structural unity derives from its focus on idealism and its internal patterning of perceptions and points of view. Sara Jeannette Duncan uses Canada not only to provide the history of the imperialist movement, but also to supply a foil for the old world, so that in the interaction between old world and new world experiences and personalities she can scrutinize subtleties of idealism and levels of vision. Hence her concern is not narrative for the sake of narrative but the effect of event on the formation of vision; as she herself says of Lorne Murchison's trip to England, "what he absorbed and took back with him is, after all, what we have to do with; his actual adventures are of no great importance." In the context of turn-of-the-century Canadian fiction, marked as it was by a strong emphasis on "actual adventures", Duncan's ability to work into the fabric of her narrative the abstract problem of the levels, limitations and horizons of vision distinguishes *The Imperialist* from the story-telling of Gilbert Parker, Norman Duncan and Ralph Connor. Much of her distinction may be due to her long absence from Canada, which may have helped to expand her artistic vision and give her greater detachment and a more universal frame of reference than her Canadian contemporaries. This detached perspective, combined with her personal knowledge of Canada and her dexterous manipulation of characters and ideas, renders *The Imperialist* one of the most carefully structured and unduly neglected Canadian novels.

The skill of Duncan's structural technique lies in her meticulous interweaving of narrative threads so that all events and characters implicitly comment upon one another, and through the various attitudes manifested by various characters the "figure in the carpet" slowly and surely emerges. Within this scheme of levels of vision the highest focal point — the horizon — is idealism, political in the case of Lorne Murchison, moral in the case of Hugh Finlay. Just outside central focus sit the two characters who function on the lesser plane of self-interest,

Alfred Hesketh and Dora Milburn. And the substantial background to the whole is provided by Elgin, Ontario, recognized by John Murchison to be "a fair sample of our rising manufacturing towns," and by his son Lorne to be a microcosm of eastern Canadian society: "Elgin market square . . . was the biography of Fox County, and, in little, the history of the whole province."

Elgin's vision focuses on "the immediate, the vital, the municipal." Anchored in common-sense pragmatism, the town distrusts imaginative eccentricity. In Elgin religious fervour "was not beautiful, or dramatic, or self-immolating; it was reasonable;" and young daydreaming Advena Murchison learns that "No one could dream with impunity in Elgin, except in bed." As the microcosmic example of the level-headed, business-minded Canadian community, Elgin supplies the formal testing-ground for Lorne's idealism and judges less by principle than by economic practicability. When Lorne accepts the Liberal nomination in a federal by-election and makes imperialism the keynote of his platform, the whole country looks to Elgin to indicate the national reaction to the Idea and sees in Elgin a mirror of itself.

The town's solid, practical personality manifests itself in Mrs. Murchison and, on a more sophisticated level, in Dr. Drummond. "The central figure . . . with her family radiating from her," Mrs. Murchison contains the stability of everyday reality: she knows that the crises of ordinary living are whether Abby's baby has the whooping cough and what to serve the minister for tea. On her own level of apprehension she sees through the ideal of England when Lorne returns with his clothes "ingrained with London smut," and she implicitly understands the emotional realities that Advena and Finlay try so hard to idealize away because, in her common-sense world, no young man and young woman can see so much of one another without falling in love. Dr. Drummond, the Scottish Presbyterian minister, exemplifies a similar intuitive grasp of ordinary life. While his limitations are those of any man who moves "with precision along formal and implicit lines" and whose study is lined "with standard religious philosophy, standard poets, standard fiction, all that was standard and nothing that was not," his fundamental knowledge of human behaviour enables him to confront Finlay's misguided idealism and to inform him that he and Advena are "a pair of born lunatics" for their determination to sacrifice love to principle.

While Elgin, Mrs. Murchison and Dr. Drummond represent the primary level of vision — namely common sense and practical conduct — there runs in them a deep vein of old loyalties and half-hidden emotional ties waiting to be tapped by Lorne's more penetrating imagination. For all its spirit of North American

enterprise, Elgin, "this little outpost of Empire," maintains its umbilical ties in its annual lively celebration of the Queen's Birthday; the importance of this event to the Murchison children fills Duncan's opening chapter. Dr. Drummond and John Murchison emigrated from Scotland together and transferred their concerns entirely to the new world, yet "obscure in the heart of each of them ran the undercurrent of the old allegiance." Allegiance to tradition inspired Mrs. Murchison to name her first two daughters after their grandmothers, Lorne after the Marquis de Lorne (Governor-general of Canada from 1878 to 1883) whose mother-in-law was Queen Victoria, and two sons after Canadian Liberal party leaders. In addition, Lorne Murchison grows up in the old Plummer place, a home distinguished by the "attractiveness of the large ideas upon which it had been built and designed." This atmosphere of "large ideas," Elgin's lingering "sentiment of affection for the reigning house," and Lorne's early manifestation of "that active sympathy with the disabilities of his fellow-beings which stamped him later so intelligent a meliorist" are all absorbed into his earnest personality and into the making of his idealistic imperialism. In her careful plotting of Lorne's background Duncan weaves an intricate fabric of colonial affections which requires only Lorne's personality to tailor it into the imperialist banner.

BUT EVEN MORE IMPORTANT than the content of Lorne's idealism is his idealism itself, as *The Imperialist* focuses squarely upon the personality of the idealist. For Duncan, idealism results more from temperament than from philosophy. Hence her two principal idealists, Lorne Murchison and Hugh Finlay, are described in remarkably similar terms although the actual forms of their idealism differ greatly.

Hugh Finlay, the young Presbyterian minister from Dumfriesshire, and Lorne Murchison, the young Canadian lawyer, are two examples of the same "type": sincere, open, at times almost simple, and noticeably different from everyone else in intensity and visionary focus. Both inhabit a dimension beyond the ordinary, both appeal to others by their strength of personality, and Duncan describes both in terms of expanded horizons. Lorne's face is "lighted by a certain simplicity of soul that pleased even when it was not understood;" he is "frank and open, with horizons and intentions; you could see them in his face." Similarly Finlay is "a passionate romantic . . . with a shock of black hair and deep dreams in his eyes . . . a type . . . of the simple motive and the noble intention, the detached point of view and the somewhat indifferent attitude to material

things." Like Lorne, he has "horizons, lifted lines beyond the common vision, and an eye rapt and a heart intrepid." Circumstance and place of birth rather than temperament direct Lorne's idealism towards political theory, and Finlay's towards personal sacrifice and the upholding of old moral allegiances. While the story of Lorne's political career has nothing to do with the story of Finlay's romantic involvements, the parallel plots complement one another as the new world idealist finds his moral inspiration in the old world, and the old world idealist looks to the new world for "elbow-room" yet cannot shake off his old world ties.

Lorne's incipient idealism finds its focus when he is invited to be secretary to a deputation from the United Chambers of Commerce of Canada shortly to wait upon the British government "to press for the encouragement of improved communications within the Empire." For Lorne the Empire immediately becomes "the whole case;" Canada has stuck with and must continue to stick with England for "the moral advantage." Once in England, Lorne alone is not disillusioned by "the unready conception of things, the political concentration on parish affairs, the cumbrous social machinery . . . the problems of sluggish overpopulation" which depress the other members of his delegation. Instead he colours all with his idealism, and sees "England down the future the heart of the Empire, the conscience of the world, and the Mecca of the race" if only the colonies will come to her economic aid.

Once Lorne's idealistic temperament attaches itself to imperialism, enthusiasm rather than reason determines the course of his career. On his return to Canada his gift for transmitting his earnestness becomes the source of his political attractiveness: "at the late fall fairs and in the lonely country schoolhouses his talk had been so trenchant, so vivid and pictorial, that the gathered farmers listened with open mouths, like children, pathetically used with life, to a "grown-up fairy tale." That imperialism is little more than a "grown-up fairy tale" is implied by the outcome of Lorne's career. His growing feeling that he rides "upon the crest of a wave of history," and that he is the instrument of "an intention, a great purpose in the endless construction and re-construction of the world" severs him from the pragmatic reality of Elgin. Once the Idea takes possession of him he proves incapable of following the advice of the Liberals to subdue his imperialism which is becoming increasingly suspect in the business community. As a result he barely wins the election, and when irregularities are charged by both sides and the seat is to be re-contested, the Liberals ask him to withdraw. Lorne's idealistic vision — his overly expanded horizons which cause

him to lose touch with the primary, common-sense vision of his community — makes him a unique figure in the canon of Canadian hero-victims: he wins the election, but he loses the seat.

Into her pattern of levels of vision Duncan works an Elgin-level idealist who, by juxtaposition, accentuates Lorne's loftier idealism. Elmore Crow, Lorne's former schoolmate, goes out west only to discover that from a common-sense point of view normality is best: "you've got to get up just as early in the mornings out there as y'do anywhere, far's I've noticed. An' it's a lonesome life. Now I *am* back, I don't know but little old Ontario's good enough for me." Having "wore out his Winnipeg clothes and his big ideas," Crow returns to the family farm and makes himself useful.

But like Lorne, Finlay and Advena live far above the plane of useful reality. The lovers are saved from the adverse consequences of their idealism only by the *deus ex machina* intervention of Dr. Drummond. The two meet after Advena has already loved Finlay from afar, and much of Finlay's bungling stems from his inexperience with women and his inability to perceive Advena's love until things have already progressed to a point of deep emotional commitment. Artistically, perhaps the finest passage of the book is the scene of their first real encounter which sets the subsequent direction of their relationship.

Late on an April afternoon — the time of year is the transition into spring, and the time of day the transition into evening — Finlay overtakes Advena on his way home. They walk in silence together, and Advena feels that the event is "pregnant, auspicious" — like the time of day and the time of year, the brink of something. When they turn a corner and the sunset suddenly bursts upon them, Finlay, the recent emigrant from the old world, marvels that "it's something to be in a country where the sun still goes down with a thought of the primaeval." Advena, born and raised in Canada, prefers "the sophistication of chimney-pots" and longs "to see a sunset in London, with the fog breaking over Westminster." After some witty exchange they go their separate ways. Finlay's road lies "to the north, which was still snowbound," while Advena's is into the "yellow west, with the odd sweet illusion that a summer day was dawning."

In the paradoxes worked into this scene Duncan maps the lovers' course. For all his admiration of the "primaeval," Finlay remains morally and intellectually "snowbound" by convention. By birth a northern man (from Dumfriesshire), his northern route to his home in the new world concretely expresses his old world vision, which is embodied in his intractible resolve to honour an engagement of convenience to a distant cousin made before his departure for Canada.

In contrast, Advena's new world vision and western direction signify her greater consciousness of passion and emotional freedom, and her capacity to see that Finlay's "dim perception of his own case was grotesque." While she glances intellectually towards chimney-pots and Westminster, and does try to support Finlay's conventionalism and his marriage to Christie Cameron, it is her passion that finally shatters their idealistic self-renunciation. So long as they maintain their idealism — their intellectual refinement which allows them the illusion that theirs is a "friendship of spirit" — the course of their relationship runs northerly, towards frozen passion and ice-bound convention. But when Advena meets Finlay in a thunderstorm and passionately declares "We aren't to bear it", and Dr. Drummond conveniently decides to marry Christie himself, the lovers turn abruptly towards the yellow west and the frontier of emotional freedom.

In Duncan's pattern of levels of vision Lorne and Finlay are two versions of the same thing: two sides of the woven carpet, to return to Henry James's metaphor. While Lorne's idealism is directed outward, towards an impossible "union of the Anglo-Saxon nations of the world," Finlay's is entirely personal, designed to avoid "the sacrifice of all that I hold most valuable in myself." Just as Lorne expatiates on the moral advantages of imperialism without working out the concrete economic details, so Finlay expatiates on the freedom of the new world without perceiving his imprisonment by the conventions of the old world. As idealists, they are removed from the primary, common-sense vision of Elgin; but because they are idealists, their motivation is well-intentioned: Lorne wishes to save the Empire, Finlay to save his principles.

DUNCAN ADDS another dimension to her pattern of levels of vision with the self-centredness of Alfred Hesketh and Dora Milburn. As with everything else, Lorne's apprehension of Hesketh, an independently wealthy, apparently benevolent young Englishman whom he meets in London, is coloured by his idealism: "Hesketh stood, to him, a product of that best which he was so occupied in admiring and pursuing. . . . There is no doubt that his manners were good, and his ideas unimpeachable in the letter; the young Canadian read the rest into him and loved him for what he might have been." Hesketh is sufficiently inspired by Lorne's infectious idealism to come to Elgin, but once he arrives Lorne realizes that Hesketh is a useless twit. "I certainly liked him better, over there," he confesses to Advena, "but then he was a part of it. . . . Over here you seem to see round him somehow." Lorne's doubts about Hesketh's place in

Canada are borne out when Hesketh, campaigning for Lorne, succeeds only in alienating his audience by his condescension and snobbery. Like Finlay, Hesketh carries all his old world attitudes to the new world; he fails even to perceive the gap between his class-conscious Englishness and middle-class Elgin's egalitarianism and pragmatism. Hence he admires the affectedly English Milburns as "the most typically Canadian family" for "Miss Milburn will compare with any English girl." But unlike Finlay, Hesketh lacks principles. While his ostensible purpose in coming to Elgin is to help Lorne spread the gospel of imperialism under the aegis of the Liberal party, he finds it easily convenient to swing his allegiance to the Conservatives — Mr. Milburn's party — when he becomes involved with Dora, and to develop a consuming interest in Milburn's traction engines. Hesketh completes his betrayal of Lorne when he announces his engagement to Dora, to whom Lorne had already given a ring. But in Duncan's scheme Dora and Hesketh belong together, for by their self-importance they hold themselves aloof from Elgin society, and by their lack of principle and their selfish motivation they operate on a level far beneath the high-mindedness of the idealists.

Lorne's romanticized vision of Dora prevents him from perceiving the selfishness underlying her coyness and her continual evasion of a definite promise. Not at all the goddess of Lorne's conception, Dora presents "a dull surface to the more delicate vibration of things," and to her one of the most significant ramifications of Lorne's trip to England is that she will lose her escort to the regatta. She cannot stand to see propriety disturbed — "When she was five years old and her kitten broke its leg, she had given it to a servant to drown" — and Lorne's enthusiasm disturbs propriety. She also cannot stand to be ignored, and when she feels at times that "Between politics and boilers . . . the world held a second place for her," she graciously accepts the attentions of Alfred Hesketh. While Elgin views the world from the level of common sense, and Lorne and Finlay see things through their exalted idealism, Hesketh's and Dora's level of vision is limited to self-interest.

Even after her pattern became clear, Duncan's personal attitude toward her characters remains strangely vague. The first-person voice which frequently enters the narrative is probably Duncan herself, but even this voice remains so detached that apart from overt disapproval of the self-centred characters it refuses to commit itself to more than a distant, ironic sense of sympathy with both the common-sense community and the idealists. If there is a character who represents the author's point of view it would have to be Advena, who straddles

the common-sense and the idealistic worlds, and who views Elgin and her brother with detached sympathy. Advena appears to abandon the solid reality of her parents' world when she supports Finlay's marriage to Christie, but her common-sense roots finally assert themselves. When she passionately declares to Finlay that she can no longer maintain their ideal she feels that all is lost: "Before she had preferred an ideal to the desire of her heart; now it lay about her; her strenuous heart had pulled it down to foolish ruin." But the ruin of the ideal is "foolish" to Advena only initially; Duncan makes it clear that it is the ideal itself that is foolish — the fabrication of two people "too much encumbered with ideas to move simply, quickly on the impulse of passion." Lorne destroys his political career because his idealism is too passionate; Finlay and Advena nearly ruin their lives because their idealism is too intellectual. If Duncan intended any message beyond her exploration of the different levels of vision at which different people operate, it could be the Renaissance ideal of temperance — the balance of passion and reason which produces concrete human achievement.

The Imperialist has unfortunately suffered the neglect accorded to much literature based on a topical political situation. What in 1904 the *Canadian Magazine* found "opportune" the modern reader now finds obscure, since Duncan assumes her readers' familiarity with the imperialist movement. Like Marvell's *Painter* satires, *The Imperialist* requires some annotation and explanation. But once made accessible, the book reveals itself to be one of the most sophisticated and penetrating Canadian novels written before World War I. Sara Jeannette Duncan's scheme of levels of vision, her ability to work ideas into the structure of her narrative, and her detached sympathy for both her idealists and her common-sense characters raise *The Imperialist* above the local and the historical into the universal concerns of literature.

review articles

KLEIN'S POET SURFACING

Tom Marshall

The Collected Poems of A. M. Klein, compiled and with an introduction by Miriam Waddington. McGraw-Hill Ryerson, $14.95 cloth, $6.95 paper.

THIS IS an important publication. It makes available to the general reader for the first time in many years a large body of work by one of our most important poets. Except for *The Rocking Chair* and *The Second Scroll*, all of A. M. Klein's books have been out of print since at least the 1950's. Moreover, there are enough poems never before collected to fill a number of slim volumes. All serious students and interested readers of Canadian poetry owe a debt of gratitude to Miriam Waddington and to the Klein family for making this work available. In its richness and variety, its virtuosity and range, in its failures as well as its successes, this book provides one of the most ambitious and fascinating testimonies of creative achievement that we have had.

That said, let me register two quibbles before attempting some sort of comment about Klein's work as a whole. Firstly, I regret that for whatever reason a splendid opportunity was missed; Ms. Waddington and her publishers have included only those poems that were published in magazines and books, and have not included those unpublished poems from Klein's own notebooks and the private manuscripts he made for relatives and friends in the 1930's when book publication was impossible. To include these would have occasioned textual problems (as they would any serious attempt to deal with Klein's very extensive revisions, many of them made after poems were published), but we would then have had a "Complete" Poems. As it is, we are unlikely (for commercial reasons) to see such an animal for some time.

My other quibble is less serious, and has to do with the order in which the poems are printed here. Klein's first volume, *Hath Not A Jew . . .*, was published in 1940, but most of the poems were written in the late 1920's and early 1930's. Nevertheless, Ms. Waddington places these after the "radical poems" of the middle and late 1930's. This can give a misleading impression of the poet's development. Still, Ms. Waddington is correct, I think, in making a distinct group of the radical poems, which might

well have made (in their time) a timely book.

In fact, a reading of the many poems never before published in book form shows how much of Klein's better work had been lost to the general public. He was a prolific poet, for better and for worse, producing a large body of verse between 1927 or so and the 1950's. To know him only as the man who wrote *The Rocking Chair* and *The Second Scroll*, and then fell silent for twenty years, is to know him at his best, but not in all his variety.

Linguistic playfulness and an addiction to rhyme characterize Klein's earliest work. A fondness for light verse — some of it quite juvenile, some of it quite delightful — is the counterpoint to his more sombre accounts of Jewish suffering throughout the centuries. There are also sonnets of biblical subjects, love poems and poems of the ghetto. As one who has written about Klein's work before, I am grateful to Miriam Waddington for the discovery of a number of witty poems that I had never read or else had forgotten. One such is "Dialogue", in which two Jewish wives pine for the old country:

> The two shawl-covered grannies, buying fish,
> Discuss the spices of the Sabbath dish.
>
> They laud old-country dainties; each one bans
> The heathen foods the moderns eat from cans.
>
> They get to talking of the golden land,
> Each phrase of theirs couches a reprimand.
>
> Says one: I hate these lofty buildings, I
> Long for a piece of unencircled sky.
>
> I do not know the tramway system, so
> I walk and curse the traffic as I go.
>
> I chaffer English, and I nearly choke,
> O for the talk of simple Russian folk!
>
> The other says: A lonesomeness impels
> Me hence; I miss the gossip at the wells.
>
> I yearn for even Ratno's muds; I long
> For the delightfully heartrending song
>
> Of Reb Yecheskel Chazan, song that tore
> The heart so clear it did not ask for more.
>
> They sigh; they shake their heads; they both conspire
> To doom Columbus to eternal fire.

Here an experience common to many Canadians — and not, of course, only to Jews — is memorably and wittily set down. Another early poem that greatly appeals to me is the sonnet "My Literati Friends in Restaurants", in which the polyglot poet scribbles the last line of the Divine Comedy on a menu and dreams of his love while his intellectual friends bicker and shout their abstract love for the working classes.

But much of the early work seems to me clumsy and fustian, sometimes because of the dubious tactic of a deliberately archaic diction and syntax as a means of rendering the medieval or earlier Jewish world, sometimes because the rhymes are not subtle enough to lift the satires out of the realm of burlesque. This is a fault one finds in much of the "radical" poetry, and at its worst in *The Hitleriad* of 1944. It was Whitman, I think, who said of Poe that he carried the rhyming art to excess, and it might be added of Klein that his technical strengths often become weaknesses through excess. One takes the bad with the good when a poet is as vital and exuberant as this.

When Klein's devices work, however, the result is a poetry of great originality. In *Hath Not A Jew . . .*, where the best of the early work is collected, Klein explores the situation of the Jews throughout history in a language adapted from

that of Spenser, Shakespeare and Marlowe. Much of this hybrid verse — which unites the great but disparate traditions of English literature and Hebrew lore — is surprisingly fresh, colourful and scintillating, especially in poems for children, based on Jewish folklore and Chassidic tales from Poland, the land of Klein's immediate ancestors. There is, in this book, almost no reference to Canada or identifiable mention of Montreal. But one of the most impressive poems, "Out of the Pulver and the Polished Lens", develops a universal statement of the search for "identity" in terms of Baruch Spinoza's liberation from ghetto and synagogue into a wider world full of God's presence. The search for "God" is, the poet suggests, the search for one's fullest and not one's narrowest self (one can think of this in terms of Jung's description of the individuation process). Such a concern transcends cultural barriers, and foreshadows Klein's later expressions of sympathy for French Canada.

In the radical poems, too, Klein extends his sympathy to all who suffer from economic injustice. I have always felt that these poems were somewhat hit and miss, but certainly there are among them, as Klein's Elizabethan colleagues might say, "palpable hits" such as this complaint against the bourgeois philistines:

> Milady Schwartz, (oh, no, she is no snob)
> Speaks to the staff: The season is belated.
> Her husband works too hard. You'd never
> think
> So fine a soul would take to cloaks and suits,
> Competing with such thieves as Levy, Inc.
> But she does not complain. We all must
> suffer
> For those the higher things life has to offer.
> Does Mr. Abram Segal still write verses?
> It must be wonderful. She envies him.
> She wishes she could make up rhymes. She
> nurses
> Feelings unuttered, smitten by lockjaw.
> (*Moi, j'ai Apollon sur les bouts de mes*
> *dix doigts . . .*)
> Of course she loves art. She goes to lectures.
> But yesterday she heard a recitation
> About the patter of a babe's pink toes.
> He should have heard it, should the poet,
> Abe.
> Also, she is a member of a club
> Occasionally addressed by local bards.
> (A teaspoonful of art, before and after
> cards.)

Klein's poems of social protest prepare the way for his fusion of private vision and public observation in *The Rocking Chair* (1948). Meanwhile *Poems* (1944) continues his articulation of specifically Jewish themes. In the poems immediately preceding *The Rocking Chair* (some of them later employed as glosses in *The Second Scroll*) there is a new assurance and poise, a gradual movement toward a more consistently "modern" idiom. What his most severe critics have regarded as a facility for empty rhetoric Klein turns, as I shall attempt to show, to appropriate purposes.

The Rocking Chair is, I think, a landmark in the history of Canadian poetry. Stylistically, Klein has benefitted from association with other Montreal poets of the forties (P. K. Page, Patrick Anderson, possibly even the early Irving Layton) and from acquaintance with the work of Yeats, Hopkins, Auden and Thomas, but he remains very definitely himself, probably because his mastery of various languages brings an individuality (if not an oddity) to his manner of negotiating English. In a richly inventive, sometimes even ornate language he applies his very considerable insight into the nature of minority groups to the situation and character of the French Canadians, Canadians in general, Canadian Indians, and even the scattered tribe of Canadian

poets. In this he expresses what must become the collective Canadian consciousness, a tapestry of minority groups, each in its own cultural garrison (or ghetto) and surrounded by a vast and forbidding landscape. "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape" is, in fact, the key poem, for in it the poet's function is seen as the articulation of man's place in the social, natural and cosmic landscape, and of its life in him. Unfortunately, as the poem also indicates, hardly anyone was likely to be listening in 1948, and Klein was never able to enjoy an audience like that of the 1960's and 70's, which has lionized his successors (Layton, Purdy, Cohen, Atwood etc.) for their enlargement upon these basic themes.

Klein's work reflects the Canadian multiculturalism; even the zionism of many poems and of *The Second Scroll* is, by analogy (and because the Old Testament is part of the mythic baggage of us WASPS too), relevant to the Canadian attempt to achieve community. In "The Provinces" Klein writes:

> . . . the heart seeks one, the heart, and also
> the mind seeks single the thing that makes
> them one, if one.

And in "Grain Elevator" all his worlds are yoked together in a cinematic flow of images that flash by at almost hallucinatory speed, a "montage/of inconsequent time and uncontiguous space" that binds a Montreal grain elevator to Babylon, Leviathan, the ark, Joseph's dreams in Egypt, Saskatchewan, the liberation of the Bastille, Araby, Mongolians in the steerage of a ship, and a number of other things — in fact to all times, places and peoples that have been sustained by bread. Recurrent images of prison, ship and river give way to the eventual flower-box (and flour-box) from which (and through which) "all the coloured faces of mankind" are raised. Canada contains, in the microcosm of the grain elevator, a universe of need and its possible fulfilment. Material and imaginative liberation occur together in this Utopian vision; it offers what Margaret Avison calls "jailbreak/ and re-creation". Exuberant metaphor articulates a basic human (and in other poems an extra-human) unity in diversity.

Here and in "Lone Bather" identity with the world is achieved through metamorphosis. Language is made an instrument of magic, a flexible, esemplastic substance. As the bather becomes bird, dolphin, plant and merman in turn, Klein's customary dislocation of conventional syntax functions as part of the process by which one's "normal" perception of reality is broken down in order to reveal man's kinship (and, as he returns to his evolutionary origin, his ultimate identity) with all living things:

> Upon the ecstatic diving board the diver,
> poised for parabolas, lets go
> lets go his manshape to become a bird.
> Is bird, and topsy-turvy
> the pool floats overhead, and the white tiles
> snow
> their crazy hexagons. Is dolphin. Then
> is plant with lilies bursting from his heels . . .

The world is rearranged and reconstituted for us; we are even allowed, by a sudden shift of perspective, a momentary look through the diver's eyes.

Klein's magic is "Canadian" insofar as it proposes an ultimate unity while retaining respect for the individual categories, cultures, boundaries and creatures that make up the whole. His was essentially a religious sensibility, and his great theme is the transcendence of evil through imaginative sympathy. To be a Canadian,

he suggests, is to experience alienation and exile, to know cultural conflict as well as cultural diversity. All Canadians, in this view, are like wandering Jews in a vast and mysterious land of exile. (By 1974, I think, many have begun to feel at home, but this happy process is far from complete.) It seems advisable, in this situation, that the several Canadian garrisons attempt to communicate their hopes and anxieties to one another, and communicate also the attempts of each cultural or regional community to achieve some feeling of harmony with the land and, perhaps through the land, with a larger order of things in the universe. Thus art, thus the poet who takes into himself the landscape.

It was, then, potentially tragic that, at least at times, Klein should have seen the poet, once the acknowledged spokesman for his culture, as an invisible man hopelessly unable to communicate his essential vision to a society entangled in technology and drugged with its attendant pop-culture. The poet of "Portrait" holds his vision as a "secret", harbouring in his situation of neglect feelings of profound ambivalence about his own worth, and even inclined to doubt his own existence. Some poets, Klein writes in a passage both amusing and sinister, "go mystical, and some go mad." The experience of divinity that expresses itself in artistic creation may, after all, he seems to suggest, be just a form of madness. The serious artist may well be dismissed as a madman by a society that has forsaken any experience of transcendence.

But the poet is the man whose nature will not allow him to forego the experience of divinity, even if his social ego be submerged and lost in the attempt to communicate his vision. If he comes to feel that it cannot be communicated, then he is totally isolated, ghettoized indeed. But if he touches the imagination of his people, he surfaces triumphantly. His (and our) sense of balance and wholeness may be restored by the ability of the human imagination to move to the transcendent perspective of "another planet". Insofar as the reader of the *Collected Poems* (now and in future) may experience this, he will have (in himself) resurrected Klein's drowned poet.

POET AND POETASTER

George Woodcock

The Poems of Archibald Lampman. University of Toronto Press. $6.50
CHARLES MAIR, *Dreamland and Other Poems. Tecumseh: A Drama.* University of Toronto Press. $4.50.

IT IS WHEN reprints once again make poets of the past freely available to us — instead of their works being trapped in libraries from which we may chance to liberate them (unless we are specialists) once or twice in a reading lifetime — that we can keep their works beside us in a way which not only allows us to appreciate the general totality of their achievement, but also to establish a more personal relationship by recognizing special qualities in their work that

strike an intimate response in our minds.

This kind of liberation of our classic Canadian poets to what one hopes will be a wider readership has been the achievement of the University of Toronto Press's Literature in Canada series; one can in general find only praise for the felicity of the choice of titles and the appropriateness of the choice of editors that have been shown by the General Editor of the series, Douglas Lochhead. Having brought back to us the poems of Charles G. D. Roberts, Isabella Valancy Crawford and Charles Sangster, Dr. Lochhead now offers *The Poems of Archibald Lampman*, and *Dreamland and Other Poems* — together with *Tecumseh: A Drama* — by Charles Mair.

This has — I confess — been the first time I have read Charles Mair *in toto*; it may well be the last. I had in the past been content with the fragments of his verse which I read in anthologies, plus the lively picture of the man and his times — and the further fragments of verse — provided by Norman Shrive in his *Charles Mair: Literary Nationalist*. Shrive — who has written the introduction to the present volume — clearly recognizes that this is a case where the man is much more interesting than his writings, and when we read the derivative fustian of *Dreamland and Other Poems*, and plod through the ponderous imitation of English eighteenth century heroic tragedy in which Mair embedded the moving and genuinely heroic stories of Tecumseh and Brock, we can only wonder what happened to the man who actually played a somewhat fantastic part in the Red River Rising and who knew the reality of the old west from experience. The links between the two Mairs seem to exist only in a very few passages of his verse, such as those in *Tecumseh* where the woodenly romantic lover Lefroy describes his journeys into the prairies, and the occasional hankerings in the shorter poems after some kind of earthly paradise, and odd hinting passages in such peculiar lyrics as "To my Photograph" in which Mair rather mawkishly asks his sepia image to

> . . . tell my love how you and I
> Have seen strange suns on dream-lakes glow.

Mair did have the kind of feeling for animals and trees and wild plants which the best of the early prairie travel chroniclers showed, and the finest stretches of verse he wrote were those in which he worked such observations of the Canadian landscape into evocations of a real environment, its look and mood. There was at times in him — as in the almost contemporary wandering English painter of the prairies, William Hind — a genuinely pre-Raphaelite power to make the setting glow by means of such a "vivid picture of the flora and fauna", as Shrive put it.

In picking the three best of such passages for his *Book of Canadian Poetry*, there is no doubt that A. J. M. Smith showed Mair in an unrepresentatively favourable light. And even on the basis of selected fragments it is doubtful if one can claim that — as Smith actually suggests — Mair attained "a more universal and truly classical way of looking at things than is exhibited by any Canadian poet except Archibald Lampman." I could pick a greater selection of "truly classical" passages even from Roberts, and certainly a much greater selection from Smith himself, than Mair could offer. Thus, on the grounds of a few eminently collectible passages (like his Keatsian

"August" and the travel descriptions in *Tecumseh*) Mair has been well served by his anthologists, and he has been equally well served — both in an excellent biography and in the introduction to the present selection — by Norman Shrive. Yet it is still Mair's life that holds our interest, and the amazing fact, as Shrive indicates, is that so little of that life found its way into his mainly derivative, shallow and artificial verse.

The kind of comparison with Lampman which Smith made can only be to the disadvantage of a writer like Mair, since Lampman, for all the comparative shortness of his career, is so much more varied and versatile, so much more accomplished in his craft, so much truer in his voice. Lampman even at his worst seems to speak as a genuine poet, while Mair even at his best strikes one as a poetaster who has surpassed himself. If one counts Duncan Campbell Scott — by virtue of his mature work — as a twentieth century poet, then Lampman must certainly be regarded as the finest Canadian poet of the Victorian era. And if that in itself is not enough, there are probably a couple of dozen poems by Lampman which compare well with poetry being written anywhere during the 1880's and the 1890's in the English language.

Since the Literature of Canada series deals in reprints, this is not the long-needed complete Lampman, embracing all the unpublished and uncollected material. It is a composite volume which might be described as the Scott Canon; it consists of *The Poems of Archibald Lampman*, as assembled by Scott after the poet's death and published in 1900, and the later selection of previously unpublished material which Scott and E. K.

Brown put together more than forty years afterwards and published in 1943 under the title of *At the Long Sault and Other Poems.*

The introduction has been written by Margaret Coulby Whitridge, who shows herself a critic of considerable though hitherto untested quality. She leads us away from the virtues of Lampman as a nature poet, which are undoubted but familiar, towards his interest as one of our first poets aware of urban alienation (a consciousness evident in many more poems than his justly famous "City of the End of Things"), towards the importance of fear as an element in his later poems linking him with Canadian poets of the present century, and towards the strength and sincerity of his socialist convictions, which have been under-estimated by earlier critics.

In comparison with his friend and contemporary Roberts, one of the striking aspects of Lampman is his unwillingness to give expression in verse to the sense of Canadian nationality he revealed in other media, and in comparison with both Roberts and Scott, an equally striking characteristic of his work is his disinclination to name settings for his poems. Even when one recognizes the regions and sometimes the close localities of which he is writing, he does not often mention actual places, and "At the Long Sault" is his only poem that actually evokes a Canadian historical incident in its proper setting (though the incident described does have a verse devoted to it in a poem, strongly pacifist in flavour, entitled "War").

Such a scarcity of specific localisms supports Smith's idea of Lampman's having a "universal . . . way of looking at things". His politics went beyond nationality to view poverty and war and greed as worldwide problems, and the libertarian socialist Utopia that is the subject of the dream he narrates in "The Land of Pallas" is timeless and placeless in earthly terms, but in terms of the mind closely related to the visions of Godwin and William Morris; indeed, despite Lampman's nominal Fabian affiliations, it is Morris's socialism that is most nearly reflected in his politically — or perhaps rather morally — radical poems.

In the same way as Lampman saw his socialism within a universal setting, so he tended to see himself as a poet within the total English-speaking tradition, trying in his geographical remoteness to do the same kind of thing as his English and American contemporaries. His moving elegiac sonnet, "The Death of Tennyson", showed his affiliations accurately. When he filled his books with narrative poems about mediaeval figures in European cities, when he wrote ballads in the manner of Poe, when he echoed James Thomson's *The City of Dreadful Night* and wrote a long Wordsworthian poem ("Story of an Affinity") in a Canadian setting, he was not imitating foreign models in a mood of slavish colonialism; he was being a Canadian poet in what seemed to him the best way — the way of staking his claim to equal standing in the English tradition by doing as well as they what the metropolitan poets did. This was the literary equivalent of certain forms of nineteenth century nationalism which combined an intense local loyalty with an equally intense imperial devotion; in Mair's case the political side of such imperial thinking was dominant, while with Lampman it was otherwise.

The result could have been disastrous if Lampman had not in fact been the fine

and perceptive nature poet he was. His romantic verse tales of lands he never saw and times he never lived in are unconvincing because unfelt with any intensity, and it is in the sonnets and short lyrics where he talks of what is close, the landscapes he loves, the emotions that wrack him, that he is always best. Then also he is nearest to being a Canadian Keats, not in an imitative or derivative way (though the derivations are sometimes there), but in the sense of a poet fulfilling in a way appropriate to his own time and place the role Keats played in the England of the Romantics, and that was indeed a role which implied Smith's "universal and truly classical way of looking at things."

SCARCELY AN END

F. M. Frazer

L. M. MONTGOMERY, *The Road to Yesterday.* McGraw-Hill Ryerson, $7.95.

PARTISAN Prince Edward Islanders, whose "How do you like our beautiful island?" is as automatic as other people's "How do you do", are understandably fond of all L. M. Montgomery's works and fanatical about *Anne of Green Gables.* Montgomery's picture of the island as a semi-magical, sea-girt garden is naturally appealing to patriots.

But they are far from alone in their enthusiasm. The most gifted English major graduating from the University of P.E.I. in 1973, a young woman now working toward a Ph.D. at the University of London, came to the Island university from Virginia because of *Anne.* And hers is only one testimony among thousands, though a particularly striking one, to the far-reaching and enduring power of Montgomery's first novel. The musical version by Donald Harron and Norman Campbell continues to draw overflowing audiences to every performance at the Charlottetown Summer Festival, where it has played for ten consecutive seasons. It was similarly successful at Expo 70 in Japan, and in England, where it won the London critics' award as the best musical of the 1968-69 crop. Admittedly, the stage show is now well launched as an independent entity, but fairly clearly the novel is the seminal draw.

Faced with such widespread and lasting love for one of her novels, one might expect a new book by Montgomery to be hailed as a literary event, the sort of thunderbolt, albeit of much smaller voltage, that we would recognize in the discovery of the concluding numbers of *Edwin Drood.* But *The Road to Yesterday,* a collection of fourteen stories unearthed by her son and now published for the first time, is unlikely to make much public impact. In other words, it is a consistent sequel to the other twenty books she wrote after *Anne,* and readers may well feel that she should have paid more attention to her Captain Jim of *Anne's House of Dreams* (1918) when he said, "A writing woman never knows when to stop; that's the trouble. The p'int of good writing is to know when to stop."

Austere readers, that is. For the rest of us, from the soft-hearted and sweet-

toothed to the downright soppy, the book undoubtedly has touches of the old magic that flashed most frequently in *Anne* but also flickered intermittently in most of Montgomery's subsequent works. It is a magic composed of some honourable and some ignoble appeals. On the positive side are a few deft characterizations of lively, likeable characters like the early Anne of the "brisk mental processes", gorgeous imaginings, and penchant for "lifelong sorrows"; and some powerfully irritating portrayals of such unlovables as Anne's early antagonist, the appalling Josie Pye.

None of the protagonists in the current book rivals young Anne in either attractiveness or credibility, but there are several winning people, and the gallery of the nonheroic is not unimpressive.Perhaps the most memorable of the nonheroines is Myrtle Shelley, the grim old spinster of the story "The Reconciliation". Decades ago, Miss Shelley lost her only beau, a glib, shallow fellow, to her best friend, the equally shallow but goodnatured Lisle. The jilting was abrupt and definite, and Miss Shelley's reaction was similarly emphatic: she slapped her rival's smiling face. Now, inspired by a revered minister's sermon on forgiveness, she sets out to make a great gesture of magnanimity. But charming, lightheaded Lisle, still charming in late middle age, long since married and widowed by someone else entirely, has quite forgotten the incident, and is merrily forgiving when reminded.

> To be forgiven when you came to forgive!
> Myrtle Shelley stood up. Her face had turned a dull crimson. Her faded blue eyes flashed fire. Deliberately she slapped Lisle Rogers across her smiling face — a hard, no-nonsense-about-it, tingling slap.
> "You didn't remember that first slap," she said. "Perhaps you will remember this one."

In fact, for all her saccharine maunderings about enchanted blue castles, white ways of delight, and latterday dryads by P.E.I. ponds, there is a streak of tough, humorous realism in L. M. Montgomery, and a broader conception of the capabilities and proclivities of human minds and spirits than she is normally given credit for. Early in *Anne of Green Gables*, Anne is compelled to apologize to Mrs. Lynde for repaying heedless adult cruelty with outraged reproach and rudeness. At first merely forced and persuaded, she soon warms to her task and indulges in such an orgy of self-abasement that even commonsensical Marilla is uneasy, though Anne herself is quite content. Occasionally Montgomery illuminates the uncomforting truth that it is possible to smile and smile and be a villain — or a fool, or something else not quite admirable — without ever realizing it oneself. So, in *The Road to Yesterday*, predatory relatives woo the eight-year-old heir to a fortune ("The Cheated Child") with scarcely a glimmer of recognition that they don't really like him. And the ostensibly mourning relatives of "A Commonplace Woman", putting in a long vigil as their Aunt Ursula dies, are comfortably conscious of their rectitude even as they fume with impatience.

Again on the positive side, Montgomery had a gift, though she sometimes betrayed it, for terse, telling phrases and effectively specific, tart dialogue. The cheated child's governess has a voice "as cold as rain". The raddled madwoman of "A Dream Come True" glares at her erstwhile admirer "in a way that made his skin crinkle". In "A Commonplace Woman" the heroine's perfunctory mourners try for appropriate sentiments:

"Aunt Ursula was the best hand at a sponge cake I ever knew," said Uncle Alec.
"What an epitaph!" said Emmy.

Then there are the less legitimate appeals, like the constant wish-fulfilments. If justice is not absolute in L. M. Montgomery's fiction, it comes incredibly close to that ideal state. Virtuous characters and sympathetic readers must suffer a little in the interest of plot — and so that the splendid compensations with compound interest will be particularly satisfying. But like the lady who simply couldn't manage to work in her doctor's diet allowances between her regular meals, Montgomery is considerably more interested in feasting than in fasting. And like enormous chocolate creams, her happy endings are individually delightful but cumulatively rather sickening.

On the face of it, a succession of just and beautiful endings should be hard to sustain, and as I've said, Montgomery is in many ways a realist. Sometimes in this book she simply shifts key into quasi-fantasy or coyly invokes Divine Providence. Misty little Esmé of "Fancy's Fool", a most insipid heroine, throws over a wealthy worldling and is rewarded with the reincarnation of a ghostly lover she once "met" in childhood when she accompanied her crazed (or enchanted) aunt into a haunted garden. Lincoln Burns, the amiable, hag-ridden bachelor of "A Fool's Errand", succumbs obliquely to his sister's nagging insistence that he take a wife. He makes a pilgrimage to the distant beach where once long ago he proposed to a friendly little girl and bade her wait for him. She did wait. "He was not surprised to see a woman standing at the end of the sandy road, looking out over the sea. Somehow, it all fitted in, as if it had been planned ages ago."

Most often Montgomery pays her dues to credibility by sketching in the long sentences of sorrow or deprivation her protagonists have already served when she takes up their stories. Her philosophy seems to be that into every life a little sunshine must fall — only she chooses to bestow veritable sunbursts of blessings, monetary as well as spiritual.

Perhaps this need to mix realism with sugared romanticism, as much as her preoccupation with the past, accounts for the large number of late lovers' reunions in Montgomery's fiction. Half this collection of stories deals with present resolutions of old love affairs, one-sided or mutual.

Another kind of questionable nostalgia invests all fourteen stories, a kind identified by Montgomery's manuscript title for the book: "The Blythes are Quoted". The Blythes — Anne, Gilbert, their children, and their factotum Susan Baker — make fleeting appearances in the stories, or are at least quoted or considered. Presumably Montgomery hoped to invoke the old allure effortlessly exerted by young Anne but rarely approached by the subdued, gracious, queenly, birch-tree-kissing, conventionally romantic heroine she supposedly became. If so, the hope was worse than vain. For all the good-humoured tolerance of her infrequent remarks, Mrs. Blythe comes across as a painfully perfect goody-good. The moral conditions of characters are immediately signalled by their reactions to her. Admirers are obviously fine folk, and doubters are in spiritual peril. Decriers, envious and semi-respectful though they tend to be, are plainly mad or bad. A kind of goddess, with Susan Baker as her priestess, Anne dwells apart, discussed but seldom seen by mere mortals. The

effect is sadly stilted. Like Mazo de la Roche in the later Jalna books, Montgomery seems afraid to move a very popular character lest she jar the public's enchantment.

All in all, *The Road to Yesterday* has its charms, some dated and some not, some specious and some valid. But it is unlikely to appeal to a wide audience. The stories are not aimed at children, and are unlikely to attract teen-aged readers, now accustomed to rougher realism. They are certainly too novelettish to suit modern adult tastes. The chorus of the Harron-Campbell musical will probably carol "Anne of Green Gables, never change" to appreciative ears for years to come, while Montgomery's later books, including this posthumous one, leave scarcely an echo. For all Montgomery's real story-telling powers, the song underlines what seems to me a valid literary judgment. It ends, "Anne of Green Gables, in our hearts you are forever young."

ONE PLUS THREE

Len Gasparini

PATRICK LANE, *Beware the Months of Fire.* Anansi Press, 100 pp. $3.25.
ANDREW SUKNASKI, *Leaving.* Repository Press, 78 pp. $2.25.
GARY GEDDES, *Snakeroot.* Talonbooks.
BRENDA FLEET, *Sullen Earth.* Fiddlehead Books, 32 pp.

PATRICK LANE forewarns the unwary reader with an epigraph from Céline's *Journey To The End Of Night.* The epigraph is a solemn reminder, and Lane's poems tell us about things we would like to forget. They are the acerbic documents of an imagination turned inside out. Lane records his impressions of reality with guts. There is no jive circumlocution in his style — an unschooled, street-cool one that serves the purpose of his perception. Neither does he run at the mouth for the sake of vocabulary: "You learn when you wake up/not to open your mouth for fear/of what you might fill it with."

Beware the Months of Fire is Lane's ninth collection, and it contains many poems from earlier, now out-of-print editions. The new poems complement the range of Lane's voice. They also touch upon familiar and poignant subjects: from the almost scatological view of "What Does Not Change" to the brutality of "Gerald"; from big city streets to country jails to the haunting isolation of the B.C. interior, and from the malaise called South America to Canada's own spectral Indian Reservations. Lane has covered them all. His poems are mirrors with the spidery cracks of truth in them. He doesn't flinch from the ugliness and cruelty of life, but observes it with ironic compassion. Like Layton and Jeffers, he knows the grimace behind the grin.

It isn't dying so
much as it is
falling into the ground
pushing up at you

* * *

and me sitting
on the edge of the hill
back to the river
feeling the ground
pushing up at me

There are so many heavy poems worth quoting in their entirety that I feel somewhat constrained in being unable to comment on all of them. However, a few in particular should suffice. One that stands out starkly in its pathos and tormented analysis of a marital break-up is "The Absinthe Drinker". The opening stanza numbed me.

For years I tried to leave them,
leave them all.
Now they've left me.
Three childish smiles are scars
inside my mind.
She took all three.

In another poem, "Because I Never Learned", the last two lines fuse irony and image into an ontological experience. And this is what a good poem should do: involve our feelings via image — not idea.

Lane's vision encompasses the surfeit of experience pushed to its extremity. Whether he writes about wild dogs or lovemaking, "Toronto the Ugly" or the "shredded" walls in a tenement house, he is right there, gripping the essential, inducing us to look. He feeds us raw chunks of life.

Because of his seeming obsession with the seamier aspects of life, the lyrical and reflective moments in his poetry (And they do happen!) hit us unexpectedly. "The Bird", "Saskatchewan", "October", "Cariboo Winter", and "Similkameen Deer" are evocative of nature and the tender ceremonies of love. In these pieces Lane transforms the "I" and gives it an objective dignity. Metaphor and meaning create a kind of magnetic field, and the poet places the "I" within that space. That Lane's dedication to his craft is no desultory matter — let the reader beware as he listens to a final poem addressed to him:

know
the poet is made of paper
can you hear him inside your eye
the scream of the tree
as you read him

* * *

now
can you feel the dead tree
as you turn his pages away

Anansi Press should be lauded for publishing such a vital collection. It is easily the best book of poems to come out of Canada this year.

Andrew Suknaski's *Leaving* reads like a travelogue in verse. His volume is divided into three parts with poems ranging from prairie impressions and homespun episodes to lyrical globe-trotting.

Unlike Patrick Lane's, the poetry of Suknaski does not deal in raw sensation and lacerated nerves. The consciousness of the predator is undefined. Instead we move into a realm of mountain climbing and pastoral visions. The poems are, for the most part, quite prosy. I don't mean to imply that they are dull, but the form they emerge from consists of clipped lines and awkward stanza patterns. Since Suknaski has experimented extensively with the concrete type of poetry, you would think that his eye for arrangement would be more fastidious. But then, form isn't everything — and as Creeley said, it's only a vehicle for the content. And this brings us closer to what Suknaski's poems are all about.

"Deathlocks" presents an effective analogy between rutting elk and two farmers fighting over a girl. "Xmas in California" and "Motorcycle Gang" are

both sordidly realistic. In the first poem we see an alcoholic Santa Claus "lying face down near a chimney — ". This tragic image is intensified by a little symbolic allusion: "his reindeer waited forty days/before the people grew kind enough/to cradle him away." The other poem combines religious symbolism with synecdoche to connote the noble savagery of Hell's Angels type motorcyclists "moving across vast freeways/of california/ dicing her neon oases in the sun." The poem ends with a victim.

they found their mary magdalene
in a city's concrete garden

& because she flunked
her prostitution assignment
they pinned her with three spikes
to an oak
like a single crimson rose

In "Hitch Hiking", Susnaski's true poetic diction is apparent. The words flow imagistically within the limits of conventional stanzaic disciplines. The poet is standing on the highway thumbing a ride. He is not having much success: "each hour added/another spoon of hate/to my marrow — ". His frustration becomes a violent entity in itself:

i know
that if the world
had been a single brick
about that time
one karate blow
propelled by the helium
of my hate
would have cracked it
in half

A truck finally stops to save the world, and the poet rhapsodizes: "i could have curled the dust/on the man's boots/into a nightingale — ".

The poems in the book's last section recount the journeys that Suknaski made abroad in 1971. They cover most of the seven continents, and each poem is appended with the name of the city it was written in. The poems are careless in construction, and they contain too much metaphysical digression.

Leaving is interspersed with some fine sepia photographs of abandoned houses and windswept plains, but the total impact of Suknaski's collection doesn't quite measure up to his canon of craftsmanship. His poems need a bit of revising.

Snakeroot, the title of Gary Geddes' third book of poems, is a plant whose roots have been regarded as a remedy for snakebites. One is immediately struck by the attractive design of this volume; however, the poems seem too short to be printed on such wide white pages.

Geddes is a late entry into the game of poesy-writing. Most of us remember him for *20th Century Poetry & Poetics*, an excellent book that he edited several years ago. I think that Geddes is more gifted in scholarly research, and because his lucubration in that area seems compatible with his logician's sensibility, the poems in *Snakeroot* suffer from a curious inconsistency. The poem, "The Addict", exemplifies the disparity in autumnal imagery and the most sentimental kind of introspection — in this case, the memory of lost youth. The theme is Wordsworthian, but the dynamism needed to carry it through is sporadic and insufficient. The mood just isn't there. In "Where Both Rails Meet", Geddes shifts his focus and a balanced perspective results. We see a prairie railway "cutting a relentless swath/through history, a succession/of small towns in its wake." The concluding stanza is a poetic trick of association; the mood lingers this time.

Rolled sections of snow fence
are stacked at regular intervals,

wait the sure coup of winter.
The land parades, makes
its naked protest.

The only weakness is the phrase "sure coup." I winced at that one. It skirts dangerously close to pathetic fallacy.

"Blood and Feathers" is another poem that works quite well in the evocation of a single, dominant mood through the use of a sensation-creating trope. The poet "refuse(s) to be seasonal, stirred/to frenzy by a planet's turning." He would rather "Let dead rocks and dying grasses/ speak for themselves, or be dumb." In the natural order of things the poet questions his own role. The premise is a purely academic one, and Geddes leaves it at that.

The title poem and "Goshawk" are both impressionistic in technique, and this impressionism reveals itself through a blending of vivid imagery.

Snakeroot, even with its chiaroscuro-etched photographs, fails as a supposedly unifying collection. If Geddes can subdue his subjectivistic approach to a poem, I'm sure his follow-through would be a lot stronger. He has the verbs; all he needs is a pronoun.

Between my fingers, spaces;
a wheel of broken spokes,
a broken wheel. The house
gapes. Grandmother, lost
to me, you singer
of sullen earth.

These lines set the mood for Brenda Fleet's *Sullen Earth* — a pamphlet-length poem that derives its basic force from a combination of symbolic contrast and regret. The landscape of this poem is bleak, almost Depression-like in its imagery: "You ask me to feel at home,/ here where there is no home/and no man's stake is driven/firmly into receiving earth."

I think that Fleet has succeeded in relating the bitterness and fatalism of a woman who feels victimized by her mate's spurious promises of security. The irony is understated throughout the poem, and Fleet's purpose in playing down this device is significantly dramatic. The terra firma is contrasted with unrequited love and the rigours of a mean existence:

I do not redeem the soil.
I sell my birthright.

The women slowly die, and so the soil
We laugh, we show our breasts
We die in parked cars.

Sullen Earth is a monologue of low-keyed anger and despair. It has its monotonous moments, but Brenda Fleet's vision is a unique one. She has traversed the contours of "a small lifetime . . . letting loose all manner of nightmare" like "another Pandora seeking rebirth" through love, in an environment of love.

THE WALKING GHOSTS OF EMPIRE

H. J. Rosengarten

ROCH CARRIER, *they won't demolish me!* Translated by Sheila Fischman. Anansi. $3.25.
HAROLD SONNY LADOO, *Yesterdays.* Anansi. $3.25.

THOUGH THE SUN has set on the British Empire, WASPish imperialism is alive and well and living almost everywhere. As always it seems benevolent and well-intentioned, while subtly and secretly it corrupts or destroys. Its appeal is strong — who can resist its technological benefits, its affluence and comforts? — so that any attempt to oppose it is ultimately vain and futile. Yet our consciousness of that futility only increases our sympathy for the resistance of a man like Dorval, whose battle with city hall in *they won't demolish me!* takes on epic proportions. Roch Carrier's hero sets himself against progress, in an episodic and sometimes allegorical tale about the demolition of his rooming house near Montreal, to make way for high-rise office buildings. The theme is only too familiar: the destruction of a community with human values and traditions, by big-business interests. The evil forces are clearly identified and embodied in the machines, the cranes and bulldozers destroying people's lives for the sake of the faceless capitalists lurking in the city; and the city itself is seen as a threatening monster creeping up on the innocent. Inspired by memories of the wartime French resistance with which he had fought, Dorval sets up his own resistance with the help of his boarders, and even takes the attack to the enemy in a glorious nocturnal expedition to secure the ears of passing Anglais. Yet the attempt to revive his past, to halt the inroads of time and change, is doomed to failure. The sources of that failure lie in the imperfections of our moral as well as our physical nature. In an understandable relaxation of principle, Dorval turns his house into a brothel for striking construction workers, and so becomes identified with the capitalist exploiters he has defied for so long.

they won't demolish me! moves easily from farce to satire to near-tragedy; its pace never slackens, for Carrier prunes his narrative of unnecessary elaborations of character or setting. The tone is primarily comic, but the novel's political implications are not: Carrier's targets are the Anglais of North America, whose financial power is undermining and destroying French Canada. Even Dorval is sucked in by the prospect of making an easy dollar out of the workers. Yet by giving his hero weaknesses and inconsistencies, Carrier makes him all the more sympathetic and believable, and avoids the oversimplifications that might have arisen by making Dorval some kind of martyred saint. Despite his vigour and energy and seemingly inexhaustible passion for love, Dorval is only human after all, ageing, tiring; and his failure, given tragic expression through the suicide of another character at the end, is a defeat for the human spirit everywhere.

Business, the law, and even the church,

are allied in the name of progress against Dorval's assertion of individual values; and in his second novel, *Yesterdays*, the late Harold Sonny Ladoo perceives a similar pattern emerging in the life of the West Indies. His hero Choonilal is a simple, hard-working, middle-aged native of Carib Island, an Indian who is in awe of the white world, while holding fast to his ancient faith and his Hindu priest. His son Poonwa, however, has had the benefit of a Christian education; a Canadian woman missionary beat the pagan out of him as a child, and now Poonwa wants to return the favour. His plan is to go to Canada and convert the Christians:

> I am going to make them feel that their culture is inferior; that the colour of their skin can justify their servitude. Within a few decades I will teach them to mimic Indian ways. Then I will let them go to exist without history. I will make East Indians buy up all their lands and claim all their beaches. Then I will drain all their national wealth and bring it to Tola. In this way I can make East Indians a superior people.

Poonwa has learned the lesson of colonial history well; and though the author keeps a distance between himself and his character, who is a selfish and heartless son, Poonwa's bitterness is very evidently shared by his creator. *Yesterdays* is about the destruction of a culture by white imperialism; and for once Canadians are seen as oppressors, not victims. The sadism, bigotry and exploitation with which we like to charge others are here laid at our door, for in this novel Canada is representative of the white Anglo-Saxon world as a whole, whose language, laws and religion have swamped a less materialistic and less aggressive culture. Poonwa's consciousness of white oppression does not lessen his desire to share some of its fruits; he wants to enjoy Canadian affluence, even if his father must mortgage house and land to send him to Canada. Choonilal however clings to the old ways, even to the lengths of rejecting modern toilets as being offensive to the Aryan gods. Much of the book's comedy derives from the importance attached to defecation, and Choonilal's constant concern with the state of his bowels. This might in part be intended to flout convention, to mock the more sophisticated Westernized portrayals of West Indian life by such writers as Naipaul. At the same time, the emphasis on sex and defecation is a reminder of the common humanity which links all men, but which white society tries to deny. Even here, Ladoo suggests, white Christianity has been a disruptive influence; Poonwa's experience at the Mission school has taught him to despise his background and to enjoy the superior comfort of an indoor toilet free of smells and flies.

Father and son are further separated by the most potent form of imperial power — language. Poonwa speaks English with an Oxford accent; and along with the language, he adopts its implicit attitudes of superiority to native colonials. Choonilal himself speaks in the crude but vivid patois of the Caribbean, a mangled form of English which makes up in vigour what it lacks in correctness, as in this retort to his son's rudeness:

> Wen you de small you used to call me "fadder," now you does call me "father." It look like English flow from you ass. But all de book you read Poonwa, and all dat education you have in you ass is notten. In dis same island man wid education have to eat dey shit! You is one man who have to catch you ass in dis world . . .

Choonilal's attempt to resist Poonwa's scheme finally fails; he is defeated by a combination of external pressure and the

workings of his own faith. The corrupt Hindu priest who persuades Choonilal to mortgage his property embodies the worst consequences of Western colonialism, its spiritual impoverishment, its decadent and empty materialism. Like Carrier's hero Dorval, Choonilal cannot carry on the battle alone; the old must be sacrificed for the new, and progress, in the shape of automobiles, iced drinks and cameras, must be served. In both these novels, comic plot and characterization serve larger and more serious purposes; both Carrier and Ladoo want to point to the moral decline of societies ruled by Western capitalism. In *they won't demolish me!* this comes through as an almost resigned awareness of the inevitable; but beneath the comic surface of *Yesterdays* the reader may sense a deep and unappeasable anger.

THE VOGUE OF THE BIG BOOK

Anthony Appenzell

ANTHONY ADAMSON and JOHN WILLARD, *The Gaiety of Gables*, McClelland & Stewart. $17.95.
MORLEY CALLAGHAN and JOHN DE VISSER, *Winter*. McClelland & Stewart. $18.95.
J. RUSSELL HARPER, *A People's Art*. University of Toronto Press. $22.50.
LORNE E. RENDER, *The Mountains and the Sky*. Glenbow-Alberta Institute and McClelland & Stewart. $27.50.

DESPITE THE talk of financial crisis in the book trade, of shortages in paper, the vogue of the Big Book, which is rarely the great book, goes on with only seasonal variation; the Christmas season continues to carry, in literal terms, the heaviest weight of each publishing year. The four books I am reviewing — when I came to test them on my scales — weighed in all some 13 pounds. Their total length — pictures and letterpress together and taking into account that two were inexplicably unpaginated — came to about 700 pages, the equivalent of two average novels. Their cost to anyone who may be inclined to buy the batch in a bookshop is $86.90 for the four, or an average of $21.72 per volume. Even taking account of inflation, that is more than most people who take their reading seriously enough to buy many books can afford to pay for a single title.

I am far from advocating stinting in book design. I enjoy a book that looks and feels good, with elegant type faces and jet black ink on well-textured paper; that is well bound and well-proportioned, with colour plates vivid enough and large enough to do justice to their subjects. I am willing to urge readers to pay within reason for excellence in production, and where in past years a big and heavy and expensive book has shown a superb balance of space and content (as in Arthur and Witney's *The Barn* and Michael Bell's *Painters in a New Land*), I have not hesitated to recommend it regardless of price. But that superb balance is necessary, and my feeling for the dwindling forest as well as my dislike of *uselessly*

conspicuous spending make me pause before the massive offerings which I am now reviewing.

Of course, all the books whose titles appear at the head of this review can — in one sense or another — be classed as "art books", and in this genre there is something of a tradition of lavishness, bound up with a questionable assumption, to which I shall return, that such books are bought only by libraries and connoisseurs and need not therefore be inexpensive. But the vogue of the big and over-lavish book has spread into regions of publication where it seems entirely inappropriate. An example I encountered recently is a book called *Mind in the Waters* (McClelland & Stewart), a kind of symposium or concert of writings and pictures edited by Joan McIntyre "to Celebrate the Consciousness of Whales and Dolphins". If the book were only a celebration, a threnody on a doomed race of beings — then there might be some justification for the fact that this is a heavy, coffee-table-sized book that costs $14.95. But it is far more than a celebration; it is also a plea — with whose aims I am entirely in agreement — for action to save these fascinating peoples of the ocean before man, their moral inferior, destroys them. The material of *Mind in the Waters* could have been put into a paperback original and — given the current interest in the subject — it would have sold widely and far beyond the bookstores at somewhere around $2.95; in its present form it will sell slightly and slowly, and so the purpose of its compilers — to save the whales and the dolphins — will be little furthered.

Admittedly, the same kind of tactical consideration does not arise with the books on my list. None of them — not even Morley Callaghan (superbly illustrated by John Visser) on *Winter* — seems likely in any form to be a best seller. Even so, their sales might have been increased if their weight had been reduced by a third, and this would have been possible — with benefit to our forests and to readers' buying power — through a more critical approach to the handling of space. By now we have surely recovered from the delight at great white areas of paper which we experienced when the wartime austerities that lingered into the Fifties finally disappeared and Canadian publishers developed a taste for the large and the daring. A page, we have re-learnt, is meant for print, and a book can be too thinly populated as well as too crowded. Just as type that is too large can attenuate its message, so an excess of margins and half-empty pages can diminish the interest of what is displayed (as museum directors are beginning to realize now that they are reverting from selective to exhaustive display techniques).

The Gaiety of Gables, by Adamson and Willard, is a good example of the unjustifiably big book. The whole concept is a fragile one, to be handled modestly. The hand-wrought bargeboards of Ontario houses — the gay gables of the title — are charming indeed, but charm is the limit of their appeal. Thus Anthony Adamson can write only a slight introductory essay, because there is nothing to support a more pretentious presentation, and the illustrations, which move within a somewhat restricted range of patterns, are diminished rather than enhanced by being isolated within large white margins that tend to leach out what tonal contrast survives the printing process in black-and-white illustrations, which form the

greater part of *The Gaiety of Gables.* To devote a large format to a book dedicated to this minor facet of Canadian popular art, and to charge $17.95 for it, is excessive. A smaller book at half the price would have been in proportion to the subject and would have sold more widely.

A rather different doubt attends one's approach to *Winter,* which is really two parallel things: an album of photographs taken by John de Visser up and down Canada during the seasons of snow and ice, and a long essay by Morley Callaghan describing the Canadian winter as he has experienced it. Here again the illustrations have been unimaginatively arranged, one to a page, with in every case a central presentation, which in the horizontally-oriented prints has meant vast and deadening upper and lower margins. Yet more important in *Winter* is the failure of the two parts of the book to merge, and this is because the participants each insist on being the complete artist. Callaghan, as a good essayist, writes out of his own memories and impressions, ignoring the photographs that are to accompany his prose, and as his memories are extraordinarily visual they create their own image in the mind's eye and do not require physical illustration. On the other hand, de Visser is a visual artist of poetic cast, whose photographs are heavy with suggestion, loaded enough with messages and meanings for them to appear as an album in their own right, while Callaghan's essay might have found a far better place as — say — one of a group of prose equivalents of *The Seasons.* One has the feeling that this is a made book, thought up in a publishing office, rather than a book whose two parts came together out of a symbiotic empathy between writer and photographer.

The remaining two books on my list show a better marriage of form with content, and also a greater consistency in content. They both serve useful functions, though their functionalism is rather pedestrian and their design lacks the inspiration that marked both *The Barn* and *Painters in a New Land,* with their visually and verbally felicitous balances of illustration and commentary.

In *A People's Art,* J. Russell Harper complements his classic *Painting in Canada* with a survey of "Primitive, Naive, Provincial and Folk Painting in Canada". There is a somewhat messianic tone to his approach, for he sees a quasi-moral quality in these various forms of popular art, looking back as they do to a time when art mirrored an organic social collectivity, and forward to the day when all men will have the power to be artists. It is a vision that has long haunted those who move of the periphery of the world of artistic creation. The great arts-and-crafts prophets, William Morris and Walter Crane, had it; so did Herbert Read, a failed painter who became an art critic, and Tolstoy, at the cost of denying the high art of his own greatest novels, and even Trotsky, in his own special way.

But it is a vision that founders always on the reefs of evidence. For while in tribal societies, and in strongly knit collectivities like most mediaeval societies, a single artistic tradition might carry all the spiritual impulses of the community, in post-Renaissance societies the division has always been deep between the living intentionality of high art and the conservative acceptance of popular art. Occasionally an individual bridges the gap, as Henri Rousseau le Douanier did, or Scottie Wilson, whose presence among Mr. Harper's exhibits reminds us that his

eccentric talents were first recognized on Yonge Street, Toronto. But most really popular art since about 1600 has been static in its world view, eccentric rather than innovative in its methods, and limited in its range of perceptions; it is significant that the best of the paintings Mr. Harper reproduces — the landscapes of Thomas Davies and Pierre Le Ber's splendid death portrait of Marguerite Bourgeoys — had appeared among the examples of high art in his *Painting in Canada*, and were done by educated men who had at least some training in the art they practiced. *A People's Art* is useful as a record of some of our untrained painters, but it would have gained greatly if Mr. Harper had extended his province to include sculpture, for carving has been at least as interesting a manifestation as painting of the Canadian popular sensibility.

A People's Art is as poorly presented as the other books I have discussed — and is even more wastefully big. Chunks of exposition are followed by a series of pages arranged as in an album, with paintings shown centrally, each above its appropriate legend. *The Mountains and the Sky* at least departs from this monotonous patterning; it mingles illustration with text, varies the size of prints, and plays quite effectively with the juxtaposition of prints and white spaces. Written and arranged by Lorne E. Render, *The Mountains and the Sky* is really a kind of catalogue raisonné of the best works in the collections of the Glenbow-Alberta Institute of Calgary, one of whose many functions has been the assembling of a representative collection of paintings relating to Western Canada, from the prairies through the mountains to the Pacific Coast.

The Mountains and the Sky is not presented as a comprehensive overview of western landscape art. Indeed, anyone knowledgeable about the region's painters will quickly detect the major omissions; there are none of the western paintings of, for example, A. J. Jackson or Loren Harris; there is nothing by Jack Shadbolt or Alistair Bell, by Edward J. Hughes or Tony Onley, or by Bruno or Molly Bobak in their western period; nothing, to dip farther into the past, by William Hind. But in one way the volume's frank limitation constitutes also its main virtue, since the Glenbow Institute has been assiduous in collecting landscape painters whose achievements were neglected as artistic fashions veered in recent decades, and a number of these are lavishly represented in *The Mountains and the Sky.* Those who still regard one of the roles of painting as the retention of the moment of inspired visual apprehension will welcome an introduction — or a reintroduction — to the scope and intensity of such uncelebrated but excellent landscapists as Walter J. Phillips, W. L. Stevenson, Carl Rungius, A. C. Leighton and the early Maxwell Bates. The critical and historical commentary linking the prints is sound and sufficient.

books in review

A WORLD SEQUESTERED

RUDY WIEBE, *Where Is The Voice Coming From?* McClelland & Stewart Ltd., $4.95.

UNTIL I read *The Temptations of Big Bear*, I always looked forward to reading the work of Rudy Wiebe; not only did *Peace Shall Destroy Many* and his stories appeal to me, but also I liked his value judgments as reflected in his anthology of short stories from Western Canada. But *Big Bear* was not to my mind a success, so that when I came to *Where Is The Voice Coming From?* I did so with misgivings. My fears were groundless. This collection impressed me with the balance Wiebe shows as a writer of short fiction, and his ease in maintaining a consistent tone that neither frays nor bores the reader; its stories proved to me what I have always felt: that Wiebe is much better with the short story, as a form, than he is with the novel.

The stories which concern themselves with the Indians or the Eskimos create a sense of achieved intimacy with that part of Canada and its people that is alien to most Canadians.

> When the blue shadow that precedes dawn comes up over the long white land breaking trail for the dogs is no easier for the wind rises inevitably, nagging loose snow, and the bank of cloud more clearly rolls higher behind me.

This is a world sequestered from our world; a history remote from our history. Yet, Wiebe has gone into this microcosm of human experience and made it live by giving to the experiences he talks about the vividness of something half-seen. It is an isolation within isolation that he creates. Finely tuned to the sound of language, Wiebe participates with his creations as they attempt to outlive their existence. The mind of the reader meets no resistance in the texture of these tales even though it is an alien world. The habits of telling a tale are no different even though the milieu is different. There is no transparency here, and at the same time no attempt to cloud the reader's vision; instead, the language grips the reader, forcing him to assimilate the experience into his own, and in so doing remove the false preconceptions that we so often have about life among our native people.

Most stories written today, however good they may be, attempt to show us some vision of our own reality. Though Wiebe concentrates on the universal humanity of the people he sees, the Indian and Eskimo tales in this volume seem closer to the flow of dreams, where nothing is questioned or ever shall be. The authority of the narrator is justification enough for any turn of event, for anything that happens. His own decisiveness is echoed in the decisiveness of his characters: a character decides to give himself up to the authorities or to his enemy; and, in one of the stories the narrator simply tells us how he will survive:

> She lays the naked boy in the robe, then pulls off her own worn, frost-hardened clothes, spreads them out on the floor and gets into the robe. I blow out the stove and in the darkness I quickly undress and lay out my clothes to freeze. Then I crawl into the robe also. It is just large enough. I can feel the ice of her emaciated body against mine but I know that together we will soon be warm, and as she hunches closer the

> wind's whine over the house is already dying in my ear.

Plots in this collection of short stories never seem contrived; though the stories appear that they could only happen to the people involved and in a particular setting, they ring true. There is, of course, a sense of cultural interplay, but this is softened by the priorities the various narrators put on themselves: how does a child meet death for the first time? how does a man cope with a war between his own people and those of the same race? how far does a man take the responsibility that he is "his brother's keeper"? The conflicts are universal, as they always must be in order to be understood, but they are shaded by a voice that makes them elemental rather than normal or average.

Wiebe tells his stories in various ways, and he plays, in a subtle way, with the language. Sometimes, as narrator, he is external and the distance he creates from what is going on merely brings the reader closer to the action, as in "Scrapbook", when a boy suddenly realizes, by looking at his "Healthy Foods Scrapbook" at school that the sister who helped him make the cover has died:

> He said, almost aloud, "She's dead," and he knew that 'dead' was like the sticks of rabbits he found in his snares.
>
> And suddenly he began to cry. Everyone stared, but he could not stop.

At other times, Wiebe creates a narrator who immediately brings the reader right in on the action; no external process takes place as the reader immediately begins to participate with what is happening, as in the first lines of "Along the Red Deer and the South Saskatchewan":

> This is long ago. Before whites dared to come into our country, when they built the Big House they call Edmonton now and then Little Big House at the edge of our country and barred the doors and put cannons on the corners and let our people through one small door one at a time when we came to trade.

The reader is no longer "white", but instead is part of the action of the people of "our country", of people who speak easily, in long sentences, whose grasp of composition is rudimentary, who speak, in a way, in another language, but are as easily understood.

Where Is The Voice Coming From? at first appears to be a classic example of what Margaret Atwood calls the "survival" theme in Canadian literature. It speaks of the harshness of winter, the violence of the North, the hardship of life on the prairies. But underneath that gloss is the greater will that makes this book: the will to grow, to discover, and to build that really is the essence of survival. The intensely simple stories where the fulness of life is realized through awareness of nature, of responses to the sad, joyful and the ironic that makes man recover his sense of self through those tiny, but meaningful distractions. The writing is active, alive, unassuming, and infinitely touched with a growing and well-grounded lyricism. I look forward to more stories from Rudy Wiebe. He has the capacity to handle the short story with vigour and taste, with discretion and grace. I feel that the form is best for him, and that he should strive to give us more stories like those in this volume, rather than longer fiction like his last novel.

DONALD STEPHENS

SAURIAN SAGA ON BLOOR STREET

DENNIS LEE, *Alligator Pie* and *Nicholas Knock*. Macmillan, $5.95 each.

WITH THE PUBLICATION of two books, *Alligator Pie*, nursery rhymes, and *Nicholas Knock*, poems for older children, Macmillan and Dennis Lee promise to fill that dead air space "Great Canadian Children's Classic" with poems. This kind of grandiloquent assertion, usually the inevitable nerve grinding corollary to conversations about the *next* Canadian novel, is guaranteed to elicit a whimper. Lee's poems, however, explode in giggles and bangs. Anyone who sets out to write a classic is crazy, but luckily, this verse is free of the pomposity of invention.

In his "Hockey-Sticks and High-Rise" postlude to *Alligator Pie*, Lee describes his frustration with the foreignness of European nursery literature. Mother Goose had somehow failed to make a stop on Bloor Street. Out of the urban environment of Toronto and his experiences with his own children, he has written a modern verse romance, an odyssey which moves from zoo to laundromat to day-care centre.

Previous generations of Canadian readers have somehow made the transition from Robert Louis Stevenson, Mother Goose and A. A. Milne to an astonishing per capita consumption of "grown-up" Canadian verse. But the rate of attrition, which is probably equally astonishing, may be due to the dearth of a native literature, particularly poetry, for childen.

Superficially, this concern may appear to be much ado about nothing, but children learn by looking in mirrors and hearing the sounds and rhythms of their own world in words. It is not nationalism, but a desire for self-knowledge that creates the need for good Canadian books for children.

Fortunately, the picture appears to be changing. Lee's books join a small but growing body of Canadian books we can place on the nursery shelf beside Grimm and Carroll and Milne. Gordon Lightfoot's *The Pony Man* is one and the beautifully illustrated books by Ann Blades and William Kurelek are others.

In the proper tradition of the balladeer, Dennis Lee allows his poems to change and grow in the telling. In his postlude, he encourages the parent to let the young listener exercise his prerogative to revise the living poems, which are meant to be read, shouted, acted. The poems are full of good old anglo-saxon rhyme and alliteration, the rhythm and bump of sounds which are a child's first toys.

> My little sister's sitter
> Got a cutter from the baker,
> And she baked a little fritter
> From a pat of bitter butter.

Much of Lee's Learish humour relies on the bizarre juxtaposition of words, the explosion of syllables into nonsense. Another source of comedy is the grotesque childhood world of fantasy and cruelty. One poem, "In Kamloops", has the storyteller eating a veritable butcher's counter of human snacks; fingers, toes and ears;

> And I'll eat your nose
> And I'll eat your toes
> In Medicine Hat and
> Moose Jaw.

This is all in the time-honoured tradition of the Brothers Grimm and Mother Goose who had little children ringing round a rosy, dropping off from the plague, and that unfortunate mediaeval politician,

Humpty Dumpty, falling and cracking his skull.

Lee's fairytale world of monsters and jokes and children tricking their parents by running away works because it is all told from the real comfort of a warm parental lap. Even in this reassurance, though, he cannot resist a good political joke for adult readers:

> William Lyon McKenzie King
> Sat in the middle and played with string
> And he loved his mother like anything —
> William Lyon McKenzie King.

Did he ever.

Unfortunately, the drawings of Frank Newfeld for *Alligator Pie* and *Nicholas Knock* are banal caricatures of the school of Seuss. Lee's poems deserve illustrations of the calibre of those created by Etienne Delessert for Lightfoot's *The Pony Man* and the Ionesco stories for children, or those of Arthur Rackham, Maurice Sendak and Beatrix Potter, or E. H. Shepherd's wonderful drawings for the Milne Books and *The Wind in the Willows.*

In spite of the accompaniment of not so perfect drawings and the irritating ubiquitous presence of a rather "Disney" dancing Ookpik, Lee has fulfilled his own expectations in the two books. *Alligator Pie* and *Nicholas Knock* manage to sing consistently off-key, without sugar and "pious versicle", to the delight of children and the jaded poetaster.

LINDA ROGERS

GREY DAYS

BARRY BROADFOOT, *Ten Lost Years 1929-1939. Memories of Canadians Who Survived The Depression.* Toronto, Doubleday Canada Ltd., 1973. $9.95.

BARRY BROADFOOT is a journalist, not an historian, and *Ten Lost Years* is not a history. Rather it is an anthology of reminiscences taken from hundreds of interviews with survivors of the depression years — people that he met, usually informally and casually, as he travelled across Canada for a total of some 15,000 miles, well-armed with a tape recorder and an abundance of note paper and pencils. In the "Preface" to his formidable volume (390 pages in all) he describes himself as "a child of the Depression, born in Winnipeg in 1926" but "by the time the 1970's rolled along I realized that probably seventy-five percent of Canada's 20,000,000-plus knew nothing, or very little, about those years — 1929-39." Why? Because:

> For some reason a conspiracy of silence seems to have tried to hide the Depression from Canadians too young to remember it, to sweep under the rug those ten lost years that were the most traumatic in our nation's history, the most debilitating, the most devastating, the most horrendous . . . Text books used in Canadian schools tend to dismiss those ten years with half a page, three paragraphs, even one sentence. And if a student is interested enough to seek further information, there is precious little to be found in the library system.

So off he went, this man with a mission, to talk with survivors — in "homes, in offices, in stores, in bars, in cafes. . . . I even met people on hot-line shows." But he did not talk with "the movers and shakers, the men who shaped events in those dreadful days," nor did he seek out the academics — economists, political scientists, historians. For this is a book about ordinary people — "the soldiers, so to speak, not the Generals."

In the end he had a chaotic mass of material, and this he has carefully edited. The people he interviewed are unnamed, the places of interview unstated. In all, he includes material from some 360 inter-

views, some of which are mere snippets of conversation — a paragraph or two in length; many of which take up a page or slightly more; and relatively few of length and full-bodied content. And all were finally arranged, somewhat loosely, under thirty-five chapter headings, each chapter being preceded by short Broadfoot comments. Some of the titles are revealing — others not: "On Relief", "Employers Could Pick and Choose", "You Go a Little Crazy", "Kids", "Hoboes — Coming from Nowhere, Going Nowhere", "Government Relief Camps — They Treated Us Like Dirt", "Law and Order". His own somewhat complacent farewell to his text is significant: "I hope you will take this whole book as the complete statement of those years, those years that we hope will never come again."

But shall we, or should we? Beyond question the work is a valiant attempt to recapture the mood and atmosphere of the "Dirty Thirties", and in many ways it succeeds. Here are witnesses to the gloom, the despair, the bitterness of those long dark days — and to the courage, the fortitude, and the hope and even good humour with which the more valiant faced apparently insurmountable obstacles. Certainly no other volume is available with this mass of first-hand evidence on how the great hordes of the unemployed and the poor managed to exist from day to day, on the long bread-lines and the hunger marches, on the hobo-jungles and the relief camps, on riding the rods and escaping the vigilance of the "bulls". Some of the accounts are told with a dramatic intensity that is gripping, but much of the work is repetitious in tone — flat and grey — perhaps inevitably so because of the greyness of the decade. Moreover, the lack of any identification can at times be annoying. Who are these nameless witnesses? How reliable are they? On the whole, I assume, they are good and honest people, but amongst them are the questionable ones — stumble-bums, alcoholics, thieves, bootleggers, and chronic malcontents — often ignorant, illiterate, and sadly warped. From them, at any time, would come a biased and distorted view of society.

A flaw, too, is the fact that the Depression is never placed in a clearly defined historical perspective. A youngish reader may well get the impression that long working hours, low wages, and primitive living conditions on farms and frontier homesteads were the immediate results of the Depression itself. But in 1929 we were still living in a *laissez-faire* economy and the concepts of the welfare state were yet to be given wide and serious consideration. Our society was delicately balanced and ill controlled, and when the Depression struck the world our already existing evils and inequities were dramatically heightened to tragic proportions. Many an oldster — myself included — can remember the sixty hour working week at fifteen or twenty cents an hour; intolerable conditions in the mines; sweat shops; teachers and parsons labouring for a few hundred dollars a year; and the marginal conditions of those who braved frontier life — all in the early years of this century. The society of pre-depression years was not today's affluent society. Life was simple, costs were low, and we survived. So by some of the sad tales included in this book as depression tales I am not deeply moved.

Finally, Mr. Broadfoot's belief in "a conspiracy of silence . . . to hide the Depression from Canadians too young to remember it" is erroneous and naive.

Witness, to name but two, A. R. M. Lower who devotes 28 pages of his *Colony to Nation* (1946) and Margaret Ormsby who devotes 37 pages of her *British Columbia: A History* (1958) to the events of the time and their background in day-to-day living. It is true, of course, that younger Canadians know little about the Depression, but Canadians of all ages do not usually have a keen awareness of the past from which they come. For most under fifty or sixty the First World War is as remote as the wars of Alexander the Great; and for the slightly younger the Second Great War is as vague as Caesar's wars against the Gauls. Armistice Day passes as a holiday, but few of the young attend services; and the anniversaries of the attack on Pearl Harbour or the landings on "D Day" pass by forgotten and unnoted. It is not a conspiracy that has swept the depression years under the rug; it is simply old Time who has been the villain and the destroyer. And — sadly I say it — I doubt if *Ten Lost Years* will bring success to the author's mission. Some of the young may read it, but not many will reread it; some may be moved by certain of the tragic utterances found in its pages, but none will find it a "complete statement" of the grey years of a sad decade.

S. E. READ

ANTI-EPIC AND NOSTALGIA

FRANK DAVEY, *The Clallam*. Talonbooks.
STEPHEN SCOBIE, *The Birken Tree*. Tree Frog Press.

ON JANUARY 8, 1904, the Canadian passengers of the American ship *Clallam* drowned two miles out from Victoria, victims of the criminal negligence of the ship's captain and part-owner, George Roberts. Roberts managed to keep the ship afloat until it was towed over the international boundary, thus evading prosecution by Canadian courts.

This is hardly the stuff of which epics are made, as Frank Davey's allusion to "goddamn Ned Pratt" reminds us. Still, Mr. Davey's account of these events in his book-length poem, *The Clallam*, derives ironic force from the background presence of Pratt's *Titanic*. Mr. Davey telescopes his choppy irregular lines and sparse paragraphs into a narrative whose compactness seems almost to repudiate Pratt's standard metre and expansive development of situation. Not that he has the scope of Pratt. The poem is done on a small scale, and he surely could have pushed his laconic style to a more effective length.

But it has impact, and he defends his own reticence, with some intentionally grotesque internal rhyme:

> This is not a documentary of the *Clallam*'s
> sinking. There are documents
> but no objective witnesses
> of the *Clallam*'s sinking. The survivors
> were not objective. I
> am not objective. Only
> the objects we survive in.
> All the stinking white corpses.

On the surface this seems merely an affirmation of engagement, but it is also a scepticism, an emphatic rejection of epic assurance as false and inappropriate not only to the narrative's depressing details and the view of the U.S. they imply, but also to its view of suffering. There are no courage or self-sacrifice; no bardic heroics here.

No, but rage breaks through the journalistic paragraphs centred on large blank pages (newspaper photo on the

cover). Mr. Davey's emotional punches flash out in skilful and ambiguous turns of phrase. The startling repetition and transformation of the word "objective" in the passage quoted is perhaps the best example of this.

Equally admirable are the "double-take" syntax and line-breaks. We survive only in what we leave behind. What do we leave behind? Stinking white corpses. An inadequate paraphrase, but the poem's verbal repetitions deserve emphasis. They consistently surpass the mere cleverness that often characterizes this kind of "pared down" minimal assertion. You can usually see what's going on, as well:

> You can
> almost see where the ship is not going
> into the dark purple of the snow
> beyond the flagstaff. The snowflakes
> know where they are going. The women
> gather at the lifeboats knowing.
> In all this darkness the waves
> shine, pour over the deck.
> The deck too is shining.

Here again rhyme parodies symmetry, order. Menacing nature, a Canadian cliché, is strong and fresh in such passages. The second sentence strikes a long-familiar chord with alarming resonance. However, the poem is sketchy; the *Clallam*'s world should have been more substantially fleshed out. Exactly how this could have been done it's not my business to say; but I would just like to have heard more about the storm, the passengers — what they said, looked like. It would have strengthened the blow.

In an earlier disaster poem, *The Scarred Hull*, Mr. Davey kept flashing back and forth between storms and wrecks and the psychic wreckage of children. Something similar could have been effective here, where the only character we really see is the incredible Captain Roberts, who during the course of the poem seems to become a symbol for American "manifest destiny" and capitalist greed. Not that the poem is melodramatic or naive; it evokes genuine outrage. What it shares with *The Scarred Hull* is commendably vivid imagery, and it has, in addition, subtle and intelligent word-play which surpasses that of the earlier poem. But it doesn't go on long enough to make a really lasting effect. Its single focus on the one disaster should be more successful than the jumping from incident to incident that occurs in *Hull*, but it doesn't seem to me to be fully realized.

I also get a little uneasy when Mr. Davey reminds us that all the *Clallam*'s survivors were American. I'm certainly not pro-American, but the narrative lacks the power to justify moralizing of any kind. Anyway, its concise clarity speaks well for Mr. Davey's versatility, especially when one recalls the expansive meditation of *Weeds* and the inventive mythologizing of many of the lyrics. This is obviously a multi-faceted talent.

Stephen Scobie locates his nostalgias, with modesty and intelligence, in Scotland and in various parts of Canada. After reading his epigraph from Gertrude Stein, on the search for roots, and then tracing his own homequest, through reflections on his friends, to his father's death, to a vision of his ancestors, I couldn't help recalling Souster's comment that "if all of us who need roots/ start digging at the same time" there won't be enough shovels.

Usually Scobie lacks the particularity to even break the ground:

> Some people I'm scared to be friends with,
> most of them men. They are too

vulnerable, easily broken; but still
have dangerous weapons for wounding
me. It is hard for men
to be friends with each other:
nothing prepares us for such honesty.

This seems to me to be true, but it lacks the particularity of poetry. When Pope, in his *Essay On Man*, talks about his clockmaker God, I suspect he is all wet, but I believe he means it, because his vision of cogs in the grand machine is sufficiently vivid to be convincing. Mr. Scobie's images are seldom recognizably his own and usually, as above, he does not illustrate his statements with any account of his experience. Neither vivid imagery nor accounts of personal experience are essential, but there is, as well, nothing to distinguish his language, rhythm and metre from that which any intelligent man would use in versifying his opinions. Or maybe there is. In the quoted passage, the "me"-"honesty" rhyme is unfortunate and the concluding pentameter line betrays the rest of it as standard metre badly written and fashionably disguised.

When he does particularize, his details are often weak, and his metaphors are too often clichés: the map of the body, the shroud of the snow. One could contend, correctly, that novel metaphors are unnecessary, but something has to be novel, even if only the directness of the language, and Mr. Scobie's flat assertions are not of the *odi et amo* variety.

Occasionally, though, there is an arresting conceit and once, at least, the plain speech derives poignancy from its context:

On the back seat of the car
beside my brother
is the small oak casket
of ashes.

Oh father,
I never thought to drive you home like this.

This demands respect, as does the seriousness of intent which informs the book as a whole. Perhaps the experience is as yet too immediate to be transmuted into art.

LLOYD ABBEY

ROUGH AND READY

S. ROBINSON and D. SMITH, *Practical Handbook of Canadian French*. Macmillan, $10.

ROBINSON and Smith are to be congratulated on having addressed themselves to the filling of a badly felt gap. In the present state of research on the French language in Canada, we simply cannot be kept waiting for an erudite synthesis: we need a little handbook to tell us what usages are generally regarded as Canadian, and how they compare with mainland French. The visitor to Montreal, etc. will find it helpful to know in advance what words he should expect to hear, and which ones might not be readily understood. After that, he can find out for himself what usage prevails in a specific milieu. Robinson and Smith have very aptly called their work a *Practical Handbook*, to indicate that this is its scope, and that it should not be used as a socio-linguistic analysis by region, class and soon.

However, in the absence of any very useful work on those lines, the *Practical Handbook* will also be used by students of literature. Existing works in the field have their various shortcomings. The pioneer *Glossaire du parler canadien-français* (1930) has a rural bias which excludes most of our present concerns; Bélisle (1957) makes a serious attempt to mark off Canadianisms with the scope of a general dictionary; Turenne (1962)

and Dulong (1968) are concerned with the *joual* problem as a whole, rather than a simple lexicography. *Le Dictionnaire canadien/Canadian Dictionary* remains our only general bilingual dictionary and is a conservative register of correct usage for the two languages in Canada. There are others, with similar strictures.

The special feature of the present work is that it groups word lists under such headings as Work, Weather, School, etc., and there lists them in three columns headed Canada, France and [blank]. The unheaded column gives equivalents in English. Some three pages of introduction explain the linguistic assumptions of the authors. These are, briefly, that there is a recognized North American English (but no mention of any characteristic Canadian usage here), that words used in France are "more literary or less colourful than the Quebec words" and that French teaching in English Canada usually aims at the colourless variety.

One may suspect the authors of sometimes making selections to uphold these views. Opposite the Canadian *guidoune*, for instance, they list none of the racy terms known to most second-year students. These, however, are fortunate enough to know the slang dictionary of Etienne and Simone Deak, and there is no reason why it should be reproduced here (it might have been mentioned). This is not a comparative study, and not even a two-way practical guide. The "Canada" column comes first and there is no way of proceeding from a word known in France to any Canadian equivalent. If the authors are right in supposing that is the way most of their possible readers need to go, it is a pity. But for readers of French-Canadian literature (who are probably more numerous than Robinson and Smith admit), it is no obstacle.

The first entry shows the word under the France column incorrectly spelt. This is all the more disconcerting, as the spelling employed reflects a common Canadian pronunciation of a word which our authors would have us believe is not used in Canada. They have warned us that "in many cases, the French words or expressions are also used in Quebec," but proceeded to make definite attributions which frequently, as in this case, seem arbitrary. What will Marc Doré think when he finds that the title of his novel *Le Raton-laveur* is not Canadian, or Yves Thériault when he finds his characters ought to say "bartender" instead of "barman"? What kind of surprise will there be among French restaurateurs who find that they have all their lives been using the Canadianism "casse-croûte", where they should have been writing "snack" on their window? How was *La Grande Vadrouille* such a popular film in a country where only a *balai à franges* or a *ballayeuse* are known?

Another kind of problem, less serious no doubt, is that of incomplete groups. Having learned that *le corps de pompiers* is called *la brigade du feu*, we might wonder what Canadians call the individual *pompier*. Having launched into the complex *stove/oven/cuisinière/four/fourneau*, we might want to get the whole group straight, once and for all, and know which word means what, where. In such cases this handbook will be found less than practical.

It would of course be sheer folly to ask a work like this to be exhaustive, or even to give any general rules about variants with systematic correspondence between the two bodies of usage. Even so, I am

disappointed to find no entries for the important Canadian series like *niaiseux*. A brief explanation about -eux and -ique terminations would go a long way.

The common denominator of all these problems is that Robinson and Sinclair are regarding words as permanent installations, rather than movable feasts. To some extent this is to be explained, and therefore excused, by the handy format they have chosen. In that case all we have to say is that the scholarly user will get what quick help he wants from this book, but remain aware of its necessary limitations. On the other hand, the usefulness of the book is seriously limited by the authors' abdication of all responsibility to give the customary classifications *fam.*, *coll.*, *argot*, etc., or to devise new classifications more suited to the Canadian scene, or to give any idea which words have long been accepted and which are regarded by most French Canadians as young upstarts destined to disappear.

Despite these limitations, the *Practical Handbook of Canadian French* lives up to its title as a rough and ready guide. It will be more useful to readers of Canadian literature than many of their metaliterary quarrels about the special place of French-Canadian/Quebec culture.

JACK WARWICK

BETWEEN TWO WORLDS

GEORGE BOWERING, *In the Flesh*. McClelland & Stewart, $2.95.

JOY KOGAWA, *A Choice of Dreams*. McClelland & Stewart, $2.95.

Between Two Worlds seems an appropriate phrase to describe the effect of these two books of verse. On the one hand, there is the work of an established poet, George Bowering, seemingly doing the same as he has done in the past — writing projectivist lyrics — with more or less skill, but, in fact, I believe, caught *between* styles and unable, satisfactorily, to resolve some fundamentally opposed artistic problems. On the other hand, there is the work of a new poet, Joy Kogawa, making her first collected appearance in book form; the nature of her ancestry — second-generation Canadian of Japanese descent — and of her artistic vision, largely determine the "between two worlds" impact of her poetry.

Bowering's book, it should be said (according to his prefatory note), is made up of "period" pieces, done "after I turned thirty." His attitude to the poems here, then, is that they come from a time when he has left behind another and fading world of experience. Yet, the significance of that age milestone is important to him: in his thirties, he says, he has become more passionate about life than he ever was before. Certainly, the Bowering of *In the Flesh* is not the Bowering of many poems in those slim earlier volumes which were little more than jejune imitations of Black Mountain poetry. For one thing, he has more to say now. But the trouble is that he is *not* saying what he has to say well. The reason, I suspect, is that his use of the old techniques simply snarls his vision into hopeless syntactical knots. The Bowering whom we know and respect — especially in such a fine, earlier poem like "Grandfather" — is the Bowering who gives full, oracular vent to his voice.

Too often, the Bowering we have in this volume is a labouring technician; the verse does not sing. Many of the

poems at the beginning are flawed by earnest striving-after-effect, and the excessive hammering on the face of being trapped in his "brain" world ultimately becomes tedious. There are exceptions. "When I", an elaborately disciplined display of words, is inspired by Milton's great sonnet on his blindness; without cavilling about the superiority of the original, Bowering's handling of Milton's theme (and words) is richly perceptive. The major poem, "Stab", however, is a disappointment; there are flashes of Bowering's real voice, but as a whole it falls flat, for, unlike Whitman in "Song of Myself" and Acorn in "I Shout Love" — longer poems it closely resembles — Bowering is unable to sustain his imaginative energy throughout.

In some respects Kogawa's poetry is more attractive than Bowering's — certainly less irritating stylistically. Plain statement (rather than verbal trickery) is her forte, but this, of course, does not mean that her work lacks colour. Her control of tone, and the strongly visual quality of her imagery, are not only functional but cast subtle shades of irony and sardonic humour over her subject matter.

A Choice of Dreams is in three parts: there are poems about Japan, poems about childhood and youth, and poems about life in a doomed world. Kogawa has constructed her book well, for both scenes and rhythms shift easily to and fro in time as the poet surveys her personal and its social setting. We sense she is engaged in a quest for certainty, but everywhere she sees conflict and uncertainty. In her "Japanese" poems, especially, she reveals a sharp eye for incongruities: always the slightly detached observer, she is yet amused (and terrified) by the collision of old and new cultures — as, for example, by the rough "choreography" of the pushing crowds in smog-ridden Tokyo, side-by-side with the delicate *politesse* of the tea ceremony. Indeed, ceremony intrigues her, and, in her "Canadian" poems, she recalls, edgily, the ceremonies of innocent children in a world of internment camps, war, and race hatred.

It is in the last part of her book, particularly in the long monologue, "Dear Euclid", that Kogawa's vision of man's fallen world reaches its peak of intensity as she abandons her detached stance — but not her icy, controlled tone — and attacks the stupidity of a world bent on self-destruction. Neither in East or West does man know how, or dare, to save himself from the dark dream of death. Still,

> There are patterns more hidden than our patterning
> Deaths more lasting that our murdering
> There are celebrations still in the surety of death
> And more resurrections than I have known

and in *that* hope, or choice of dreams, may yet lie man's salvation — between two worlds.

ERIC THOMPSON

"THIS MAD, WICKED FOLLY"

MAXINE NUNES AND DEANNA WHITE, *The Lace Ghetto*. new press, $7.95.

THE LACE GHETTO is the third in a "New Woman" series of books under the General Editorship of Adrienne Clarkson that are being published by new press. In chapters on such subjects as men's view of women, the suffragette movement, sexuality, marriage, and motherhood, the authors, Maxine Nunes and Deanna

White, present images of women as they appear and have appeared in advertisements, books, cartoons, comic strips, newspaper and periodical articles, and photographs. In their own text, which includes interviews and selections from taped discussions with contemporary Canadian men and women, they analyse the differences between the images of woman and her reality. Their point is that woman, in accepting the "myths of 'femininity'" imposed on her from outside, has for the most part failed to find her inner self and therefore to achieve her full potential as person. Their hope is that *The Lace Ghetto* will have "the effect of a low-key consciousness-raising meeting" and convince woman that the achievement of friends and the search for self-discovery are not "mad, wicked follies" but sane, healthy activities for finding her essence.

No one book, of course, is going to spring a woman suddenly or easily from what the authors call her "lace gretto". But this publication should help. By being "low-key", the authors have avoided the strident tones sometimes struck by other "women's libbers". By using visual aids, they have increased the effectiveness of their written text and created a series of witty, often humorous, comparisons and contrasts. By reproducing items from contemporary North American publications and by quoting contemporary Canadian men and women, they have made their points with immediacy and relevance. Queen Victoria's letter about "this mad, wicked folly of Women's Rights, with all its attendant horrors" and her most dowager-looking photograph will cause laughter, for example. Anne Landers' column on "Ten secrets of a happy marriage" printed between two stories of unhappy marriage, each told by a contemporary Canadian woman, should create, if not a "flash of recognition" as the authors hope, at least a pause for thought in each reader.

The Lace Ghetto, then, is a successful book. It ought not to replace a work like Simone de Beauvoir's *The Second Sex*, from which the authors often quote and which is still *the book* on women. It will not itself give a woman freedom or provide her with self-discovery. But it may, and indeed should, delight its readers, teach both men and women about themselves and their society, and help some women — and perhaps even a few men — to find the courage to be.

MARY JANE EDWARDS

BACK IN ANGUISH

EARL BIRNEY, *The Cow Jumped Over the Moon: The Writing and Reading of Poetry.* Holt, Rinehart & Winston.

IN THIS BOOK the poet Birney has turned critic, or at least has abandoned the poet's usual Delphic remoteness enough to acknowledge the existence of those who presume to come between the poem and the reader, to criticize the critics. *The Cow Jumped Over the Moon* varies in tone from gentle self-mockery to the avuncular voice of an old tribesman who would like to tell the younger generation how things are done, without letting them know he is doing it. Under the guise of telling how he wrote his own poetry, especially "David", and of how he believes poetry should be taught, Mr. Birney fires intently at such often battered targets as teachers and professors who

insist on one interpretation of a poem, who make the analysis more important than the poem, or who use any of the standard teaching deviations developed in classrooms.

But let us begin, as they say, at the beginning. Birney bluntly states his intentions in the opening paragraphs:

> This book is mostly about a poem I wrote called "David." I begin by recalling the making of it: the happenings, thoughts, motives, influences that led me first to the idea and then to the shaping of it. Then I talk about the difficulties I had in finding readers and listeners. . . . the problems others have had in reading the poem, especially those caught in the process of having it taught to them.
>
> The wistful purpose of this book then is to persuade anyone literate in the English language who thinks he does not like poetry that he is missing a unique pleasure easily within his reach — or anyone who likes poetry a little, or only some kinds of poems, that he may extend his range and pleasures.

With such explicit guidance a reader mostly knows what to expect in this book, but the next pronouncement, typical of the work, may find some readers unprepared; it forcefully posits a Birney-esque premise to what follows:

> . . . students are warned (*Kaff! kaff!*) that I consider the "teaching" of poetry a perversion of the intentions of poets; that I denounce (*harumph!*) any teachers or professors who make this book the *sole* text for any course or who set examinations on it requiring a "right" answer. Persons employing this text for authoritarian purposes are the enemies of all genuine students.

Birney also announces that the book is based on "nine personal and probably unsound premises about the nature of poetry," then deftly undercuts them: "Further warning: the above statements are all partly false." At this point one begins to tire of the self-mockery and suspects that the author's second premise about poetry applies also to the book itself: "It is unreliable as a source of information about its subject or its author, on any rational level."

As with poetry itself, however, so with Birney's book: one should not insist on a coldly logical approach to either. The merely "rational level" precludes the concomitant emotional response that is part of everyone's experiencing of poetry, and that has to be one's reaction to the semi-facetious statements Birney delights in. He asks us to suspend our rationality and normal expectations, to go along with his tone of sly innocence. We get the message: he is deadly serious but does not want to sound like it. For once a cover blurb is accurate: " . . . an unusual blend of poetic theory and autobiography, for all those who enjoy poetry but especially for those who have learned not to."

A priori it may not be assumed with confidence that one can inculcate principles of poetry appreciation by the explication of one poem. The basic question here then concerns the degree to which this book successfully accomplishes its author's purposes. Birney tells us that of the three hundred-odd poems he has published, he chose "David" because it has been "the most widely read, critically discussed, anthologized and 'taught'." It has been required reading at high school or university level in every Canadian province. He kept a record of the many difficulties he had in getting it published, and assures us, "I happen to remember a great deal about the way the poem began in my head."

In talking about writing "David" and about poetic composition in general, though always interesting and instructive, Birney can be as prosaic as anyone else, but often he approaches a quality of lyri-

cism — the prose of a poet, perhaps. Such passages are one reason why *The Cow Jumped Over the Moon* is successful: it is a delight to read. It would be a disservice to Birney and his readers to resort here to partial quotation, but those interested readers may note, for example, the barely subdued excitement with which he sets down seven "special techniques to be expected in most poetry."

In Birney's account of the long, slow process that produced "David", the inevitable nostalgia is kept in control by the poet's defensive sparring with his less sensible critics, and the resulting comments provide terse clarifications for those who want this guidance.

Twelve others of Birney's poems are treated in much the same way as is "David", but more briefly. These include "Vancouver Lights" ("a descriptive poem, in a mood of simple delight and awe in the beauty of things"), "Mappemounde" ("the sort of thing that can trigger complaints about obscurity"), "From the Hazel Bough" (one of the poet's own favourites), and inevitably, "Canada: Case History" ("I've never thought of this as a poem. It's a piece of satire in verse. . . . "); a fourth version of this poem, a satire on the original, is here published for the first time.

One senses Birney's abiding love of poetry as he voices his misgivings about what has been done with it in the schools. He is speaking out of decades of personal experience, looking back in anguish at what has been done to his own poetry as well as to poetry in general.

Several appendices close off the book with a flourish. The titles of the first two need no comment: "Extracts from Letters about 'David' " and "Notes on Notes on 'David'." Having enjoyed these, a reader may speculate whether the third, "Bibliographical Information," lists only the critics of whom Birney approves. Judging by this book one can almost, but not certainly, count on that.

ALEX MACKINNON

LA NUIT QUEBECOISE

VICTOR-LEVY BEAULIEU, *En attendant Trudot*. L'Aurore, $2.50.

VICTOR-LEVY BEAULIEU is one of Quebec's most exciting (as well as most prolific) young writers. *En attendant Trudot* is the second of his plays to be staged and the first to be published.

Beaulieu has built his reputation on a series of interconnected novels out of which a "Beauchemin Saga" is gradually emerging (to date, *Race de Monde!*, *La nuitte de Malcomm Hudd*, *Jos Connaissant*, *Les Grands-Pères*, *Un rêve québécois*, and *Oh Miami, Miami, Miami* have appeared; several other novels are in preparation). The picture of human existence — more specifically, of French-Canadian existence — painted by Beaulieu, the novelist, is not a very comforting one: the natural state of almost all of Beaulieu's characters seems to be "*la noirceur*", a state of dereliction and despair. As Jean-Claude Germain, who directed and produced *En attendant Trudot*, writes, in his preface to the play:

> Victor-Lévy Beaulieu, tout comme le docteur Miron et le docteur Ferron et beaucoup d'autres, fait partie de l'epaisseur de la nuit québécoise et toute son oeuvre en porte les signes. . . .

The "plot" of *En attendant Trudot* is simple to the point of being almost non-

existent: Ti-Bé's wife, Génie, has died; Ti-Bé tries to escape/cope with the reality of that death. There are — nominally — three characters in the play: Ti-Bé, his Memory, and his wife, Génie. As the play progresses, however, the audience comes to realize that Génie is not Ti-Bé's wife but a character who has no existence (and perhaps never had) outside of Ti-Bé's psyche.

The original draft of the play was, according to Martial Dassylva, writing in *La Presse*, completed some two years before the play itself was finally produced; the draft was considerably revised under the expert guidance of Jean-Claude Germain. The result is astonishingly good theatre: crisp dialogue, clear but subtle character delineation, effective black and Rabelaisian humour, ingenious use of pantomime and song, unobtrusive symbolism. The fact that everything which happens on stage is actually going on in Ti-Bé's mind gives *En attendant Trudot* an overpowering unity; the fact that what is going on in Ti-Bé's mind is happening on many subconscious and conscious levels at once, allows Beaulieu to handle concepts such as time and reality in a manner reminiscent of the French Surrealists, Theatre of the Absurd playwrights such as Beckett and Genet, and Panic Theatre playwrights such as Arrabal.

The most striking feature of *En attendant Trudot* is that, except for a few of the stage directions, it is written entirely in *joual* (even Beaulieu's introduction to the play is in *joual*). Like Joyce and Genet, two writers who have obviously had a great deal of importance upon language, he has said:

> Pour moi, le joual, ça veut dire d'une certaine manière "anarchie", pis sa veut dire "révolution". La meilleure façon de "fucker" le system . . . c'est de parler en joual . . . Quand tu parles et que t'écris en joual, y peuvent pas du tout t'encadrer, y peuvent pu du tout t'encarter t'es completement de contre.

Le joual is the symbol, *par excellence*, of the people of Quebec; a revolutionary French-Canadian author such as Beaulieu has no choice but to write in it. But *le joual* is not only the language of Quebec; it is also Québécois for *le cheval* and *le cheval* (*joual*) is one of the most important recurring symbols in Beaulieu's work — the symbol of a French-Canadian idealism and hope. Ti-Bé's "*joual*", Nellie, is dead even before the play begins. The message of *En attendant Trudot* merits being heard, not only by French-Canadians, but by all of us in Canada.

RUI AFONSO

THE NELLIE

RAY SMITH, *Lord Nelson Tavern*. McClelland & Stewart, $6.95.

THE LORD NELSON TAVERN, better known to habitués as "The Nellie", is one of Halifax's more prominent pubs. For Ray Smith, a former Haligonian, it is only a departure point for a set of grotesque but credible characters in a book that his publisher obstinately calls "a novel" but is actually a story-sequence.

The sequence begins with "Two Loves". A group of college students drink beer and debate the aesthetic merits of the lovely Francesca who — with the dashing yachtsman Dimitri — becomes the cynosure of all eyes; she and he are "perfect lovers" that "lemonade summer." Among the imbibers are Grilse, who gets assassinated twice in the course of the book; Naseby, famous for his repulsive-

ness, who in "Walk", the last story, is the head of the sexploitation film company FBN (a small anagrammatic joke here); Paleologue, who in "Sarah's Summer Holidays" sexually initiates a 13-year-old whose I.Q. is "163 on the Kinns-Noble scale" which "runs to 180 hypothetical top". Sarah is nominally the daughter of Gould, another Lord Nelson customer who marries the large-bosomed Rachel who, while having her portrait done, has the affair with the painter Ti-Paulo that produces Sarah who absent-mindedly breaks Naseby's spine with a judo hold....

One gets the idea. *Lord Nelson Tavern* resembles nothing so much as a zany gossip column whose economy of narrative is matched with a sometimes unfortunate tendency of characters to go into long monologues that, while funny at first, tend to be tiresome after a while.

Yet there is a good deal of art in these seven pseudo-realistic stories and Smith has a strong purchase on the characterist ambiance — one cannot say motivation — of their protagonists. The poet Paleologue is absurd, but he has a certain Humbert Humbert pathos about him; Ti-Paulo's Pygmalion inclinations are endearing. And the precocious Sarah's journal jottings are so delightful that the actual seduction of Paleologue is, well, anti-climactic.

Here she is on her own physical development:

> I have recently become more aware of my body in that I began to menstruate six months ago. I am not yet regular, but all the other signs of puberty are there and at Christmas I allowed Rachel to force upon me four bras. She has been trying to get me into them since I was nine, but I have refused, I think wisely. Other girls at school have been wearing "training bras" for several years and there is nothing more disgusting than their constant nattering and squeezing and poking. If I sound somewhat proud of myself, I admit I am. I have achieved puberty earlier than all but three of my classmates (cows all) and so have gained respect. This makes life much easier in certain ways. I hate to think of the teasing I would have to put up with if I were among the last. Finally, of course I am glad it has begun. It is somewhat uncomfortable and, I gather from the books, will continue so for a year or two. But the discomfort is not great and I can safely conclude that the major part of it is over. So far as such development goes, I have only two things to cope with in the future: sexual intercourse and menopause. I assume neither is imminent.

Some other reviewers have come down rather hard on "Two Loves", the first story in the book, but I find it in some ways the most satisfying of all. One love, that of the rich and elegant Francesca for the elegant and rich Dimitri, is founded on narcissism; the other, that of the intellectual Paleologue for the typist Lucy who comes from a small town and is obsessed by the country-and-western ballad "Stand by Your Man", is the attraction of opposites. Francesca and Dimitri sail, or fly away into the sunset, but Paleologue must resign himself to losing Lucy of the callow mind and ethereal body. He says:

> I will not perform for them any longer.
> I want only to sleep. I am so tired. I will sleep in the harbour. The ocean is too far away. I will sleep in the harbour. I will not perform for them any longer.
> Not for them.
> Not for you.

Lord Nelson Tavern would have been a more than intermittently entertaining collection if the wit and sharp satirical sense of the other stories had been accompanied by "Two Loves" strength of symmetry, its shaped compassion.

FRASER SUTHERLAND

THE DICKENS LODE

JOSEPH GOLD, *Charles Dickens: Radical Moralist.* Copp Clark, $9.50.

MICHAEL GOLDBERG, *Carlyle and Dickens.* University of Georgia Press, $10.00.

JOSEPH GOLD'S *Charles Dickens: Radical Moralist*—chronologically examining in individual chapters the fifteen novels from *Pickwick Papers* to *Our Mutual Friend* — has at first glance the appearance of an undergraduate-oriented reader's guide to the Dickens canon. It is that, and more. He has a thesis, of interest to both specialist and general reader, which provides a unifying framework for his discussion of the novels.

Agreeing with other critics that Dickens is both reformer and moralist, Gold sets himself apart by trying to discover precisely what kind of reformer and moralist he is. Examining the works individually, he finds the clue in Dickens' developing understanding of the psychology of behaviour. He contends that "while Dickens saw perfectly from the start what good and evil looked like, in all their guises, he did not explore their underlying psychology until much later". Accordingly, Gold groups the Dickens canon under two thematic headings, the Anatomy of Society and the Autonomy of Self. The first group includes mainly the earlier novels stressing radical social reforms in order to eliminate suffering and injustice and thus create harmony between the individual and society. The second group includes those later novels that emphasize not social solutions but a search for answers within the individual, moral rather than social reform. In this regard, it is with the first-person psychotherapy of the autobiographical *David Copperfield* (1849-50), Gold says, that "Dickens' growing awareness that the nature of society depends on the moral quality of individuals comes to its first full development." Thereafter, though the novelist occasionally may examine specific social injustices as in *Bleak House* and *Hard Times*, his principal preoccupation is development of the self into "an autonomous and fully realized whole". This is achieved through psychological analysis of the self, whereby the individual may come to self-knowledge, be morally regenerated, and in turn forward the regeneration of society. Thus the moralist and reforming aspects of Dickens and his work, Gold shows, find their meaning and unity in his exploration of psychology, and function in the novels to portray a coherent vision of better people *per se* making better the world.

Though Gold's thesis may interest both specialist and general reader, his primary target seems to be the high school and undergraduate market, sorely in need of such a survey. One clue to this intention is the book's organization: many chapters contain considerable analysis of matters not strictly necessary for Gold's thesis but of undeniable value to the student searching for a good overview of a specific work. In this regard, each chapter can stand alone as a commentary on an individual novel; each also provides a fair number of "takeoff" points for classroom discussion or a student's further investigation. The two or three quotations prefacing each chapter (the most frequently-chosen are from Blake and R. D. Laing; Carlyle is unmentioned) may function as additional foci for discussion. Orientation towards the student market is also suggested by the book's surprising lack of an index. A more minor criticism is the occasionally disproportionate

amount of space devoted to different works: *A Christmas Carol, David Copperfield* and *Bleak House* get 8, 10 and 11 pages respectively, while *Oliver Twist, Nicholas Nickleby* and *The Old Curiosity Shop* get 41, 27 and 23. The space for *Oliver* is justified; it is often on school and university courses — as are the first three works. But the last two are not.

Where Gold's book is aimed at a readership embracing both student and scholar, Goldberg's is not. His *Carlyle and Dickens* is mainly for the specialist. He takes up the critical commonplace that Carlyle influenced Dickens and subjects it to close scrutiny, examining at length the relationship between the two Victorians from their first meeting in March, 1840 until Dickens' death in June, 1870.

Goldberg sees Carlyle's influence first appearing in the economic concerns of *A Christmas Carol* (1843) and *The Chimes* (1844), written soon after Dickens' disillusioned return from a visit to the U.S. Goldberg then skips ahead to *Dombey and Son* (1848), calling it a "Carlylean parable" on Mammonism and elaborating on the debt to Carlyle:

> The social vision of the novels from *Dombey* onward, with their sense not merely of faulty institutions but of a sick society inhabited by tyrants, who are at least in part the victims of the forces they represent, owes more to Carlyle than to any other man.

Thereafter, though he discusses only *Bleak House* (1852-3), *Hard Times* (1854) and *A Tale of Two Cities* (1859) at length, Goldberg indicates Carlyle's continuing influence on the other novels by occasional examples discussed under the chapter headings of "Politics", "Style" and "The Grotesque".

JOHN R. SORFLEET

ISLAND ANTHOLOGY

Vancouver Island Poems, edited by Robert Sward. Soft Press, $3.50.

IN A BOOK of poems one creates an impression through establishing a motif with rhythm, a kind of unity of style and form which creates meaning by allusion. There must be a sense of continuity, but a small book cannot attempt many things. The motif of *Vancouver Island Poems* is "an anthology of contemporary poetry", (but not merely poems from or about Vancouver Island). Its strength — and its weakness — derive alike from the fact that it is an anthology and it is short. The book is a sampler, and because of that it offers fresh and new tastes; it fails where it gives only a taste and leaves the senses blurred.

The aim of a collection is always the same, the movement towards the clear way of creating, recreating, of heightened experience. Each poem is self-contained, but each must be part of the whole. If the presentation of *Vancouver Island Poems* had been less traditional, if it had been a more careful exercise in the mixing of media, its unevenness might have been carried off with zest. But though visual images are used, one senses they are token images: a picture of a solitary seagull, a closeup of barnacles, Salt Spring Island rocks; the pictures are nice, but that is all.

The worst of the contributions to *Vancouver Island Poems* are the dull pain poems, the clichéd poems of the usual. For example:

> Touch only my heart tonight
> Listen my little one
> Love me a thousand years right now
> Tomorrow I may be gone.

Compare that with the shining quality of

Dorothy Livesay's "One-Way Conversation":

O do not be distressed
that you cannot create
the great illusion;
thundering gods
at the womb's intrusion
You have a role
valid as sunshine
of speech as equal
of man in parallel
pain joy
partner to woman:
you have a role
human to human

Vancouver Island Poems, which is published by the new west coast publishing house, Soft Press, merits attention when you find that special individual way of seeing. It does not pretend to be a definitive collection, but it does include many fine poems, some by new authors. Especially notable are "Going to the Station" by Jeremy Boultbee, the collection of poems by Marilyn Bowering, Anne Burnham's "There is a Need in Me", "Summer Is" by G. V. Downes, and Ken Cather's "Ladysmith", which is a poem in motion, a poem which travels through the Island town of its title.

JUDY KEELER

WORLD OF TWO FACES

MARIE-CLAIRE BLAIS, *The Wolf*, translated by Sheila Fischman. McClelland & Stewart. $6.95.

THE MAIN CHARACTERS of the novels of Marie-Claire Blais are always adolescents. It tells us much about her vision that they are inevitably maimed or destroyed by the process of maturation — they die of disease or are "crucified on the cupidity" of an adult world where the familiar constants are frustration, suicide, and omnipresent death. Blais's fictive world has two faces: the tragic and comic alter-ego of the Greek mask. Her gothic world of rural Quebec (how obsessively it is a waste world of snow!) can be delineated with a bawdy, if morbid humour, the humour of Jean-Le Maigre in *A Season in the Life of Emmanuel* (1966). Yet more familiar is the hermetic universe of her first novel *Mad-Shadows*, published in 1959, where all the action takes place against an apocalyptic atmosphere of unrelieved doom. *The Wolf*, first published in French in 1972, and recently translated by Sheila Fischman, is a product of this latter vision. Blais has experimented before with the nocturnal underworld of pederasty, prostitution, and vice. Here she returns to a familiar figure, the Rimbaud-archetype, child-vagabond, devoted to a chivalry of evil: "They take all the vices floating in the air and absorb them."

The novel is an impressionistic monologue delivered by a youth called Sébastien, a young pianist, in which he recounts his homosexual liaisons with four successive men. It begins: "I want to tell you about the love of boys for men and of men for boys — or, quite simply, about 'love for my fellow creature'." Sébastien thinks of himself with apostolic fervour as belonging to an involuntary race of redeemers, drawn by the secret suffering in others which he seeks to expiate through a pity that can only be sensually expressed since charity is a gift of the body, a pagan gift. He is a kind of perverse child-Christ living in an excremental position where "all the humiliation of the world seemed to be relieving itself." There are two poles of characterization in the novel: lambs and wolves — often a dis-

guise for the "weakness of the slaughtered lamb". One of Blais's themes is that any relationship (and homosexuality is a kind of stark metaphor for all sexual couplings) involves parasitism, spiritual cannibalism: "Love perpetuates crimes . . . ", is barbaric, destructive. Sébastien's four lovers are all aspects of this wolf culture. They are the outlaws, outsiders; they constitute everything that society has rejected. How well Blais's novels fit into the predominant archetypes of modern French literature; one thinks of Genet: the fascination with secret anguish, perversion; the victim-slave as holy experience.

Each of the four lovers represents an alternative response to the pressures of an outlawed vice. Bernard is a school companion (the perverse claustrophobic world of the monastery or Catholic boarding-school recurs in almost every Blais novel) who initiates Sébastien to pederasty. Dionysian in his natural appetites, he is twisted and maimed into a violent animal by his sexual alienation, movingly portrayed in his brutal rape of Sébastien. He is a voracious mouth absorbing the world's poisons, "a strangler, disemboweling, searching in cemeteries for the roots of life." Lucien is a fifty-year old neurotic, a teacher of musical counterpoint. For Sébastien he is a symbol of repression. "I saw in him an image of Hell: an atrophied heart, a soul enslaved by moral rules that etiolated him." A bizarre and haunting image exemplifies his self-denial. In a sexual scene which ends in frustration, he is described as "cautiously replacing my forbidden sex against my thigh . . . as though he were replacing a crystal object in a cupboard, afraid of breaking it." The third lover, George, is a business man who acts as a benefactor to young musicians. He is dying and turns to the sixteen-year-old Sébastien for the sensual gratification he has always denied himself. Yet he is a hypocrite, fearful of exposure, repugnant is his "usury of the beautiful things in life, the usury of feelings, of the gifts of mind and body that were everywhere wasted so scandalously." Finally there is Eric, a musician and Sébastien's present lover. When Sébastien initiates a *menage à trois* with a former lover, Eric becomes hysterical and possessive, teaching Sébastien the final truth about love. Love that is too generous only awakens the instinct of the wolf. Love with too great freedom should belong to angels; in humans it awakens inexplicable savagery.

One finds oneself compelled to ask what is Blais's purpose in this extraordinary and sustained exploration of homosexuality. It seems an odd, vicarious subject, vaguely sensual but never directly erotic. What seems to fascinate her is the theme of the couple, and the human parasitism of sexual desire, as though all couplings involved a mutually destructive union between prolific and devourer. A subsidiary theme is the way the mind cankers spontaneous sensual feeling through shame, fear, or jealousy. Sin is not mentioned in the novel but there is an ever-present perversity that leads to the continual exploitation and spoilation of human dignity. The book is obviously intended as a moral examination of love. Its conclusion? Love fails. It is a dream; "we're wrong to expect any consolation from the other." We are autonomous beings, alone until death. The most we can ask is for a witness to penetrate the glacial solitude by passionate and vicarious suffering with us. A nostalgic image haunts the book — the lost house of child-

hood but with its divine welcoming doors closed.

The novel closes on an extraordinary symbol: a small wooden figure of the crucifixion carved by a peasant sculptor — Christ as redeemer: "He suffers, he is offended, but you can feel that he only asks to bend over you in a moment of surprising accessibility." We discover that this morose and compelling tale of homosexual love is finally religious in intention: "What then, is redemption?" Sébastien sees himself as a reverse image of the lamb of God, through his self-immolation seeking the moral remission of others. His awkward compassion fails. He discovers that his peculiar monastic love only raises tormented appetites without being able to assuage them: to give "oneself completely to another, becoming his food, does not calm one's hunger but provokes it and tempts it to the point of dizziness." At the end of the novel Sébastien is alone. The reader is left with what one feels is a wistful consolation: one drop of blood, of compassion and love, given freely, unstintingly, even if given badly, is not completely lost. "I would like to dedicate my life to that once again." But even such a minimal expectation is unfounded in this bleak exploration of human passion.

The novel is metaphysical in style as well as content. It is an extended monologue with all action abstract and disembodied. It is as though the real world has been totally interiorized, except for the occasional anchor in certain stark physical images, all the more effective as they emerge with hallucinatory vividness from cerebral meditation — a swimming pool, a winter landscape, a mansion in fall, a primitive sculpture. The structure is entirely fluid; there is no action, simply a repetitive stream of lyrical images. This can make for difficult reading. Such a book works better in French than in English which makes more pragmatic demands on structure and language. What can be a fine almost crepuscular style in French can seem introverted in English — the spider weaving from its own entrails. The translation by Sheila Fischman is very fine indeed, capturing Blais's exotic vocabulary with a sophisticated control of nuance. Fischman is one of the founders of *Ellipse*, known for her bawdy translations of Roch Carrier. Here she shows herself equally adaptable to the metaphysical macabre of Blais's world.

ROSEMARY SULLIVAN

POETS AND CRITICS

ONE OF THE KEY TASKS of an editor — and often it is the most difficult one — is to seek the critic most likely to be in tune with a particular author or a particular book, and therefore most likely to be sensitive to the virtues of the work and also to the ways in which it has failed, given the creator's intentions, to become what it might have been. The best criticism arises from a happy fulfilment of this task, from the conjunction of the right critic with the right book, and in *Poets and Critics* (Oxford, $4.25), George Woodcock has selected a series of occasions of this kind from the past issues of *Canadian Literature*; the anthology forms a pendant to the earlier Oxford selection of writings from the journal, *A Choice of Critics*.

Fifteen critics (including Frank Davey, A. J. M. Smith, Mike Doyle, Margaret Atwood, Stephen Scobie and Douglas Barbour, as well as Woodcock himself)

write on eighteen contemporary poets, ranging chronologically from E. J. Pratt to bp Nichol. While not claiming to present a complete coverage of all the significant poets of our time and country, *Poets and Critics* does reveal the main trends in Canadian criticism and poetry during recent decades, and it shows how closely linked are these two genres, since, as Woodcock points out, ten out of the seventeen essays are by poets writing about other poets. A similar proportion would not be found in an anthology of essays on fiction, for modern novelists — Woodcock observes — rarely take to criticism as easily as modern poets.

Woodcock suggests that "the link between poetry and criticism sprang mainly from a tendency among poets in periods of great creativity — whether for themselves or in the general world of poetry — to work intensely on both the intellectual and the intuitive levels. Poetry is a craft which demands more intense and meticulous intellectual disciplines than fiction, and it does so by very reason of the irrationality of its sources."

L.T.C.

ON THE VERGE

***** PETER C. NEWMAN, *Home Country*. McClelland & Stewart. $7.95. *Home Country* is journalism at its best. Peter Newman has long been recognized as an acute observer of the Canadian political scene with the ability to express his insights in sharp revealing ways, and many of the short pieces in *Home Country* — which is a collection of his periodical essays and notes — do just this. What raises the book to a level much higher than that of the average journalist's gathering is the series of long essays called "Places" which forms Part I of the book. With an extraordinary impressionist vividness, Newman evokes in these pieces the spirit of modern Prague and of Israel, of melancholy Sweden and lost Laos and even more lost Nixon-era Washington. The sadness — and the splendour — of our time have rarely been so well evoked in so brief a space. Reading Newman writing on Prague, any essayist should feel a twinge of professional envy, as I did.

***** BERYL ROWLAND, *Animals with Human Faces: A Guide to Animal Symbolism*. University of Tennessee Press. $10.75. Beryl Rowland, one of Canada's leading Chauceriens, has created out of her studies of mediaeval art and literature an excellent guide to animal symbolism — mainly in the European tradition. She proceeds alphabetically, mingling the mythical with the real, all the way from the Amphisbaena and the Ant to the Weasel and the Wolf, and presents with a seemly wit a wealth of information of the kind most writers find curious and suggestive. She arranges her book without daunting pedantry, but provides suitable references after each entry and an excellent general bibliography at the end of the volume. *Animals with Human Faces* is a book for every poet's shelf.

***** ARTHUR S. MORTON, *A History of the Canadian West to 1870-71*. Second Edition, edited by Lewis G. Thomas. University of Toronto Press, $25.00. Professor Morton's *History of the Canadian West* was first published in 1939, and it has not been reprinted since. In part this was due to its dimensions, for the book was as monumental in size as in scope, running to almost a thousand pages. But some of the blame for its neglect must be laid to the jealousy of fellow academic historians, who condemned the book on such frivolous grounds as Morton's disinclination to burden it with an excess of scholarly apparatus, or, more weightily, his generally favourable treatment of the Hudson's Bay Company, which was repugnant to the kind of sentimental nationalism that found superiority in the fur traders operating out of Montreal. Time always neutralizes superficial objections of this kind, and, having made *The Canadian West* in its first edition an extremely rare book, now reveals it — republished and with a list of sources assembled from Morton's notes to satisfy the pedants — as a work of such quality and content that its long unavailability must appear as unfortunate as its present issue is welcome.

**** FARLEY MOWAT, *Tundra*. McClelland & Stewart, $12.50. One anticipates that Farley Mowat will be remembered longer in connection with other men's works than with his own. His more personal books, with their often misfiring passion, their opinionatedness in-and-

out-of-season, their frequent inaccuracy, their grinding self-righteousness, and their self-advertising bravado, do not wear well. Amusing for a single reading, sometimes initially heart-rending, they pall even at a second glance. On the other hand, Mr. Mowat's anthologies of writing on the north which he so demonstratively loves are useful and interesting documents, for he has an eye for the vivid, and while I have allowed his own books to be borrowed from my shelves without insisting on their return, I have clung quite obstinately to his *Ordeal by Ice* and *Polar Passion* for their assembly of the essential writings on the Arctic regions. *Tundra* completes that cycle with an admirable selection of writings of the early travellers and explorers of the Barrens. There are times when the quintessential Mr. Mowat emerges to make slighting remarks about travellers whose endurance and achievement one had thought at least equal to his own (Franklin, for example), but one has learnt to let such lapses pass and to accept with gratitude the garlands of other men's Arctic gatherings which he presents. I am also grateful that *Tundra* has been published in manageable form; too much attention was paid to display in *Ordeal by Ice* and *Polar Passion*, which were large and expensive books, difficult to shelve.

***** Robert Craig Brown and Ramsay Cook. *Canada 1896-1921: A Nation Transformed.* McClelland & Stewart, $12.50. This volume is a somewhat belated item in the monumental Centenary series, the 18-volume history of Canada which began publication in 1967 under the editorship of Donald Creighton and W. L. Morton; it has turned out to be one of the best of these excellent books. Brown and Cook deal with an era in Canadian life whose dramatic importance has not up to now been fully recognized — the era in which, slowly and hardly perceptibly to the people of the times, Canada changed from a rural into an urban land. It is the era whose early years were dominated by Sir Wilfrid Laurier and to an extent reflected his facilely optimistic idealism; its last decade embraced the First World War, the times of radical discontent that followed it, and the progressive dissolution of the Victorian attitude that had dominated Confederation Canada. To weave all the conflicting strains of this time of change into a cohesive narrative was no mean task, but Cook and Brown have done it well, and *Canada 1896-1921* will remain for long the best work on the generation in which the shape of modern Canada became visible.

**** *The Letters of Thomas Hood*, edited by Peter F. Morgan, University of Toronto Press, $15.00. Once a year or so, a volume appears in a little known series, the University of Toronto Department of English Studies and Texts. They are sponsored by the Department named, but are not restricted to its members. They include original works of criticism, like William Robbins' *The Ethical Idealism of Matthew Arnold* and Hugo McPherson's *Hawthorne as Myth-Maker*, but they also include scholarly editions of literary classics, some of which, like F.E.L. Priestley's splendidly introduced version of Godwin's *Political Justice*, have also become classics of editorship. Peter F. Morgan's edition of *The Letters of Thomas Hood* is the latest volume in the series. It is a more modest achievement than Priestley's, but then, Hood was a more modest figure than Godwin, with none of the great anarchist's haunting capacity for revival. He was a good man of letters, concerned with the professional problems of writers in his time, but belonging, despite his much anthologized *jeux d'esprit*, inalienably to the second rank. His letters reflect his position; they are almost entirely to lesser writers like himself. Occasionally he addresses a Dickens or a Thackeray, but the leading men of his time are more often mentioned than written to. Yet his correspondence gives a vivid sense of what the life of a sound professional writer must have been in the years between 1815, when the first of these letters was written, and the day in 1845 when, his career ended, Hood wrote his gallant last letter to David Macbeth Moir: "God bless you and yours, and good-by! I drop these few lines, as in a bottle from a ship water-logged, and on the brink of foundering, being in the last stage of dropsical debility; but though suffering in body, serene in mind. So, without reversing my union-jack, I await my last lurch . . ."

***** J. L. WISENTHAL, *The Marriage of Contraries*. Harvard University Press. One of the puzzling things about Bernard Shaw is that he was a didactic writer and yet because of — rather than in spite of — this fact his plays have worn amazingly well in comparison with those of his contemporaries — even of Oscar Wilde, whom now we really remember mainly for *The Importance*. The secret, which should perhaps have been obvious, but which no critic before Mr. Wisenthal has fully developed, is to be found in the fact that for all their didacticism, no really didactic person — at least in the sense of a person with decided views on political and social matters — ever whole-

heartedly accepted Shaw's plays. Such people always felt let down because the conclusion that seemed obvious to them was somehow sidestepped. In other words, Shaw — rather like Proudhon — carried on a kind of two-termed dialectic. His plays contained the thesis and the antithesis, but the grand synthesis of the revolution achieved was never reached, because for the continuation of life the independent survival — even in marriage — of the contraries was essential. It is, as Mr. Wisenthal suggests, a Blakeian rather than a Marxian dialectic, and he approaches the plays from *Man and Superman* down to *Back to Methusaleh* in accordance with Bernard Shaw's contention that his characters are "right from their several points of view". It is a useful approach, going far to explain the peculiar tensions that keep Shaw's plays alive for readers and theatre-goers sixty to seventy years afterwards. This is one of the few good recent books on Shaw.

**** *Mind on the Waters*, assembled by Joan McIntyre. McClelland & Stewart, $14.95. *Mind on the Waters* is an important and fascinating book, both in itself and for its ulterior aims. It is a fine anthology of facts, experiences, arguments, poems, pictures, relating to the Cetaceans, that great natural family of the whales and the dolphins whose members appear to rival man in the complexity of their minds and the scope of their consciousness. It is impossible to read the items assembled by Joan McIntyre, founder of Project Joshua, without being intrigued and moved. But, apart from giving pleasure and information, *Mind on the Waters* is intended to arouse public support for the campaigns Project Joshua and its allies have under way to end the hunting of whales, and even its royalties are being ploughed back into the project. Given the atrocities we perform in the dubious name of science on our closer relatives, the apes and monkeys, it will obviously be a hard task to persuade men that more might be gained from communicating with the great denizens of the ocean than from exterminating them, and that is why one hopes that this large and rather expensive volume will soon be reprinted in a smaller paperback that can be sold cheaply and widely enough to have some effect on general opinion.

**** HEATHER ROBERTSON, *Salt of the Earth*. James Lorimer. $17.50. Heather Robertson's *Grass Roots* was a classic piece of prairie reportage, a moving record of the old age and impending death of the Canadian prairie culture. Researching for that book, she came across many documents relating to the youth of prairie society, the age of the pioneers between 1880 and 1914, and in *Salt of the Earth* she has allowed those pioneers to tell their story by means of a mosaic of contemporary records and contemporary photographs, linked together by the most modest of editorial bridges. *Salt of the Earth* has an advantage in authenticity over certain recent books that were compiled from recollections tape-recorded long after the event; its voices tell of the trials and joys of pioneer life when they were still new in the memory, and this gives the book an altogether fresher feeling than one experiences from reading of pasts re-arranged in half a century of changing memory. This is the world of Grove and Stead, and also of Nellie McClung; students of such Canadian writers will find it immensely useful in fixing the relationship between factual and fictional representations of the same world.

*** GERMAIN LEFEBVRE, *Pellan*. $18.95. One of the best of Canadian painters, and one of the most potently seminal influences on the past generation of artists in our country, Alfred Pellan deserves to be celebrated splendidly, and in the present volume there is no fault one can find with the choice of illustrations or with the quality of the reproductions. There are about 130 plates, and they serve as an excellent, well-chosen visual introduction to Pellan's work. *Pellan*, indeed, would be a superb book if the written side of it were only as good as the visual. But Germain Lefebvre has provided a shallow and gushing account of Pellan's life and a quite inadequate critique of his work. It would have been better to have presented the reproductions as an album with a very brief biographical introduction, rather than to spoil their effect by subjecting the reader to an account which does little more than sensationalize Pellan's career.

GROVE IN POLITICS

FREDERICK PHILIP GROVE was in his early seventies when I met him. He lived at Simcoe, Ontario, and was running as a CCF candidate in the rural riding of the same name in the Ontario provincial election of 1943.

He was a tall man, grey-haired, with such a commanding presence that he seemed larger than life-size on the political platform or in any group of which he was a member. He was erect in bearing, unnaturally so because of an injury that prevented his bending his back very much. He thrived on adulation, nor was he starved for it in his own home. His wife and a woman visitor nourished his ego constantly.

His manner of speaking, too, drew attention. He was a rhetorician of the old school, grandiloquent in speech, using exaggerated gestures, which, if he had been a lesser man, or if they had not been all of a piece with the man, would have been comic. His accent was extraordinary but consistent with the image he projected. If you can imagine an Oxford accent grafted upon the remains of a Swedish accent, that was the voice of Frederick Philip Grove.

As he told it, his story was this. His father had been a Swedish millionaire who had sent him to Oxford. During holidays, he sailed the Mediterranean in his father's yacht. He lived the life of a sybarite. When his father died, it was found that he had squandered the family fortune. Frederick Philip Grove emigrated to North America and hoboed around it before settling down as a teacher in Manitoba.

Frederick Philip Grove, never a rich man, lived in genteel poverty in his home at Simcoe. His home was in contrast to his flamboyance as a man. The rooms were generously proportioned, and, as I remember, painted a soft cream, with white trim on the woodwork. There were few pictures on the walls, but what there were, were of high quality. The furniture was sparse, austere, but elegant. His library, well furnished with books, was a holy of holies which few were invited to enter. I felt that I had arrived when he took me there for a chat. It was his boast that he never went to sleep at night without reading some pages from one of the authors of ancient Greece in the original.

When he took my wife and me into our bedroom, he waved majestically towards about fifteen books held upright between bookends on the dresser. "Have you read any of my books?" he said. I would have been embarrassed to have told him the truth that I hadn't heard of him until I had been sent down to speak for him, and mumbled something about not having had that pleasure. Whereat he autographed and gave me a copy of *A Search for America.*

The fact is that Frederick Philip Grove was not very well known at the time. Later, he came into considerable vogue. Now, he is somewhat in eclipse again, except as a representative figure of a certain stage in the development of Canadian literature. Even his story of his early background is in dispute. It doesn't much matter if he fabricated all or part

of his identity. He came to live it as a fact.

I have mentioned that he was never rich. That is an under-statement. He told this story about himself. Not long before I met him, when he was at an age when most men retire, he had worked in a pea factory in rural Ontario, dumping peas into a hopper for ten cents an hour — that's right, ten cents an hour! Another Oxford graduate was working near him at the same wages. He said to the other: "What brought you to this condition?" The other replied, "Drink." The other then asked Frederick Philip Grove what brought him to this pass. Grove replied, "Literature."

As a candidate in the provincial election, Grove had no political organization so far as I could see. There were few CCFers in rural Ontario in the summer of 1943. My wife and I and the others in the household including Grove himself folded and mailed his campaign literature from the little building in which Mrs. Grove taught school to about seven pupils.

I spoke at a political meeting with Frederick Philip Grove. I still have a copy of the notice of meeting which Grove inserted in the local paper. His name was in letters about half an inch high; mine, in letters about an eighth of an inch high, although I was the visiting speaker and an M.L.A. sent from British Columbia to speak for him and others.

The meeting was well attended. I think most of the folk came out of curiosity. Frederick Philip Grove spoke first. I was fascinated by the measured flow of his language. Remember, he was in his seventies, but he spoke vigorously, coherently, figuratively, and effectively. It was a very good speech indeed. I followed after, and thought that I had not done badly because I had afterwards that warm inner glow by which a speaker knows when he has come close to the mark. We returned to Frederick Philip Grove's home after the meeting — his wife, my wife, their guest, me, and, of course, the author. Everyone was loud in praise of his speech. He stood in the centre of the floor basking in the homage of the rest of us sitting around on chairs. At this point, Mrs. Grove remembered that I too had spoken at the meeting. She said graciously, "And Mr. Webber, I thought you made a fine speech, too." "Yes," said Mr. Grove, "It was just what was needed to complete mine."

Such egocentricity takes one's breath away. But that quality in Frederick Philip Grove was no mean, puerile thing. In him, it was raised to a fine art so that it seemed to enhance the man.

The next morning, my wife and I left for campaign meetings in other ridings, but no other candidate made anything like the impression on us, immediate or lasting, as did Frederick Philip Grove.

BERNARD WEBBER

THE CITIZENSHIP OF ELFRIDA BELL

IN THE WINTER, 1974 issue of *Canadian Literature*, Pierre Cloutier's article, "The First Exile," is based on the premise that Elfrida Bell, the heroine of Sara Jeannette Duncan's novel, *A Daughter of Today*, is a Canadian expatriate. He refers directly to "Sparta, her small, drab Ontario hometown."

The Toronto News Company 1894 edition of the novel states, on p. 2 and many times thereafter, that Elfrida Bell is from Sparta, Illinois. The copyright page indicates that this edition is merely an offshoot of the American D. Appleton and Company edition. Both American and English reviews (in *The Critic*, *The Nation*, *The London Bookman* and *The Athenaeum*) confirm this account of Elfrida's origins.

It is true enough that Elfrida's nationality is less important in the novel than either her bohemian style of life or her artistic ambitions. It is clear, nevertheless, that she is distinctively American, and that her type of American character is consistent with Sara Jeannette Duncan's treatment of national differences throughout her fiction.

Women, especially, are defined in Miss Duncan's novels to a considerable degree by their nationality. The American type and the British type are usually contrasted with each other. The American type (here Miss Duncan follows Howells and James) is outspoken, relatively free of parental ties or inhibitions, and eager to acquire culture. The English type — at least in the 1890's novels, before the suffragette movement caused Miss Duncan to modify her ideas — is shy, under parental control and intellectually passive. Canadian women, in the two novels in which they are prominent, are presented as a third alternative: North American in their willingness to explore new ideas and emotions, but more reserved and introspective than The American Girl.

Elfrida Bell is the most radical version in Sara Jeannette Duncan's fiction of the American type. She advocates free love, even if she does not practice it, and renounces her homeland. She is contrasted throughout the book with Janet Cardiff, an English girl who is somewhat more adventurous than her compatriots in Sara Jeannette Duncan's fiction, but compared to Elfrida is cautious and bourgeois.

Elfrida's character is too complex to be summarized briefly. In one perspective, however, her suicide represents the tragic consequence of a peculiarly American sin — lack of restraint. When a parallel character in *Cousin Cinderella* is criticized for being "very American," a genuine Canadian replies: "Americans like being very. I don't believe they can help it."

T. E. TAUSKY