$2.00 per copy

CANADIAN LITERATURE No. 64

Spring, 1975

ULTRAMARINE - HAIL AND FAREWELL

Articles

BY RONALD BINNS, GEOFFREY DURRANT, HALLVARD DAHLIE, DONALD G. PRIESTMAN, CHRISTINA H. ROBERTS-VAN OORDT, FRANK BIRBALSINGH

Poems

BY P. K. PAGE, AL PURDY, DOROTHY LIVESAY

Review Articles and Reviews

BY GERMAINE WARKENTIN, GEORGE WOODCOCK, SEYMOUR MAYNE, DONALD STEPHENS, TOM MARSHALL, ANTHONY APPENZELL, FRED COGSWELL, LINDA SHOHET, HELENE ROSENTHAL, ALEX GLOBE, PATRICIA BARCLAY, ANDREW POTTINGER

Opinions

BY J. FOLEY AND SANDOR J. KLEIN

A QUARTERLY OF CRITICISM AND REVIEW

BLISHED BY THE UNIVERSITY OF
TISH COLUMBIA, VANCOUVER 8

ANADIAN
TERATURE

TTERATURE CANADIENNE

MBER 64, SPRING 1975

Quarterly of Criticism
l Review

TOR: George Woodcock

SOCIATE EDITORS:
Donald Stephens
W. H. New

VISORY EDITOR:
Ronald Sutherland

SINESS MANAGER:
Tina Harrison

NTED IN CANADA BY MORRISS
NTING COMPANY LTD., VICTORIA

ond class mail registration
nber 1375

blication of *Canadian Literature* is
sted by the Canada Council

nadian Literature is indexed in the
nadian Periodical Index and is
ilable in microfilm from
iversity Microfilms,
Mobile Drive,
ronto M4A 1H6

solicited manuscripts will not be
urned unless accompanied by
mped, addressed envelopes.
ms by invitation only.

dress subscriptions to
culation Manager, *Canadian*
rature, University of British
umbia, Vancouver 8, B.C., Canada

SCRIPTION $6.50 A YEAR

N 0008-4360

contents

Editorial: Tasting the Castalian Waters 3

ARTICLES

RONALD BINNS
Lowry's Anatomy of Melancholy 8

GEOFFREY DURRANT
Aiken and Lowry 24

HALLVARD DAHLIE
Lowry's Debt to Nordahl Grieg 41

DONALD G. PRIESTMAN
Man in the Maze 52

CHRISTINA H. ROBERTS-VAN OORDT
Constellation Tragique 67

FRANK BIRBALSINGH
The Tension of his Time 75

POEMS

P. K. PAGE
Enemy 23

DOROTHY LIVESAY
Two Poems 66, 111

AL PURDY
Stopping Here 74

REVIEW ARTICLES

GERMAINE WARKENTIN
Criticism and the Whole Man 83

GEORGE WOODCOCK
Purdy's Prelude and Other Poems 92

SEYMOUR MAYNE
Other Montrealers 98

DONALD STEPHENS
Insistent Fluidity 101

TOM MARSHALL
Inferno, Paradise and Slapstick 104

ANTHONY APPENZELL
The Gem-like Flame Extinguished 107

BOOKS IN REVIEW

BY FRED COGSWELL (112), LINDA SHOHET (113), HELENE ROSENTHAL (115), ALEX GLOBE (118), PATRICIA BARCLAY (121), ANDREW POTTINGER (122)

OPINIONS AND NOTES

J. FOLEY
Port Colborne's Canada Day 125

SANDOR J. KLEIN
A. M. Klein's Letters 128

UNIVERSITY OF BRITISH COLUMBIA MEDAL FOR POPULAR BIOGRAPHY 1974

The most notable thing about Canadian biography during the past ten years has been its range of approach: though concentrating on one person, some biographers have included much social history; others have approached their subject academically; others have used illustration as a full means of biography, as in Pitseolak's superbly done book a few years ago; still others have ranged from contemporary 'pop' art to a fusion of autobiography with social comment.

1974 was not a good year for Canadian biography, though there were some good works. Some of them were banal, others badly written, some without a sense of the person being examined. What surface, however, are books that indicate the range of Canadian biography, not only in approach but also in subject matter. There is Ruth Mateson Buck's book, *The Doctor Rode Side-Saddle*, a solid presentation without a trace of pretentiousness; Andrew Allan's *A Self-Portrait*, first delivered on the CBC, has a fine style and a good sense of the man and his voice; others ranged from social history (Hacker's *The Indomitable Lady Doctors*), through poem as biography (Peter Steven's *And the dying sky like blood* on Bethune), to collective tributes (Alan Jarvis, and others, on Douglas Duncan).

The winner this year is Lena Newman's book, *The John A. Macdonald Album*. It is, in the fullest sense, a 'popular' biography. The Selections Committee found that the book was extremely interesting. It is many things: a photo essay with intelligent, thoughtful, and organized commentary displaying accurate integration of peripheral detail. For innovative and lively presentation, and for patient attention to enlivening detail, the Medal goes to Newman. Tundra Books, and their page editors, are also to be commended for this book.

DONALD STEVENS

editorial

TASTING THE CASTALIAN WATERS

THE DAY IS LONG PAST when Desmond Pacey's pioneer *Creative Writing in Canada* was virtually our only readily available guide to writing in Canada, past and present. Now there is not only the *Literary History of Canada*, shortly to be reprinted in revised and expanded form, but also a variety of less substantial but not always less ambitious books that seek to give us an overview of the Canadian Literary scene. Sometimes the approach has been thematic, and this has usually involved a limitation in the comprehensiveness of the survey, since the books and writers discussed are chosen to exemplify the author's thesis about the dominant trends of Canadian writing and the dominant preoccupations of Canadian writers. Thus books like Margaret Atwood's *Survival*, D. G. Jones' *Butterfly on Rock*, and their lesser imitators, in spite of brilliant insights into individual works and writers, and even groups of writers, provide highly distorted views of Canadian literature if one takes them as pictures of the whole. They are maps that show only certain roads, and not all the main towns.

The other kind of survey is inevitably circumscribed by considerations of space; even the *Literary History*, for all its bulk, is forced to deal summarily with many writers and can only sketchily fulfil the critical as distinct from the historical function. When the *Literary History* was published, Northrop Frye put in the plea for a critical handbook of the same dimensions, similarly written by many hands, but so far as I know this major survey never passed beyond the stage of suggestion, and until it does we must rely on the second group of general literary surveys that have been appearing in recent years, small in size and aimed largely

at the increased public for compendia of potted information and evaluation that has been created by the expansion of Canadian literature classes in universities and secondary schools.

Atwood's *Survival* started off as such a guide, but, perhaps fortunately, was led by its author's obsessions into becoming something less practically useful (not the best of cribs, certainly) and more intellectually exciting. Among the books that have kept to the original plan of presenting the whole field in ready form have been Elizabeth Waterston's *Survey* and Clara Thomas's *Our Nature — Our Voices*, both reviewed in past issues of *Canadian Literature*, and Frank Davey's newly published *From There to Here* (Press Porcépic, $4.95), which is described as "A Guide to English-Canadian Literature since 1960". In fact, Davey's book was planned as a sequel to Clare Thomas's book (and is announced very unobtrusively on the cover as "Our Nature — Our Voices II"), but the economic adventures of the original Publisher, New Press, and the pilgrimage of Dave Godfrey from publishing house to publishing house, resulted in its eventual issue by Press Porcépic in a quite different format from the original volume.

All these changes in imprint and design are just as well, since Davey's approach is radically different from Thomas's. It is — with no thought of posing any hierarchy of values — the difference between the academic and the literary. Both Clara Thomas and Elizabeth Waterston are essentially teachers-who-write; they show an understanding of and often an intuitive sympathy with the authors they discuss, but there is still not the same kind of involvement — negative or positive — that one encounters when the situation is reversed and a writer-who-teaches does the job of introducing other writers. Nobody has reacted to their books in the way people react to *Survival* and are likely to react to Davey's *From There to Here*.

When one considers the limitations Davey seems happily to have accepted, *From There to Here* is something of a *tour de force*. Other poet-critics like Atwood and Jones, by adopting the thematic approach, have been able to group the books they consider into large sweeping essays, each dealing with an aspect of the main theme. Davey, recognizing that other aspects of their work differentiate writers more than themes unite them, has chosen to write a brief but penetrating critical essay on each of sixty writers (with George Bowering stepping in to discuss Davey himself). Davey is a poet with sharply defined views of his craft, but his attitude towards criticism is remarkably open; he refuses to be governed by fashion, and thus, while his judgments may at times seem idiosyncratic, they can rarely be dismissed as prejudices. He shows the weaknesses of a

writer like Leonard Cohen, for example, without diminishing his true value (as against his inflated public status); he devotes careful attention to writers like Daphne Marlatt and Gerry Gilbert who have perhaps not received their meed of attention, and if he does not persuade us to accept his valuation of them, at least he induces us to read them more carefully; he writes acerbically where (as in the case of Graeme Gibson) he detects a reputation that has been built on scanty real performance; at times, as in the case of Mordecai Richler, he omits with stark justice a writer who has, after all, voluntarily absented himself. There are some Davey criteria I find hard to accept — his polarity of life and anti-life for example — and I am puzzled by some of the conclusions he has reached on this basis: e.g. that P. K. Page is one of the "anti-lifers". Still, this is the best short survey of a comprehensive kind we have had of contemporary Canadian writing, and it is undoubtedly so because Davey is *involved* in the deep and real sense of being a critic and a poet, of being at once part of the world of which he writes and capable of standing outside it.

NEVERTHELESS, poet-critic though he is, Davey is also an academic, and so, at a rough count, are or have been more than half the sixty writers he discusses. It is a lower proportion, I suspect, than it might have been ten years ago, but it is still higher than one is likely to find in countries which have developed a real infrastructure of publishing and literary journalism, and it represents a situation that gives writers at least an interim interest in universities and in what happens to them. (After all, perhaps half the literary journals of Canada, including *Canadian Literature*, would not have existed unless universities had sponsored them and given them at least a modest financial patronage.)

It is this that makes us look with some interest beyond the strict bounds of literary criticism to books on the present state of universities, particularly when they are written by men whose academic interests are primarily directed to literature, like Claude Bissell, or who obviously understand, like Cyril S. Belshaw, that the creative artist has special problems in an academic setting.

In *Halfway Up Parnassus* (University of Toronto Press, $12.50), Bissell presents an autobiographically tinged history of his involvement as student, teacher, administrator, with the University of Toronto. It begins in — and sometimes lapses back into — that peculiar in-group facetiousness of tone which so often passes for wit in an academic setting and which embarrasses the outsider as much as the boyish rituals of service clubs. But soon — and for most of his book — Bissell is quite seriously concerned with the kind of problems that in

recent decades have plagued the administration of large modern universities. In the end one may remain convinced that the only reasonable solution for the problems of the multiversity is dismantling and decentralization, but in the process of reading *Halfway Up Parnassus* one at least gains some sympathy for the predicament of a sensible and sympathetic man caught in the kind of strait between the Scylla of an antiquated authoritarian structure and the Charybdis of a sometimes totalitarian student opposition into which the times have led so many academics.

Cyril S. Belshaw, whose *Towers Besieged* (McClelland & Stewart, $5.95) is descriptively subtitled "The Dilemma of the Creative University"), has had his share of university administration, though on a humbler level than Claude Bissell's, but in his book he sheds his immediate loyalties and antagonisms and attempts to stand outside and sketch the picture of a university that will be creative in the sense that it takes as primary aim the engendering in its members, "students and faculty alike, an ability to ask and formulate questions *linked with generalized knowledge*, and to use evidence, logic and intuitive judgment to provide answers."

To use "evidence, logic and intuitive judgment": that is not, even if the questions and answers may be shaped differently, very far from the processes which writers follow, and it brings one back to the recognition that, though pedantry is the enemy of creation, there is — ideally considered — much in common between the literary world and the academic world. Who of us would not relish the opportunity to visit through time-travel some place like Plato's grove or Epicurus' garden, where the discussion of knowledge was truly disinterested and concerned neither with hopes of employment nor calculations of tenure? One may not accept all Belshaw's propositions in his very personal vision of what a university should be like (and space prevents us from doing more than suggest to readers that they study the book themselves), but there is stimulation in his insistence on creativity as the principal criterion for judging a university, and in his admission that, even so, there are kinds of creativity which the best academy constrains and which must therefore be developed outside its bounds.

THE AUTOBIOGRAPHY, like the travel narrative, is a genre rarely well practiced in Canada. We are not lacking — it is true — in memoirs, and especially in the memoirs of politicians, but these rarely attain the combination of ironic detachment and passionate involvement that characterizes the true autobiography, as it characterizes the true travel book. In *The Siren Years*

(Macmillan, $11.95) — which bears the subtitle of "A Canadian Diplomat Abroad 1937-1945" — Charles Ritchie presents not a formal autobiography, but a journal kept during those years when the second World War passed from inevitability into actuality. But keeping a journal suggests a willingness for what one writes to be read by others, and — even if only half-consciously — every diarist shapes his notes for those unknown but longed-for violators of his privacy. So we might define the journal as an autobiography contemporary with the event, and the autobiography as a journal after the event.

But how many journals ever reach us as they were written down in the heat of the moment's feeling? Certainly *The Siren Years*, in which Charles Ritchie tells — more as an aesthete than as a diplomat — of his experiences in a long-past London, gives the feeling that it has been long and lovingly polished; nothing changed perhaps, but everything burnished in preparation for the sun of public attention to shine upon it. And worth burnishing it all is. I knew intimately and remember nostalgically that war-threatened and war-battered London of which Ritchie writes; I experienced it on a socially lower level perhaps — cheaper restaurants, daughters of the world revolution rather than ballet girls, and Charlotte Street rather than High Bloomsbury — but it retains in my mind the very sense of a magical world threatened by the forces of darkness, and every day presenting its jewels of experience in the midst of horror, that Ritchie transmits. We shall never look on that London again — Ritchie or I or thousands like us — but one is grateful to have it brought back with such love and care, such polished prose and discreet embellishment.

In certain Foreign Services, literary excellence is a tradition. It has been so among the French since Stendhal languished as Consul in Civita Vecchia; I remember the pleasure of encountering the poet Octavio Paz as Mexican Ambassador in Delhi; Britain had its Harold Nicholson. Canada has had Douglas Le Pan and R. A. D. Ford, and Ritchie, though he has left until retirement the pleasure of releasing *The Siren Years*, with its sharp and piquant vignettes of revered Canadians like Vincent Massey as well as of English mandarins like Elizabeth Bowen, is of their company. It might do a vast amount for Canadian foreign relations, and much for the content of Canadian books, if we were to extend the process and offer poets and novelists semi-sinecures in Canadian missions abroad rather than sequestering them, as we too often do, in the concrete towers of Canadian campuses.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

LOWRY'S ANATOMY OF MELANCHOLY

Ronald Binns

HALF-WAY THROUGH *Ultramarine* (1933) the novel's adolescent hero confesses that

> the desire to write is a disease like any other disease; and what one writes, if one is to be any good, must be rooted firmly on some sort of autochthony. And there I abdicate. I can no more create than fly. What I could achieve would be that usual self-conscious first novel, to be reviewed in the mortuary of *The Times Literary Supplement*, a "crude and unpleasant work," something of that nature, of which the principal character would be no more and no less, whether in liquor or in love, than the abominable author himself.[1]

The voice speaking here seems to be less Dana Hilliot's than Malcolm Lowry's, signalling with defensive irony the autobiographical quality of this first novel and its author's acute self-consciousness of the literary weaknesses that can follow on from such transparently-personal inspiration. If the confession was meant to neutralize or provoke the critical response from that particular organ of the English literary establishment it failed, and the paper's reviewer merely noted that "*Ultramarine* reads less as a novel than as the first expansion of shorthand notes taken with a view to making a novel out of a new experience," finding much of the dialogue boring and concluding that "If the art of writing is imitation the author has mastered it; if reconstruction enters into it he has yet some way to go, for he has not attempted to fuse the objective and subjective elements of his narrative into a whole."[2]

From this angle it might seem that *Ultramarine* can only engage our interest as a document of youthful autobiographical jottings, an immature outpouring from the hand that later wrote *Under the Volcano*. Lowry's widow disagrees: "The most important thing about this book, to me, is not its partially autobiographical content, but the fact that at this early period Malcolm was already so completely the self-conscious artist, in control of his material and style."[3] Examining this first novel in the light of Lowry's later career allows us to under-

stand both points of view and to recognize that what rewards the work yields lie precisely within these dual areas of interest.

Clearly Lowry's three early sea-voyages provided an initial resource for his romantic self-mythology, and *Ultramarine* furnishes us with the first full-length expression of this deeply-felt experience, already partially drawn on in four short stories and later to be re-deployed within *Under the Volcano* and "Elephant and Colosseum."[4] Against this context of biographical reference, however, stand the distancing techniques of Lowry's style. His baroque foregrounding, verbal wit, encyclopaedism and densely-literary allusiveness removes the novel from the realm of purely biographical interest and helps to place it within the context of its time. In this sense I would disagree with Mrs. Lowry's opinion that *Ultramarine* is "highly original and, for its time, experimental,"[5] since on the contrary it seems to stand very much within the tradition of the psychological novel as it developed in the work of Joyce and Virginia Woolf and could be sensibly grouped with similar second and third generation modernist novels deriving from this tradition such as Faulkner's *The Sound and the Fury* (1931), Djuna Barnes's *Nightwood* (1936) and Elizabeth Smart's *By Grand Central Station I Sat Down and Wept* (1945).[6]

When reading *Ultramarine* it is also worth bearing in mind two other traditions which Lowry distinctively draws on: firstly, that of the romantic *Bildungsroman* (ranging from *The Prelude* to *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man*), which characteristically deals with the self's development into maturity, and secondly a diverse collection of largely autobiographical sea-voyage literature, including R. H. Dana's *Two Years Before the Mast*, the novels of Melville and Conrad, Eugene O'Neill's play *The Hairy Ape*, and two novels with the largest claims as influences on Lowry's novel, Conrad Aiken's *Blue Voyage* and Nordahl Grieg's *The Ship Sails On*.[7] It would be easy enough to single out other literary perspectives against which to interpret the action of *Ultramarine* since it is a characteristic of encyclopaedism to promote a sense of equality between differing expositions of meaning; I would suggest, however, that the larger meanings of the novel are contained in the three areas of the psychological, the romantic, and the autobiographical to which I have pointed.[8] The stream of fragmentary parodies of T. S. Eliot's poetry which run through *Ultramarine* (never more wryly grotesque than in Hilliot's drunken mutation of the last line from "The Waste Land" into "she shantih" (sea-shanty)) serves to emphasize the radically disrespectful and comic nature of Lowry's relationship to tradition.[9] Although the novel takes us into the familiar territory of the Waste Land ("Women squatted

on the steps of the houses, and, as we passed, hoisted up their skirts, as if mechanically. A gramophone was going somewhere, playing 'My Sweet Hortense.' ") there is no sense of a cultural heritage providing a yardstick against which to measure the fallen modern world. For Lowry a gramophone record is sufficient to register the irony of the situation, whereas in Eliot's poem the incongruity in the act of the typist who "smooths her hair with automatic hand, / And puts a record on the gramophone" relies for its irony on the hidden literary allusion to *The Vicar of Wakefield*. Lowry is not, of course, averse to using Eliot's poetic strategy when it suits him, but there isn't the simple one-way process going on in Lowry's novel as there is in "The Waste Land". The total effect of literary allusion in *Ultramarine* is to contaminate rather than revere and preserve "the tradition". Lowry's use of romantic poetry provides a case in point; in his loneliness and misery Hilliot quotes from Keats, identifying with the narrator of the "Ode to a Nightingale", and yet a short time later he burlesques an equally melancholy lyric of Shelley's to describe the workings of the ship's engine ("The desire of the link for the pivot; of the lever weight for the fulcrum . . . "). What is tonally appropriate in the first instance is, by the very nature of the transformation from lyric fragility ("The desire of the moth for the star, / Of the night for the morrow, / The devotion to something afar / From the sphere of our sorrow") into a mechanical context, entirely incongruous in the second. Consequently one allusion cancels out the effect produced by another. The way in which we interpret Hilliot's voyage is affected by an enlargement of this technique. Clusters of literary allusion allow us to convert Hilliot's journey either upwards into terms of mythic grandeur or downwards into a context of low-life realism, and only by recognizing the contradictory implications of the encyclopaedic array of reference can we realize that the meaning of the voyage falls somewhere in between the two extremes. Although the past matters in *Ultramarine* it is not finally the *literary* past which provides the index to Hilliot's actions but, more simply, the impulses of feeling which stem from his personal past.

BEFORE GOING on to consider what type of feeling is wrought on Hilliot's consciousness by the effect of the past it is worth taking note of a different kind of literary self-consciousness which differentiates *Ultramarine* from a work like *Two Years Before the Mast*. Lowry's novel is something more than simply thinly-veiled autobiography in the way that it self-consciously draws attention to the process by which private experience is rendered into art. Through-

out Chapter Four one of the sailors sets up a chorus of references to a "Yankee fellow":

> "This bird was a journalist or something of that on a paper in Australia. He's travelling round the world for it and singing songs at the piano. He says if you talk to me — "
>
> "Lor lumme days. *Talk* to him. Do you mean he stood you that feed just for talking to him?"
>
> "*Certainly* he did. He kept saying, now say that again. And all the while he was writing in a little black notebook."

The anonymous figure of the expatriate musician writer provides a counterpoint to Hilliot, himself a musician, an exile and a writer registering the bleak working-class experience of life aboard the *Nawab* for eventual literary ends. The documentary realist side of *Ultramarine* is made clear by Hilliot's smattering of allusions to the Preface to the *Lyrical Ballads*:

> " — a selection of the real language of men — " " — the language of these men — " " — I propose myself to imitate and as far as possible to adopt the very language of these men — " " — but between the language of prose and that of metrical composition there neither is nor can be any essential difference — "

The novel divides up fairly evenly between blocks of dialogue and passages of interior monologue, a structural ordering which serves to realize the monotony and imaginative poverty of a sailor's life and the contrasting richness and depths of Hilliot's consciousness, saturated as it is by an eclectic reading in an immense variety of literature. One of the crew tells Hilliot how much he enjoys reading George Bernard Shaw:

> "I don't mean from a literature point of view. I mean from a reading point of view. I dunno how to explain — like. You see, he's always got a message for the proletariat — like. You see us working men ain't the sort of bastards that the moneyed class think us, lying in all morning smoking cigarettes and then telling the tale to the Labour Exchange in the afternoon."

Nowadays we are most likely to read *Ultramarine* "from a literature point of view," recognizing its embryonic anticipations of the themes and techniques of *Under the Volcano*. Nevertheless, it is important to recognize that Lowry's first novel uniquely blends the two very different contemporary genres of the modernist psychological novel and the proletarian realist novel.[10] Lowry escapes the limitations of much committed Thirties' literature by qualifying any tendency towards an easy class-identification, observing many of the petty rivalries which inhere in the *Nawab*'s own hierarchial system of rank and finally subsuming Hilliot's

quest for brotherhood within a larger metaphysical integration. Lowry's realism is, however, more than just a gesture towards fashion and a good instance of its functional relationship to the psychological theme is provided by the way in which the humanizing of Andy, the ship's cook, from his original role of caricatured bully, emphasizes the meaningful change which experience works on Hilliot's perceptions of the world.

Lowry is not averse to subordinating his low-style realism to ironic fictional ends, however, as an apparently chance reference to "Three white leopards" makes clear. In the context of the babble of conversation which composes Chapter Four the remark seems to be associated with the ship's recent intake of zoo animals. At the same time these words duplicate part of a well-known line in Eliot's "Ash Wednesday," and Lowry's contextual placing of the allusion amidst bawdy and brutal dialogue ironically transforms the pre-Raphaelite delicacy of the original source with sardonically grotesque effect. The most radical instance of the falsification involved in the process of mediating experience into fiction is revealed in Hilliot's admission that the figures which have haunted his imagination throughout the novel are conjured from a banal reality:

> As for my father we shall exhume him from his imaginary madhouse, reinstating him to his normal position of tutor, to his liver trouble, his pipe, his dog and his games of chess; my mother may return fearlessly to her eye-bath and her Sanatogen — she may even learn to be proud of her wandering son and I foolish to deny my love for her; my guardian becomes miraculously what he has always been — the family chauffeur . . .

Ultramarine, then, generates a self-scepticism which warns us not to take the novel too directly as confession and which consequently points us towards a consideration of the techniques involved in such distancing.

IN LITERATURE the sea has often functioned as a place of purgatorial suffering where, through separation and apparent loss, the individual moves toward redemption and reconciliation, and Dana Hilliot's voyage proves no exception to this traditional perspective.[11] Although he frequently denies a motive for abandoning the comfort of his wealthy home background to join the harsh conditions of life aboard the *Nawab*, his voluntary ordeal quickly shapes itself into a romantic quest for authenticity through suffering. The voyage becomes a prolonged initiation ceremony with Dana, taunted by the Furies ("singing over their victim, sending him mad. Janet, enjoying it in a white sweater, gloating in

a thin, ululating treble."), seeking and eventually discovering an identity with his social and metaphysical environment.

The epigraph from Chaucer amplifies the meaning of Hilliot's rejection of his home life: in a sense "wrecchedness" is where he belongs, and suffering becomes the only road to freedom. He recognizes this when, in the inferno of the stokehold, he perceives that the firemen "seemed to get more fun out of life than the seamen, and seemed somehow to be better, in some queer way to be nearer God —." This central paradox underlies the novel and finds enlargement in the warring tension between innocence and experience in Dana's consciousness. Although he is contemptuous of his background and of "those who carried the whole horizon of their lives in his pocket" he finds himself unable to relinquish the pressures of the past, obsessively returning to a mental picture of his virginal girlfriend, Janet, and the promise she has extracted from him to remain *virgo intacta.* He experiences the pain of the social outcast, enduring the bullying of the crew and their mockery at his sexual timidity. His one attempt to pick up a whore in one of the Asian ports ends in failure and drunkenness, and he retreats into narcissistic fantasy, alcohol ("I *could* drink, anyway; there were no complications about that") and, the crew bluntly suggest, masturbation. Hilliot's feelings of sexual neurosis and guilt are further compounded by an irrational terror of syphilis, the unwelcome attentions of a homosexual quartermaster, and the bragging of the crew about their brothel exploits. He longs to heal his fractured perceptions within a vision of order and simplicity, and the ship's engine becomes a central symbol of his metaphysical goal,

> in the engine of the *Nawab*, with whose disunion, as perceived by him, he felt his sympathy to be perfect, existed also that revolution from complex [*sic*] he so desired: and it was precisely this order, more particularly regarding Janet, but also in regard to Andy and Norman — and the quartermaster! — that his consciousness lacked — was it lacking in intensity too? — and would, so far as he could see, always lack. Order, do you hear? Listening, Janet?

Hilliot's self-questioning about the intensity of his consciousness is purely rhetorical, since there is no denying the deeply-felt dramatic power of his imagination, however much we may deprecate his tendency to wallow in self-pity. His desire for "revolution from [the?] complex" calls to mind Lowry's own wish, expressed in a letter to Conrad Aiken around the time *Ultramarine* was being finally completed, "for escaping from the subtle and sophisticated."[12] In describing *Ultramarine* as an anatomy of melancholy I do not, however, want to indulge in biographical speculation and make a simple equation between Hilliot and

Lowry but instead propose a single focus of attention which enables us to distinguish the central characteristic of Hilliot's cerebral journey from confusion to equilibrium.

The origins of Dana Hilliot's name are overtly literary. "Dana" clearly derives from the name of the author of *Two Years Before the Mast*, while "Hilliot" carries a distorted echo of "Hamlet." On occasion he also refers to himself as "Eugene Dana Hilliot," a name drawn obviously enough from the author of *The Hairy Ape*. The relationship between Hilliot and Hamlet is, however, more than semantic, since Hilliot's behaviour on board the *Nawab* seems closely equivalent to that malady known to Renaissance England as melancholy, a malady of which the two outstanding studies were *Hamlet* and Robert Burton's *Anatomy of Melancholy*. Melancholy was regarded as a psychopathological condition stemming from an excess of one of the four humours and characterized by morbidity, passivity, wretchedness, grotesque hallucinations and a longing for death. All of these symptoms are displayed by Dana Hilliot up to the time when he breaks out of his brooding Hamlet-like inactivity to verbally confront his main persecutor, Andy, in a scene which provides the prelude to his release from isolation and mental torment. The analysis of Hilliot as a sufferer from melancholy proves equally viable in modern psychological terms, since according to Freud's definition in "Mourning and Melancholia,"

> The distinguishing mental features of melancholia are a profoundly painful dejection, abrogation of interest in the outside world, loss of the capacity to love, inhibition of all activity, and a lowering of the self-regarding feelings to a degree that finds utterance in self-reproaches and self-revilings, and culminates in a delusional expectation of punishment.[13]

As a modernist psychological novel, then, *Ultramarine* provides a dramatic analysis of melancholy, exhaustively dissecting Hilliot's nightmarish interior world and using a variety of encyclopaedic techniques to body out its wide-ranging exploration of an abnormal state of mind. By encyclopaedism I mean not only the use of a vast array of literary allusions and echoes but also the narrative technique of listing contingent materials like notices, names and numbers, that particular quality of stylized exaggeration which for example makes Hilliot typically bemoan not simply the distance that lies between him and his beloved, but "The Yellow Sea, the Black Sea, the Dead Sea, the Red Sea, and all the seventy-seven seas, and more than seas, that lie between us."

It is symptomatic of melancholy that it seems to lack any external causation, and Hilliot confesses that his tormented condition is congenital:

> When I was fourteen I was under the delusion for a year I was Thomas Chatterton . . . mad? No . . . not even that. But a kind of semi-madman, pernicious and irritating and apathetic in the extreme, for whom in madness, as in death to the impotent, exists the only dignified escape.

He reveals that his father is in a mental hospital and demonstrates an obsession with the idea of heredity, brooding on his dead relatives in Oslo cemetery and claiming himself as the only survivor of the family taint of madness. Later he denies an etiology in heredity, admits that his father is in fact only in a nursing home with a kidney ailment, and confesses that

> The apparent facts are largely imaginary. I assume the guilt of a mother, or of a father, or of a heredity, imagine it completely, to be able on the one hand to give an adequate explanation of my more inexplicable actions, and on the other in order to be clothed in a dark, blood-stained dignity. Some of these points are raised, and you may have read for yourself, in my much maligned and certainly dangerous and misleading work, *Hamlet*.

The heredity theme recurs when Popplereuter, Norman and Dana visit the anatomical museum on their evening ashore, a museum containing grotesque exhibits and bible-thumping polemic about depravity and heredity. The museum guide provides an ironic miniature of the novel itself in the way it arranges encyclopaedic perspectives around a simple theme, piling up medical rhetoric to assert "the awful effects of MAN leading a DEPRAVED life visiting the iniquity of the FATHERS upon the CHILDREN." Although the accretive method of the guide points up the structural techniques of the novel there is of course the crucial difference that its naive didacticism ("if any man defile the temple of God, him will God destroy, for the temple of God is holy, WHICH TEMPLE YOU ARE. . . . ") lacks any self-consciousness whatsoever and is hence authoritarian, whereas *Ultramarine* persistently invites the reader to re-adjust his point of view by undermining its mythic and romantic dimensions with parody.

Like Joyce and Beckett, Lowry reveals a fascination with arcane medical rhetoric, and he inserts odd medical terms into the narrative which make up a ramifying network of associations coming together under the theme of melancholy. Hilliot, we remember, sees the urge to write as a *disease* and asserts that he would never make a novelist because he isn't creative and because "what one writes . . . must be rooted firmly on some sort of autochthony." The oblique joke here is the transparency of the distinction that he is making (so far as *Ultramarine* is concerned), since to be autochthon is to be a native of the land you inhabit, and the term lives on in the vocabulary of medicine as the *Oxford English*

Dictionary observes: "An autochthonous or primitive thrombus is one which remains confined in the part in which it first arose, especially in the heart." Likewise Lowry's fiction remained largely confined to autobiographical material. Paradoxically the two sides of the novel are brought together here in the way that we are shown both the confinement of the fiction to themes close to the heart of the writer, while at the same time we are reminded that in expressing his subjective inspiration the writer is forced to use the public medium of language. If a biography of Lowry illuminates our understanding of *Ultramarine* a comprehensive dictionary proves equally necessary.

The heredity theme which runs through *Ultramarine* connects the medical vocabulary with Hilliot's sexual obsessions. Reference to "the metacarpi of Eugene Dana Hilliot" draws attention to his sense of guilt about his hands, relating both to the motif of masturbation and to his inability in school geometry lessons to draw a regular hexagon because of the clumsy bigness of his hands. The metaphysical quest for order symbolized by the geometry motif runs parallel with Hilliot's dark broodings on sex and inheritance; at one point he imagines that

> The centre of the Charing Cross, ABCD, the Cambridge Circle, the Cambridge Circus, is Hilliot . . . shafts of wit, laced with blood, AB, CD are the diameters.
>
> Now with his navel as centre and half CD as radius, describe a vicious circle! An order imperiously given! Hear me, Janet, maker of all these thoughts and words, these finite stupidities and speculations, an incantation for yourself, our unborn son, and me.

As has been pointed out, Hilliot is the first of the Lowry heroes, discovering himself to be the centre of the world and having to find an identity between his imagination and his environment.[14] His obsession with heredity, order and metaphysical speculation coheres within a fantasy sequence which enlarges on the possibiliites of parenthood with the Janet he "abwhores":

> Between the Tarot and the cabbage, the systole and the diastole, between the pleuritic friction, the intercostal spaces and the wild west; between the paroxysm and dyspnoea our child, Janet — this has occurred to me; to what extent may it not be subject to the pre-natal influences? Supposing we ever had one. Heredity. Tee-hee! Or perhaps the humour of the *thing* escapes you. That in the original unity of the first thing lies the secondary cause of all things with the germ of their inevitable annihilation?

The immediate parody of Eliot's "The Hollow Men" quickly slides into surreal visionary speculation staged in medical terms and moving at a breathtaking pace

with an oblique wit which suggests Hilliot's almost incoherent distaste for his prudish and anaemic girlfriend. The tone is one of levelling irony and the idea of parenthood is converted into something altogether grotesque, with the pun on "humour" pointing both to the metaphysical possibilities which Hilliot alone discerns and to his tragic insight into the decay and ultimate obliteration which conditions existence. The "humour" is both comic — expressed in the incongruous juxtaposition of superstition and informed medical knowledge — and bitterly fatalistic; the history of the world since the Fall is reduced to a strip-cartoon with Eve (plucked from "the intercostal spaces") at one end and the wild west at the other. This duality of tone is maintained in the subsequent parody of bourgeois domesticity which follows, though the underlying sense of doom is finally realized by Hilliot's mournful vision of his child as the fated syphilitic victim of his father's vice:

> a twisted, witless mask, grinning sightlessly at us, two holes in the bridgeless nose, the sightless eyes like leaden bullets sunk into the face. . . . Myself, also, the man without a soul. It died, suddenly, at the age of eight.

Unable to account for his melancholic disposition Hilliot takes a morbid delight in fabricating nightmarish intimations of a tragic life and imminent mortality. In one notable fantasy he sees himself broken by syphilis and wandering through Liverpool while a chorus of newsboys shouts the news that the *Oxenstjerna* has gone aground and is polluting the river Mersey. This ship, which keeps coincidentally returning throughout *Ultramarine* to cross Hilliot's path, serves as a visible reminder of the past, evoking memories of the times when he and Janet had watched it sailing past and symbolizing the "iron bond" of his love for her. The metaphor suggests that this love is imprisoning, something to be escaped from, and the imagery of pollution and death which attends the imaginary shipwreck makes the actual final appearance of the *Oxenstjerna* at the close of the novel suggestively ambiguous in its meaning for him.

THE CENTRAL INCIDENT in the novel which proves the turning point of Hilliot's search for acceptance and order is the drowning of the galley-boy's pet pigeon. Much to Hilliot's chagrin he had earlier been rudely restrained from saving the bird when it was originally discovered resting from exhaustion at the top of the mainmast, and instead Norman had shinned up and gained the glory of capturing it. Mid-way on the voyage, however, the bird — which has

had its wings clipped and been caged — escapes to quench its thirst, flops into the sea and begins to drown. While the crew gather helplessly, certain that the sea is dangerous to swim in,

> a little white motor boat was skidding along the water coquettishly and then turning almost in its own length and retracing its course looking more foolish than ever. The crowd yelled at it, all hooting and trumpeting at once, but its engine was making too much noise, and its only occupant divided his attention between the wheel and the spurting exhaust, which he seemed to be admiring from time to time by looking over the side at it.

The bird drowns, and the tragic futility of the incident is underlined by the arrival of the agent who announces that the harbour is perfectly safe for swimming.

The scene expresses more than simply a naturalistic situation. There is a clear association between the Chaucer epigraph and the pigeon's fate, focussed by Hilliot's earlier perception that "The pigeon might be the very messenger of love itself" and by the symbolic role of the little white motor boat. Throughout *Ultramarine* the colour white is overtly linked with Janet, and the implications of the coquettish, narcissistic activities of the boat accompanying the pigeon's death seem inescapable.[15] "Drowned" in memories and immersed in the dark world of experience Hilliot can no longer be attracted by the sugary platonic love that Janet has to offer. At last he has found an equilibrium in suffering and his willingness to risk his own life to save the pigeon sets the seal on the initiation process. Hilliot and Andy become staunch friends, the ship turns round for the homeward journey, the "indifferent point" of Hilliot's voyage is reached simultaneously in geometrical and metaphysical terms and the ship's engine-room no longer signifies muddle and confusion:

> The tragedy of the afternoon, the horrors of the voyage were forgotten; all at once he had a perfectly clear vision of himself, as if a red leaf should fall on a white torrent. Instantly there was no lack of order in his life, no factors wrongly co-ordinated, no loose tangled ends.[16]

Similarly Lowry the novelist fashions an order out of the complex confusions of Hilliot's consciousness, and the final chapter provides a complete resolution of the various strands of the novel. The letter that Hilliot receives from Janet shows her to be every bit as girlishly immature as the impression we have previously received from his memories. Her remarks tend to be as incongruously ironic as those on the card which he gets from the weighing machine after his riotous

night ashore when he learns that he is "of a simple disposition, quiet and home-loving":

> I loved our talk last Sunday evening before you went home, because you were so manly, and you put things so simply and without making excuses for them, and I understood and felt proud of you. Please always tell me things in that way. I shall always understand if you do! Oh, Dana, the sun is shining ever so brightly and the grass in the cricket field looks wonderfully fresh after the rain — will you tell me that you love me always?

The break in communication is comically complete, and Hilliot begins to compose a reply that he knows he will never send. As he sardonically points out, highlighting the difference between her simple brisk cheerfulness and his own complex self-conscious melancholia, "If you were one with Charcot and Bernheim — I would try to tell you — if I could only tell you — if it would be worth your while to understand." Charcot and Bernheim were the major influences on Freud's early investigations into hysteria, and there is a passage in Freud's memoir of Charcot which seems to ironically reflect on Hilliot's obsession with heredity and syphilis:

> As for the aetiological theories which Charcot defended in his doctrine of the '*famille neuropathique*' and made the cornerstone of his whole conception of nervous diseases, they too will probably soon need to be probed into and corrected. So greatly did Charcot over-estimate heredity as a cause that no loophole was left by which nervous disease could be acquired; to syphilis he allotted only a modest place amongst the '*agents provocaturs*' . . . [17]

In the end Hilliot's "perfectly clear vision" of himself enables him to dismiss his obsessions and become one with the crew and the ship. He frames his explanations in explicitly psychoanalytical terms, telling Janet that although she has acted "as an inhibiting factor" she is now, at the same time, "a sublimatory factor":

> Although Andy beat me out in port, it ceases to bother me because first, there is yourself; secondly, being in love with you I have the universal experience of sublimated all-embracing love for mankind. There is no need to invent a venereal lineage for myself; it is no longer amusing; my innocent aunts, and their equally innocent parents may rest in peace in Oslo cemetry. Put a flower on their graves for me — rose instead of lobelia syphilitica.

Ultramarine closes with a note of affirmation and hope; Hilliot plans to discover "something to change for the better, to transform from wasting into growth" and he turns his back on narcissistic fantasy: "Dreaming, when reading psychology, of climbing the Jungfrau. Getting lost in tunnels, tube stations, caves . . .

Never again." In Jungian terms Hilliot has achieved individuation, and he makes social use of his brilliant imagination by delighting the crew with an hilarious and lurid fantasy — which he spuriously passes off as a genuine dream — about the escape of the animals in the *Nawab*. In other words it is a *fiction* which, after the confrontation with Andy and the subsequent incident of the drowning pigeon, provides the final proof of Hilliot's acceptance by the crew and of his own coming to terms with the harsh realities of adult experience. Implicitly it is *Ultramarine* itself which is, as Dana Hilliot's autobiography, the final evidence in this process of self-recognition.

Hilliot vows "to be outward bound, always outward bound, always onward, to be fighting always for the dreamed-of harbour" and at that exact moment Nikolai, the fireman, comes to tell him that he is to be a replacement coaltrimmer, "a proper *limper*." Initiation is complete, and the immediate coincidence of the re-appearing *Oxenstjerna* provokes not fantasy and self-pity but the cool admission that he's seen the ship before "once or twice." The elegaic last sentence ("But oh, Janet, no sorrow is so bad as that which quite goes by") expresses Hilliot's wistful leavetaking of his past, which no longer possesses its power to inflict pain and neurosis.

Ultramarine is rather more tightly constructed than critics have on the whole been prepared to concede, and the novel resolves its patterns of theme and image with a complex aesthetic completeness. The ending contains some ambiguity, however, since the nature of Hilliot's future relationship with Janet seems poised on a fine balance. Although she provides a sublimating medium for his exuberant affirmations of social fraternity, the enormous distance in communication between her vapid sentimentality and his sharp sense of irony makes Hilliot's assertions of love seem equivocal, and this impression is magnified by his radical admission: "My writing? You or any woman can do that for me." In this sense *Ultramarine* anticipates the structural pattern of both *Dark as the Grave Wherein My Friend is Laid* and *October Ferry to Gabriola*, where the open-ended plots similarly have the effect of converting the closing rhetorical expressions of optimism and affirmation into tentative gestures rather than securely-grounded certainties. Whatever we may feel about the substantiality of a future relationship between Dana Hilliot and Janet there is no doubt that he himself provides one of the rarer examples in Lowry's fiction of the finally integrated personality, saved rather than destroyed by suffering.[18]

Encyclopaedic writers tend to channel their creative energy into one major book (Rabelais, Burton, Sterne) and Lowry — not altogether intentionally —

proves no exception, *Under the Volcano* itself providing sufficient motive for further reading into the brilliant ruins of the epic scheme which he planned around the masterpiece. Of all Lowry's novels *Ultramarine* stands the furthest outside this scheme, elliptically sounding-out some of the later creative themes. In its awareness of literary process *Ultramarine* evidences a conceptual interest which remained in suspension during Lowry's career until reinvigorated by his reading of Ortega y Gasset two decades later to become the major theme of the *Hear Us O Lord . . .* volume. It is nevertheless *Under the Volcano* which, finally, provides the closest link with *Ultramarine*, owing less to schematic or thematic considerations than to structural ones; the anatomy is more important than the melancholy. Both novels originated in short-story form, and the example of Joyce (who of course conceived *Ulysses* as a short story) provides an index to the reasoning and the techniques involved in an encyclopaedic enlargement of unpromising short stories into epic portraits of sensibility. *Ultramarine* is Lowry's apprentice-work and though perhaps at times flawed by self-pity and an intoxication with words we can quickly discern the young author feeling his way towards the technical mastery of the major novel. Although the themes change in the later fiction as the quest for integration and completeness becomes increasingly elusive, Lowry's heroes never quite lose the sense of melancholy which drenches Dana Hilliot's consciousness. *Ultramarine* encapsulates the embryo of an entire creative career and therefore deserves greater recognition that it has hitherto received.

NOTES

[1] All quotations from *Ultramarine* are taken from the first edition (London, 1933). Mrs. Lowry's "Introductory Note" to the Revised Edition (London, 1963) should be consulted for the valuable background information it provides concerning the original publication of the novel and Lowry's later decision to locate it as the first volume in the projected epic novel sequence *The Voyage That Never Ends.* A comparison of the two versions suggests that Lowry's intentions were never realized, and the connections with *Under the Volcano* remain tenuous. Evidently sporadic revisions include the addition of apparently casual marginal annotations (for example, in the Revised Edition the conversation between Popplereuter and Hilliot in Chapter Three is abruptly interrupted by the remark, "I forgot to mention there was a war on about half a mashie shot away, it being June, 1927, but that has no part in the story."). Other revisions include the addition of the second epigraph from Richardson and the removal of the original dedication to Elizabeth Cheyne and Thomas Forman. In the case of this particular extract the Revised Edition changes — presumably corrects — "on" to "in" in the first sentence.

[2] Anon., *Times Literary Supplement*, July 13th, 1933, p. 481. Three decades later the paper took note of Lowry's allusion and reviewed the Revised Edition in

considerably more enthusiastic tones as "an astonishing *tour de force* ... A novel which can be placed confidently on the shelf next to Melville himself." (Anon., *Times Literary Supplement*, March 22nd, 1963, p. 197.)

[3] Op. cit.

[4] The four short stories are "Port Swettenham," (February 1930), "Goya the Obscure" (June 1930), "Punctum Indifferens Skibet Gaar Videre" (Winter 1930-31?) and "On Board the *West Hardaway*" (October 1933). For places of publication see J. Howard Woolmer, *A Malcolm Lowry Catalogue* (New York, 1968). The third of these stories became Chapter Four of *Ultramarine* whereas the others were substantially rewritten before inclusion in the novel.

[5] Op. cit.

[6] See Leon Edel, *The Psychological Novel 1900-1950* (London, 1961) and Melvin Friedman, *Stream of Consciousness: A Study in Literary Method* (New Haven, 1955). Two useful essays which help in placing *Ultramarine* against the background of modernism are Richard Hauer Costa, "*Ulysses*, Lowry's *Volcano* and the *Voyage* Between: A Study of an Unacknowledged Literary Kinship," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, XXXVI, pp. 335-52, and "Malcolm Lowry as Modernist" in Malcolm Bradbury, *Possibilities: Essays on the State of the Novel* (London/Oxford/New York, 1973).

[7] For the influence of Aiken see Costa, Op. Cit. For the influence of Grieg see the letter by W. G. Simpson in the *Times Literary Supplement*, April 12, 1963, p. 249. Lowry also confessed in a letter to Grieg written in 1938 that "Much of *Ultramarine* is paraphrase, plagiarism, or pastiche from you." (Harvey Breit and Margerie Bonner Lowry (Eds.), *The Selected Letters of Malcolm Lowry* (London, 1967), p. 16). Lowry also worked on a play version of Grieg's novel, and his short story "Punctum Indifferens Skibet Gaar Videre" refers in the last three words of the title to Grieg's book, published by Knopf in translation as *The Ship Sails On* in 1927.

[8] For a relevant analysis of the perplexing effects of encyclopaedism on critical interpretation of Joyce see Arnold Goldman, *The Joyce Paradox* (London, 1966).

[9] The joke is excised in the Revised Edition. For a student at Cambridge to make fun of T. S. Eliot at this time was a very subversive thing to do. According to James Reeves the new undergraduate was handed *Poems 1909-1925* and *The Sacred Wood* with the same air of hushed reverence as "the stranger who enters an Anglican Church at service time is handed two books, *Hymns Ancient and Modern* and *The Book of Common Prayer*." Quoted by R. C. Townsend in "Cambridge English: The Idea of an English School," *Critical Survey*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (Winter 1967). In his letter to James Stern of May 7th, 1940 Lowry refers to Reeves as having "loathed me at Cambridge for three years." For further information about Lowry's unhappy years at Cambridge see Conrad Knickerbocker, "Swinging the Paradise Street Blues: Malcolm Lowry in England," *Paris Review*, 38 (Summer 1966) and Gerald Noxon, "Malcolm Lowry: 1930," *Prairie Schooner*, XXXVII, No. 4 (Winter 1963-64).

[10] An interesting comparison in this respect is the fiction of Edward Upward, six years older than Lowry and also educated at Cambridge. His novella *Journey to the Border* (1938) — reprinted in *The Railway Accident and Other Stories* (Harmondsworth, 1972) — brilliantly blends psychological obsession with political gesture.

[11] See W. H. Auden, *The Enchafed Flood* (London, 1951).

[12] *Selected Letters*, p. 8.

[13] Sigmund Freud, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 4 (London, 1925; 1957) p. 152. For a discussion of melancholy in Renaissance literature see Lawrence Babb, *The Elizabethan Malady* (Lansing, Mich., 1951).

[14] See William H. New, *Malcolm Lowry* (Toronto, 1971), p. 24.

[15] Lowry's use of colour symbolism was apparently a good deal more complex in the lost novel *In Ballast to the White Sea*. See Lowry's letter to David Markson of August 25th, 1951 (*Selected Letters* pp. 247-266).

[16] New (Op. Cit. p. 23) draws attention to the connection between the geometric pun in the title of Lowry's story "Punctum Indifferens Skibet Gaar Videre" and a remark in Coleridge's *Aids to Reflection* which illuminates the meaning of the "pointless (or indifferent) point" which the ship sails on.

[17] Sigmund Freud, *Collected Papers*, Vol. 1 (London, 1924; 1957), p. 41.

[18] For a different interpretation of this last chapter, which views the past as triumphant and the future relationship between the lovers as positive, see the essay "Malcolm Lowry as Novelist" in George Woodcock, *Odysseus Ever Returning* (Toronto, 1970).

ENEMY

P. K. Page

Tied together to race and race.
Three-legged.
Strides unmatched
and heights.
Not liking each others' smell.

They bind us together in sport
over and over.

The field is green.
The gun is fired.
The astonishing heavens
arch over us.
The fleet matched runners pass.

An obscene and wounded animal
we hobble
on darkening grass.

AIKEN AND LOWRY

Geoffrey Durrant

IN AN ARTICLE in *Canadian Literature* 44 I suggested that Malcolm Lowry's story "Through the Panama" made use not only of the story of the Ancient Mariner, but also of the voyage of Ulysses as this is interpreted in the neo-Platonic versions of the myth.[1] In addition I suggested that the union of Martin with his Primrose, the threat of their separation, and their love in the dark was an allusion to the story of Cupid and Psyche, in which the union of the lovers represents the harmony of intellect and feelings, and their separation a division in the human soul.

The suggestion relied on an examination of the story itself, and not on the sources from which Lowry might have gained a knowledge of these pervasive myths. In what follows I hope to demonstrate the use of the Psyche myth and of the Ulysses myth in much the same way in Conrad Aiken's *Blue Voyage*, a work by which Lowry was strongly influenced.[2] I shall show that the Ulysses myth plays an important part in Lowry's *Ultramarine*.[3] I shall also indicate the part that is played in both *Blue Voyage* and *Ultramarine* by the myth of Narcissus as a representation of the descent of the soul into the sensual world of generation, in accordance with the neo-Platonic interpretation of this myth. I hope that this may be interesting as showing how modern writers may make use of an ancient tradition, and also that this may cast some light both on Lowry's debt to Aiken and on Lowry's originality in the use that he makes of the myths in question.

MALCOLM LOWRY'S indebtedness to Aiken in general, and in particular to *Blue Voyage*, needs no demonstration. Lowry's *Ultramarine* takes its title from the "ultramarine abyss" of Aiken's book, and similarly attempts the use of a voyage as a representation of human life. There is also, apart from the relationships that I shall point to in this article, a general resemblance of style. Both Aiken and Lowry draw on a wide range of reading — on the whole Western tradition — for linguistic and mythical elaboration. Both are lavish in their

quotation from other writers, and both are ingenious in their use of double meanings, and of names that hint at a significance. In *Blue Voyage* Demarest, the hero, says:

> I waste a lot of time in logolatry. I am a verbalist, Cynthia — a tinkling symbolist. I am the founder and leader of a new school of literature — The Emblemists.

This is true not only of Demarest, but also of his creator. The pun in "tinkling symbolist", for example, might easily be missed by a hasty reader (and would not be a very serious loss). At times Aiken calls attention to a verbal parallel; he notes for example that "Agnes Day = Agnus Dei" and tells us that "Faubion = Fleshpot." The whole scheme of names in the book appears to be based on similar ingenuities.

Blue Voyage is the story of William Demarest's journey from New York to London, in search of his Cynthia, whom he has met on a previous eastbound voyage. What he hopes for from this love is a Platonic transcendence of the flesh:

> What I hoped was that at last I had found a love which somehow *transcended the flesh.* Yes — I actually persuaded myself that I had captured the chimaera; and that in Cynthia and poor William the phoenix and the turtle had met.

Cynthia is thought to be in London, at the eastward goal of the journey. However, she is, it soon appears, on the same ship as William, though separated from him because she is in the first class, while he is in the cabin class. (This theme of *separation* is recurrent in the story.) The intellectual nature of the relationship is signified by the playing of chess on the previous voyage, and by many explicit statements. Cynthia "whose face was turned to the east" is, as her name suggests, an unattainable Diana, a chaste moon-goddess. The journey to the east is a journey to the home of Cynthia; her appearance on the voyage, separated from William, and indeed rejecting him, suggests the unattainable nature, in this life, of the striving for a purely intellectual state of being. William finally succeeds in escaping from the passion for Cynthia, dismissing her as a "stained-glass window". However, he finds consolation in the arms of Mrs. Faubion, a "savage" or "fauve" who offers him more accessible joys than those of the pure intellect.

The symbolism of the William-Cynthia-Faubion triangle is obvious enough; and the voyage to the east is presented without disguise as an equivalent to the journey of life. There are however many indications of a more elaborate symbolism, and in particular of deliberate and sustained reference to the neo-Platonic myths.

In particular, three major neo-Platonic myths are introduced. The first is that of the voyage of Ulysses, which is understood as representing the progress of the soul, in its ship of the body, over the dark sea of the material world, towards its true home or paternal port in Ithaca, where it may hope to be re-united with its Penelope, who represents the *sophia* or true wisdom of the soul.[4] The second is the myth of Cupid and Psyche, in which Cupid represents man's intelligence, and Psyche his affective or emotional nature.[5] Their separation in the story — brought about by Psyche's desire to *know* too much — represents the unhappy separation of mind and feeling in man's experience. Their union, and their love in the dark, represents a happy and harmonious balancing of mind and feelings. The third of these myths, introduced only at the end of the novel, and touched on only briefly, is that of Narcissus whose love of his own image, seen by reflection in a mirror, is understood by the neo-Platonists as a symbol of the soul, in love with its own generated image, and in consequence of this infatuation falling into the sensuality of a lower order of existence.[6]

The Ulysses theme is sounded early in the novel, when Frank Smith, an ageing music-salesman from New Orleans, returning to his "home" in England, is compared with Ulysses:

> "You're like Ulysses, setting out at last to find the rim of the world, the Pillars of Hercules."
>
> "Not much! No exploring for me. I want to get back, that's all."

In other words, the comparison made is the wrong one; this is not a Ulysses on his final voyage of intellectual exploration, but a Ulysses who wants only to "get back" to his home. (This is represented in the novel as a death-wish, as a final refusal of the westward journey of exploration.) Demarest in jest pretends that Smith is his father, so that he himself becomes, on the voyage, a Telemachus, or younger version of Ulysses, seeking the east, not out of weariness, but out of a longing for fulfilment. (Smith is also jestingly represented as "a kleptomaniac", and thus as akin to the thieving Ulysses.)

The significance of the voyage to the east is not deeply hidden, but it is made explicit only in the later chapters of the book:

> ... Here he stands, on the deck of a dark ship, which is moving eastward at fifteen knots an hour. The steersman shifts the wheel, his eyes on the binnacle ... Who is this little, this pathetic Demarest? We laugh at him, and also we weep for him; for he is humanity, he is God.... he struggles — why? to avoid the making of mistakes, to escape the tyrant solipsism, and to know himself; like us, he endeavours to return to God.

(Here it may be noted that the aim of the neo-Platonic wisdom is to return to God through self-knowledge. It should also be noted that the name Demarest may be resolved into *De - mar - est*, or "of the sea, eastward".) The opening chapter of the novel, however, offers other evidence of the neo-Platonic system, though this is not likely to be obvious to the casual reader. Thus the wharf from which the ship sails is described as "an enormous, depressing place, cavernous" — a reference to the Platonic view of this life as a cavern. The notion of imprisonment, and of birth as an entry into a cave, a spider's web, a cage, in which the soul is utterly alienated and alone, is here advanced:

> What disgusting animals ships were; always fouling their sides with garbage.... He crawled up the next gangway, steep as a funicular, and stepped on the resilient deck. O Thalassa! Thalassa! Unmerciful sea. He was already fairly launched into the infinite, the immense solitude which seemed (to the steward who took his bag) to mean so little. Yes: alone. Alone with the sea for eight days: alone in a cage with a world of tigers roaring outside.
>
> "Am I alone in this cabin?" he asked.

(This may be compared with Lowry's use of the cabin in "Through the Panama": "The cramped cabin our obvious place on earth.") The image of the web (as the web of Persephone, and also as the spider's web of Arachne, with which the soul is entangled in the world of nature) is used by Aiken in the longing of Demarest to escape:

> ... Ah, that incurable longing for escape, for a spider's cable by which he might swing himself abruptly into space or oblivion! But this time, was it an escape or a return?

In the general pattern of significance, even the buying of seasick pills, described in the first words of the novel, has its place, since the soul, in the neo-Platonic account, is drugged into forgetfulness of its origins before it begins its journey into the world of the senses:

> It had suddenly occurred to him that he had forgotten his seasick pills — the little pink and green box was indispensable — oh, absolutely! A charm against sea-serpents.

So Demarest stops at a drug-store to replenish his supply. Here his musings, as he stands waiting, are about the coming voyage; they are filled with incipient nausea at the prospect it offers:

> O God, what a prospect! And the ship — what was the ship? A congregation of gigantic mushroom-like ventilators, red-throated, all belching a smell of hot oil

> and degenerate soup, with sounds of faint submarine clankings. Among them, a few pale stewards, faces like cauliflowers, carrying gladstone bags and hot-water bottles . . . He suddenly felt queasy.

This, echoing Hamlet's view of this world as a "pestilent congregation of vapours", establishes the ship as an image of the life of the senses, and man's condition in this life as an inescapable nausea and alienation. Demarest, like all men, still hopes for a happy voyage, with "blue sky, sunny decks, and a beautiful, mysterious young lady to talk to." There are indeed young ladies to talk to on the ship, but there is no gracious Lady of Generation to guarantee anything like a happy voyage.

The young ladies Demarest meets on the voyage include not only his inaccessible Cynthia, but also a Welsh girl, an Irish girl who is identified with Psyche, and a Daisy Dacey, who may be Aiken's side-glance at the Daisy of Scott Fitzgerald's *The Great Gatsby*, which was published two years before *Blue Voyage*. The Welsh girl is described as a "*lamia*", and as a vampire; she is studiously avoided by Demarest, and plays no important role in his own story:

> A vampire, a serpent, a lamia, a carrion-flower, — yes, a mouth like a carrion-flower, and giving out poisonous juices; for, as she laughed, Demarest noticed that her lower lip, which was undershot, was wet with saliva.

However, the ship's pianist falls into her toils, so that the suggestion conveyed is that the artist is the natural prey of this *fleur de mal*:

> She drew back a little, narrowed her eyes at the pianist's thick spectacles, then directed suddenly at Demarest a serpentine smile, at the same time giving him a gleaming wink quick as the eye of a kodak.

The Baudelairean evil is no great threat to Demarest himself, nor is the ideal represented by Daisy Dacey, who is weak and silly, and reminds Demarest of Ophelia:

> There's rosemary — that's for remembrance. Wan, and oh so wistful. Weak, and oh so helpless. But no pansies — ah not: for never a thought had she. Straying with little white feet among the lilies. Oh, pity me, a shop-worn Ophelia.

The three women to whom Demarest is attracted are Cynthia, who torments him with her unattainability; the Irish girl, who seems to proffer warmth and joy, but from whom he is separated by their mutual shyness; and finally Faubion, who gaily makes her own advances, and into whose arms he falls in the last pages of the novel. Each of these women represents a different life-choice — Cynthia

of a transformation of experience through the intellect, the Irish girl of a kindling of the emotional life, and Faubion of a joyful celebration of the life of the senses, of Nature itself. They are in other words his Penelope, his Psyche, and his Circe. Enough has already been shown of the role of Cynthia; it remains to show how the Irish girl is associated with Psyche, and Faubion with Circe.

The Irish girl, who has "innocent grey eyes and a mouth just amiably weak", appears early in the story talking to "two solid prelates". She is in general shown as inviting Demarest's approaches, but as too shy to give him the encouragement without which he is afraid to make the first move:

> ... She eyed him with a sort of tentative candour, a smile withheld ... He felt shy and turned stiffly away ...

The opportunity lost is more than a shipboard flirtation; in his restless reveries Demarest identifies the Irish girl with Psyche, who loved Cupid in the dark, but yielded to temptation and brought a lamp to the bedside in order to see the god:

> *Zring* went the Irish girl's bed-curtains again and *tschunk* went the electric switch on the wall, leaving dark the reticulated grill over the upper berth; and then the bunk creaked, and creaked seasawingly, as the Irish girl got into it, and creaked as she corkscrewed her Irish body down the ship-folded bed-clothes; and an elbow thumped the matchboard partition close to Demarest's ear, and then grazingly bruised it again, and then a padded round knee bumped, and the elbow again more softly knocked. ...
>
> . . . . . .
>
> Is it you, darling?? In the dark? where? ... Don't pause to knock, but approach swiftly through the night of sound and water, step serenely from thrum to thrum of the ship's engines, from heartbeat to heartbeat of the terraqueous god. Is it you, with the candle in your hand, you in a nightgown? Ah Psyche from the regions which! You with a pocket flashlight? ...

Here the "thrum" of the ship's engines is the "heart-beat of the terraqueous god". The ship itself, as in the neo-Platonic version of the voyage of Ulysses, represents the generated self, and in particular the body, terraqueous because immersed in the natural elements. (In the same way, Martin Trumbaugh, in "Through the Panama" asserts: "I am a ship".) Within the structure of this myth, Demarest represents the human mind, Cynthia his strivings to pure intellectuality, and Psyche, his affective nature. The separation, and the longing for union with Psyche, is one aspect of man's condition in the realm of nature — the disconnection between thought and feeling. The Irish girl however cannot replace

Demarest's longing for his Cynthia, and even as he lies so near to his Psyche his thoughts turn to his intellectual ideal, of whom he says later:

> This miraculous communion between us, Cynthia — was this perhaps an earnest of what was to come? I do not mean simply for us, for you and me, but for all mankind! Was it possible to guess, from this beautiful experience, that ultimately man would know and love his brother; that the barriers of idiosyncracy and solipsism, the dull walls of sense, would go down before the wand of Prospero?

The union with Psyche is less attractive as an ideal because it offers only individual happiness; while the love of Cynthia is a part of the transformation of all experience by the intellect, and opens the door, or so it may be hoped, to a general love of mankind.

Pauline Faubion, on the other hand, is far from inaccessible. She is a girl from the West — a point that is emphasized in contradistinction to Cynthia's belonging to the East. In the neo-Platonic scheme, the East is the abode of gods, the West of demons, and indeed there is something demonic about Faubion:

> She was handsome, saturnine, though her features were not particularly good. There was something dark and brooding about her which, combined with her extreme youth and brilliant vulgarity, intrigued him enormously. She was extraordinarily alive.

Faubion has "a burning simplicity and candour"; there is nothing remote or cold in her manner. She is a creature of this world, "sea-blown, wild, impetuous." She early provokes in both Smith-Ulysses and Demarest-Ulysses emotions that combine sexuality with cannibalism. In what follows, the porpoises, like the dolphins in Yeats's poetry, are the symbol of the life of immersion in the sea of existence:

> Porpoises. Flying fish. Icebergs. Cobalt and snow.... A slice of porpoise, Mr. Smith? A little off the breast, please, Mr. Demarest.... Faubion gazed at him, morose and sombre, reserved but yielding, implacable but affectionate. Poising the bread knife, with waved edge damascene, he prepared to make Faubion an Amazon. One breasted. Tell me when it hurts, Faubion.... This was the moment — this was always the moment; that delicious moment of utter anguished surrender...

Faubion is for the ageing Smith, and later for Demarest, when he has shaken off the spell of his moon-goddess, the very principle of life:

> Are you warm enough, Mr. Smith?... Quite warm enough, thank you, Mr. Demarest!... And what is the flavour of Faubion, Mr. Smith?... Flamingo,

> hibiscus, and guava, Mr. Demarest! . . . Take them — eat, drink, live . . . and lo! Smith lived . . .

Faubion at the same time represents the Circean sensuality that in the neo-Platonic account of the story turns men to swine by charming them into acceptance of the world of nature, the dark sea of material things:

> "The fleshpots of Egypt," said Demarest swiftly. Why? Faubion = Fleshpot. . . . For we, alas, the Fleshpots love . . . Man cannot live by bread alone.

Obsessed with his anguished love of his Cynthia-Penelope-Sophia, Demarest yields to her opposite, the Circean Faubion, only when he has lost Cynthia and, in a long struggle, has accepted this loss. With this acceptance it is possible for him to turn instead to Faubion, to the active principle of life, impure though it may be. The last pages of the novel deal with his liberation into the world of the senses, and the transforming of that world. In order to enter this new life he must accept his own animal nature. He need no longer make himself unhappy for any female, and since both Cynthia and Psyche — both intellect and emotions — are "asleep", he may at least hope that the passionate life of the senses is awake — as indeed she is! Demarest, who has been described as "Narcissus with a handglass", looks in his cabin mirror and sees his own animal nature, which he has not been able to acknowledge while under the sway of Cynthia and the Irish girl:

> Nymphs that smell of ambergris; and the wholesome dew called ambergris. He looked again, once again, with a profound amused wonderment, with blank black pupils, into his mirrored eyes. What an extraordinary-looking object he was, with pink ears, animal hairs in his nose, and a blue mole on his cheek!

The transformation into a swine is paradoxically the liberation into a new life.

It is thus Faubion-Circe who triumphs; and in accepting the love of Faubion Demarest recognizes the impossibility of a transformation of life through intellectual love, and chooses instead a surrender to physical reality. Just as Yeats in his later poetry inverts the symbolism of the neo-Platonic journey of the soul to assert that "things out of perfection sail / And all their swelling canvas wear", so Aiken makes Demarest, instead of fleeing his Circe and remaining faithful to his Penelope, fall willingly into the toils of the enchantress:

> Eagerly, softly, he withdrew himself from the shipfolded bed-clothes. And as his feet touched the coarse carpet, the knock was repeated, the turning knob gave a little creak, and the door began softly to open. Faubion.

These are the last words of the novel, and they are subtly contrived to suggest an

emergence from the mummy-wrappings of a life of sleep, the making of a new contact with "coarse" reality, and the opening of the door to a new existence. The Platonic philosophy is inverted, and Circe appears as the life-giving goddess.

The ending comes as something of a surprise, as Aiken no doubt intended. It is however prepared for throughout the novel, by incidents some of which gain their full significance only on a second reading. The chess-match between Demarest and Hay-Lawrence, early in the story, is one such incident. This game ends with the defeat of Hay-Lawrence, indeed with his being "done to death", at least symbolically. As the game proceeds, thoughts of Faubion "coming out of the West" and of Cynthia "sleeping in the East" fill the mind of Demarest. They are identified in his mind with the black and white queens respectively — "Queen Faubion, the black queen; Queen Cynthia, — white as the moon". Hay-Lawrence is playing black, and Demarest white, so that the game is a contest for Cynthia against the black Queen Faubion and the sinister Hay-Lawrence. Hay-Lawrence is a Mephistophelean character:

> I ask you, was there ever a more perfect example of the gentleman ruffian? Monocle and all. Raffles isn't in it, nor Dracula, nor Heliogabalus. That bored Oxford manner, the *hauteur* . . .

The game opens with a further suggestion of the diabolical in Hay-Lawrence:

> Hay-Lawrence frowned his monacle into his left eye-socket, stretching the left corner of his refined cruel mouth.

Demarest finally wins the game, in a move that is described as a *murdering* of Hay-Lawrence:

> Hay-Lawrence stared, immobile, an expression of stupor, or perhaps terror, in the fixed unseeing eyes: loss of psychic distance. One could hear the blood hammering at his temples — gush, throb, thrum, pound, pulse, boom. *Blood — blood — blood* sang the furies. Hay-Lawrence is being done to death. Demarest is murdering him . . .

The suggestion of blindness ("fixed, unseeing eyes") and of blood-agony and stupor, taken with the insistence on the monacle screwed into "the left eye-socket", and the presence throughout the game of a one-eyed poker-player, indicate that the Mephistophelean Hay-Lawrence is also an Odyssean devil — a Polyphemus, whose blinding by Ulysses has a particular significance in the neo-Platonic myth. Aiken has attempted to prepare for this by associating Hay-Lawrence with a tent-pole, and by making the move that destroys him a knight's move — and therefore a thrust with a spear:

Hay-Lawrence with a tent-pole, walked sedately, haughtily.

The putting out of the one eye of the Cyclops with his own huge staff is represented by the neo-Platonists as the blinding by Ulysses of his natal demon, the "outward eye" of the senses, and as a liberating of the "inward eye" of the spirit. That the murdering of Hay-Lawrence is a triumph for Cynthia and the "white" cause is plain; after the game Faubion accuses Demarest of an unnamed offence:

'Oh, I know what you've done. And *you* know *too*.'
"Cross my heart and hope I die . . . Not guilty. I appeal."
She cut her meat savagely.

Demarest does indeed know what he has done, since he has played the chess game as a battle for his White Queen against the Black Queen Faubion. And he has murdered the Cyclops who threatened to eat his white "men" one by one, and in so doing has defeated the forces of darkness and of this world.

However, even in this chess game it enters Demarest's mind that there is perhaps no great difference between Hay-Lawrence and Cynthia, between the theology of damnation and the theology of salvation. Both Cynthia and Hay-Lawrence, he thinks, though she is "of a world utterly remote" from his, "belonged, somehow, to the same constellation." In this way the ground is prepared for the reversal at the end of the book, when Cynthia is seen as representing a kind of damnation, and Faubion as a door opening into life. The choice of Faubion is a choice of the natural world, and an escape from the endless warfare of good and evil.

Finally it may be interesting to note that the first of the two epigraphs to the book is a quotation from Juvenal: "E coelo descendit *gnothi seautòn*" (From the heaven comes down: "Know thyself"), and that the second, from Coleridge's "Self-knowledge", is a question about what man can know of himself. The voyage to the East, like Martin Trumbaugh's voyage to the East, is a quest for self-knowledge.

IN *Ultramarine* the influence of Aiken's novel may be clearly seen, but Lowry draws on many writers, some of whom, like Melville and Conrad, themselves contributed to the patterns of mythic significance employed by Aiken. Lowry's knowledge of *Blue Voyage*, and his familiarity with its author, may have been the starting-point of his interest in these myths, but it is clear that he recognized them elsewhere. To identify all these influences would require a

major work, and I shall confine myself here to a brief account of the myths that are common to *Blue Voyage* and *Ultramarine*, without suggesting that where such similarities exist they are an indication of a simple dependence of one author on the other. Where two writers share a common tradition, similarities need not imply any such dependence. The identifying of the tradition may however greatly help our understanding.

The central theme of *Ultramarine*, as of *Blue Voyage*, is the hero's search for his true self, for the source of his being and his identity. He is a "toff", and his full name is *Eugene* (well-born) Dana Hilliot; since his parentage seems to isolate him from his common humanity, he must learn to discover this in his shipmates. He sees his ideal, and his own true self, at times in Norman, the all too "moral" and "heroic" galley boy, and at times in Andy the cook, who appears to be weak and degenerate, but who is later revealed as a hero of three torpedoings, and as a man who can take sexual experience in his stride, without becoming its victim. The weak chin indicates not cowardice, but courage and endurance, since Andy has "lost his chin in the war". Andy is related to Dana as Smith-Ulysses is related to Demarest in *Blue Voyage*: "Andy is more a part of me than the rest"; and Dana is told by the fortune-teller: " . . . He is your father too". Dana, Norman and Andy are all Norwegians who have settled in Liverpool, in Port Sunlight or in Great Homer Street — they are Norse and Homeric heroes in whom the innocence of the snowy north and the brightness of the Homeric world have been dimmed but not extinguished. Dana is nineteen, Norman is twenty-nine, and Andy is thirty-nine, so that each represents a stage on the journey of life. Andy is in this sense Dana's future self, as well as his father, and the theme of the book is Dana's reconciliation with his own nature and its development. Dana's resentment of Andy — who treats him with contempt, and appropriates the bar-girl Olga just when Dana has summoned up the courage to sleep with her — leads him to dream of murdering Andy. The discovery that Andy is a war-hero makes possible a new respect for him, and an acceptance of the process by which a hero may come to terms with life, appear outwardly shabby and defeated, and yet retain his integrity. At the end Dana, in a letter to Janet claims not only to identify himself with Andy ("I have identification with Andy. I am Andy") but also to have transcended Andy through his abiding love for Janet, which gives him an "all-embracing love for mankind." This has obvious similarities with Demarest's relationship with Cynthia, and like Demarest, Dana does not actually send to his lady-love the letter in which this claim is made.

Aiken's hero describes himself as a "tinkling symbolist", and in his turn Dana

Hilliot recalls that he has been described as a "tinkling sciolist". The significance attached to names is part of the "tinkling symbolism" that Lowry shares with Aiken. The name of Lowry's hero, Eugene Dana Hilliot, is misspelt in a crew list as "Heliot". This indicates that he is related to the sun (*helios*), and his home address indeed is "Sea Road, Port Sunlight". He is *Dana* because he serves "before the mast", and *Eugene* because he is preoccupied with his genetic history. He is obsessed by the idea that his father is insane, that his mother is going blind, and that he has inherited syphilis. This Ibsenesque view of Dana's past is in sharp contrast with the symbolism of Norway as a place of light, of whiteness, of Vikings — of innocence and heroism. This symbolism accumulates slowly throughout the story, but some of it may be seen in one short passage:

> Norman and Andy — Norsemen (were they?). And once more his thoughts turned tenderly towards Janet. She it was he apprehended in their voices, she and no other. And he thought of that time when their families, for ten years neighbours in Port Sunlight, had met in Christiania when he was a boy, and how their love for each other had never changed. That winter they had seen an elk in the street, driven down from the mountains by starvation — everyone was on skis — all was white.

Dana is at once a child of light, and blighted by his birth. The journey of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is a further advance into the darkness of existence, into the Hades or Hell of the life of the senses. The ship is "outward bound for hell", and there are many hints that the "whole damned business" of the voyage is a descent into a lower order of existence. In this fallen state, Dana's love of Janet, to whom he remains faithful in spirit, as Demarest does not remain faithful to his Cynthia, provides the strongest reminder of the original innocence of the soul and the transforming power of love. The symbolism of a journey to the East, so prominent a part of *Blue Voyage*, is of minor interest in *Ultramarine*; instead, Lowry uses the traditional symbolism of the north as heavenly and the south as leading to the fallen and hellish world of nature. This is combined with the idea of the ship as representing human existence, and the idea of an ultimate return to the Penelope who represents the true wisdom of the soul, as Janet represents Dana's highest moral ideals. Dana's shipmates, like those of Ulysses in the traditional interpretation of the story, are different aspects of the human personality, "other selves" to Dana. Of the ship Dana reflects:

> When you come to think of it — an ideal match. Both of us born of Viking blood, both robbed of our countries and left to make out as best we can; both, finally,

> with the same wandering, harbourless, dispossessed characteristics. Her very history is enough to fill me with a narcissistic compassion!

As has been shown, the myth of Narcissus and the mirror, combined with the Ulysses-Circe myth, plays an important part in the resolution of the conflict in *Blue Voyage.* In *Ultramarine* this myth, touched on in the passage just quoted, is more strongly suggested in later passages. In Dana's conversation with the German wireless operator the reflection of Narcissus in the beer-glass is associated, as in the neo-Platonic interpretation of the myth, with the descent from the heavens, and with the involvement of the soul with the corruptions of the physical world:

> One bubble makes a grain of sand. Sixty stars to each man. I put my glass down noisily then picked it up again, and gazed mournfully at my reflection. Narcissus. Bollocky Bill the Sailor. Bollocky Bill, aspiring writer, drawn magically from the groves of the Muses by Poseidon. But had it been so much Poseidon? I looked more deeply into the glass. Christ, was this me? What was there? Misery! Self-disgust! Terror! No getting away from the unfortunate Hilliot, this strong creature with a head of filthy, infected hair, and a maggoty brain and infected consciousness, who dreams of archetypal images; this sad dish, Eugene Dana Hilliot! Thy hand, great Anarch, evil ghost who must follow me wherever I go! Hear, chaos! Hear me, stinking cod fulfilled of donge and of corrupcion! . . .

Later, contemplating his rendezvous with Olga the bar-girl, the Circe of *Ultramarine*, Hilliot hears the siren's call "Hoo-ah-hooooo, wailed a siren from the river". This is followed by an acceptance of the unavoidable descent into sensuality:

> Do this thing. Laugh about it, because it is funny; cry, because it is beautiful; smile, because it is inevitable. . . . Well, it was for Janet, wasn't it? But if I could only be purged before doing it, were I only cleaner, more beautiful, how much more lovely it would be! How appealing the simple sadness of the scene could only the soiled Narcissus that was Hilliot be washed by rain from Heaven. . . . Hearts that should be white turned red . . . And all the sorrow of her labouring hips. North wind blow south over my vineyards, north wind brings the snow; I do not think that this is the north wind. . . .

The significance given to Narcissus here is not that of self-love, but of the self-disgust of the soul that has descended into the sensual abyss of existence. This is as distinctly a neo-Platonic Narcissus as is Demarest when he sees his own animal shape in the mirror before his Circe arrives.

The story of Oedipus is evidently important in a novel in which the hero

voyages in the *Oedipus Tyrannus* and dreams of killing his "father" in a fog. Lowry however combines the Oedipus theme with that of Ulysses. A snatch of Greek poetry that goes through Dana's mind early in the story suggests that he may be at once an Oedipus who is hostile to his father and a Telemachus who seeks for and loves his father. The fragment of Homeric verse may be translated: "There are many ships in sea-girt Ithaca." This is part of the speech in which Athene, goddess of wisdom, urges Telemachus to set sail in search of his father Ulysses. The words occur to Dana as he remembers his humiliation at being excluded from the school swimming team, and there follows a memory of the occasion when, at Kowloon, Dana has shown himself to be the best swimmer on the ship, while Norman swims badly and Andy not at all. In this respect at least Dana is more like Ulysses than his shipmates, so that he is encouraged in his hopes of achieving manhood and of finding his true self. There follows his ignominious failure to rescue the pigeon from the mast-head. This first failure, as in *Lord Jim*, leads to a second defeat, when Dana fails to rescue the pigeon from the sea, in spite of his prowess as a swimmer. The pigeon is rescued originally by Norman, who allows it to fly attached to a cord; this provides a link with the contest of the heroes in the funeral games in the *Iliad*, where the target in the archery contest is a pigeon flying at the end of a cord from the mast of one of the ships. That Lowry has the funeral games in Homer in mind is shown by his twice quoting a line from the *Iliad* describing the collecting of wood for the funeral pyre of Patroclus. A further link with Homer and with the story of Ulysses is the quoting of a line from Book IX of the *Odyssey*, where Ulysses observes the futile struggle of Sisyphus with the stone. The recollection of the funeral games and of Ulysses' visit to the dead comes as Dana, who is about to return to Olga the prostitute, remembers and mourns the cold purity of the snow and of his early love of Janet. Just as Demarest, in *Blue Voyage*, betrays his Cynthia-Penelope by falling into the arms of Faubion-Circe, Dana is preparing to betray his Janet-Penelope by returning to carry his relationship with Olga to its consummation. Dana is however only an apprentice Ulysses, wet behind the ears, and when he returns to the bar he finds that Andy has appropriated Olga. Like Ulysses, Andy knows how to sleep with his Circe without succumbing to her magic; and the only way in which Dana can hope to supplant the true Ulysses (who is also his "father") is to dream of murdering him by pushing him overboard. Death by drowning is an appropriate fate for Ulysses, whose death at sea is predicted by Tiresias in the *Odyssey*, and is recorded by Dante.

The sustained metaphor of the ship as an image of human existence, and of

the hero's shipmates as aspects of his own being, is the chief common feature of *Blue Voyage* and *Ultramarine*. This metaphor, fully developed in the *De Ulixis Erroribus*, is the dominant feature of the Ulysses myth as it is interpreted in the neo-Platonic version.[7] The Ulysses story itself is strongly implied in both novels, and with it the symbolism of Circe and the turning of men to swine. In both novels the Narcissus myth is used as an image of the descent of the soul into the inferior realm of the sensual.

Lowry however adds an original twist to the Circe myth. Where Aiken shows only a descent by his Demarest into animal sensuality, Lowry reminds us that Circe turns men not only into swine, but also into "mountain wolves and lions". Dana's loss of Olga to Andy makes him contemplate murder, so that he must come to terms not only with the sensual or swinish part of his nature, but also with what is tigerish and cruel in his heart. The ship on its homeward journey takes on a cargo of elephants, tigers, and leopards; and Dana, in an exchange of yarns with his fellow-sailors, invents a fantasy in which the animals escape, take over the ship, and eat the crew. This vision of the tiger in man requires Dana to find some outlet for demonic energy, and this he achieves by finally becoming a *fireman*, working in the "little hell" of the stoke-hold, and taking up the task he has earlier seen performed by Nikolai the Russian fireman:

> Cloom-cloom — cloom-cloom. Looking down he could see through the bulkhead doors where the red and gold of the furnaces mottled the reeking deck, and the tremulous roar of the cages' fires dominated a sibilant, continual splutter of steam. The *Oedipus Tyrannus*' firemen, among whom he once again recognized Nikolai, half naked, gritty and black with coal, and pasty with ashes, came and went in the blazing light, and in the gloom, flaming nightmares, firelit demons.

Nikolai the fireman, and not Norman or Andy, represents Dana's true destiny, which is not to hope for a return to sunlight, snow, and innocence, but to work in the stoke-hold and sustain the fiery energies. The imagery of fire, of the furnace, dominates the last part of the novel; Dana is a child of the sun, from Port Sunlight, but in the actual world the sun is manifested as heat, not as light, and the journey into existence leads to the burning heat of the tropics and finally to the polar cold. After observing Nikolai, Dana affirms his faith in life: "He loved the ship. He loved life". He then drinks whisky with his fellow-sailors, gulping down its "throat-smarting fire", and symbolically celebrating the heroism of Nikolai.

The theme of the voyage of life as a journey into fire, into the special destiny

of the artist as he nourishes life at its centre, is elaborated in Dana's meditation of the future:

> There is, as it were, a storm flood within, as my heart beats with the beating of the engine, as I go out with the ship towards the eternal summers. A storm is thundering out there, there is the glow of tropical fire! Bad or good, as it happens to be, that it is what it is to exist! . . . It is as though I have been silent and fuddled with sleep all my life.

Demarest's awakening is to the life of the senses; Dana's is to the necessity of accepting the task as a *fireman*, the condition of the *poète maudit*, of a Baudelaire or an Ancient Mariner:

> In spite of all, I know now that at least it is better to go always towards the summer, towards those burning seas of light; to sit at night in the forecastle lost in an unfamiliar dream, when the spirit becomes filled with stars, instead of wounds, and good and compassionate and tender. To sail into an unknown spring, to receive one's baptism on storm's promontory, where the solitary albatross heels over in the gale, and to come at last to land.

The hope of a return to the sunlit innocence of the north, to Port Sunlight and Norway, is replaced by an acceptance of the need to voyage continually into the south, into the "noonday fire", and after each return to human 'normality', to home, to set out again until finally the last voyage takes the sailor into the unknown:

> Then at last again to be outward bound, always outward, always onward, to be fighting always for the dreamt-of harbour, when the sea thunders on board in a cataract, and the ship rolls and wallows in the track of the frozen sea's storm.

Dana accepts his job as a fireman, and is urged by Nikolai to learn the meaning of the words "Blessed are the poor in spirit". The novel ends with the passing in the night of the Norwegian ship *Oxenstjerna*, symbol of Dana's youthful dreams, and representing, as does the *Sylvia Lee* in *Blue Voyage*, the journey that is not taken. The loss of the simple heroic ideal is painful: "But oh, Janet, no sorrow is so bad as that which quite goes by." In these last words of the novel the whole story is summed up; Dana has found his true nature in the acceptance of the "little hell" of an existence in which his manhood is attained through painful and humble service to the human energies which it is the artist's task to nourish.

What may seem at a first reading to be a loosely organized novel appears on more careful reading to be carefully constructed, with every detail, however much it may at first appear to be merely casual or anecdotal, taking its place in

an elaborate pattern of significance. The sailor's yarn about the hippopotamus Huberta, which wanders four thousand miles to find a tragic fate from the guns of farmers is itself an animal Odyssey. The attempt Dana makes to explain his life to Popplereuter (the sound of morse combined with the name of a news agency) suggests the isolation of each existence, since the wireless operator of the German ship speaks in bad English, while Dana tries to speak to him in bad German. To identify all these significances would be tedious, but I hope enough has been shown of one part of the rich symbolism of the book to indicate the intelligence and the care that Lowry put into it. *Ultramarine* owes much to Aiken, but it owes more to Lowry's own genius.

NOTES

[1] Malcolm Lowry, "Through the Panama", in *Hear us, O Lord, from Heaven Thy Dwelling Place*, Philadelphia and New York, 1969.

[2] Conrad Aiken, *Blue Voyage*, New York, 1927.

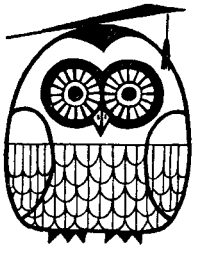
[3] Malcolm Lowry, *Ultramarine*, New York, 1962.

[4] See Thomas Taylor, *The Philosophical and Mathematical Commentaries of Proclus*, II vols., London, 1792, II, pp. 294-309, in a lengthy note giving the views of Porphyry.

[5] Thomas Taylor, *The Fable of Cupid and Psyche*, London, 1795.

[6] Thomas Taylor, *The Eleusinian and Bacchic Mysteries*, (Amsterdam?), n.d. pp. 147-8.

[7] *De Ulixis Erroribus*, tr. Johannes Columbus, Stockholm, 1678.



LOWRY'S DEBT TO NORDAHL GRIEG

Hallvard Dahlie

"SANTOS," he said, "this day shalt thou be with me in paradise" (*The Ship Sails On*).[1] Addressed to the ship's dog by Benjamin Hall as he was contemplating suicide, this statement is said by Douglas Day in his recent biography of Lowry to be "almost the only lines that he was able to lift directly from Grieg."[2] It is true that Lowry didn't lift many lines directly and indeed, the only exact borrowing of a complete sentence that I have been able to find is not the above, but the one which Tony Kilgallin correctly identifies in his recent book on Lowry: "Outside was the roar of the sea and the darkness."[3] Grieg had used this sentence to conclude the second chapter of *The Ship Sails On*, and Lowry used it verbatim on two occasions, to conclude the fifth chapter of *Ultramarine*[4] and as the final sentence in his short story, "On Board the *West Hardaway*."[5] In addition, he used a slightly modified form, "The Roar of the Sea and the Darkness," as one of the subtitles in his projected collection of poems to be called *The Lighthouse That Invites the Storm*.[6]

Nevertheless, what Lowry confessed to Nordahl Grieg in his 1938 letter[7] is essentially well-grounded in fact, more so than critics have to date acknowledged, for scattered throughout *Ultramarine* are some two dozen or so examples of "paraphrase, plagiarism, or pastiche" from Grieg. Some of these, it is true, are simple one-word borrowings in the form of proper and geographical names, or phrases and sentences which vary only slightly from Grieg's usage, but others involve significant extensions or modifications of the originals to the extent that though Grieg is discernible, the craftsmanship of Lowry is also very much in evidence. The general effect is therefore one of a careful and respectful pastiche rather than mere plagiarism, for Lowry uses Grieg's material to transform his own experiences and perceptions into a powerful private aesthetic, thus demonstrating that he was unwilling even at the outset of his career to settle for the straight-forward realism that characterizes Grieg's novel. Already Lowry was beginning to reflect what was to become a major component of his later fiction,

a vision of the irrational, of the chaotic, of the grotesque, of an internal rather than primarily an external universe. Grieg's novel, a powerful narrative though it is, remains basically a literal and static work, closely akin in tone and purpose to the naturalistic works of Zola or Hamsun, while Lowry's points unmistakably towards the surrealism of Conrad Aiken or James Joyce. He wanted, certainly, "the power and purity of Grieg,"[8] but it is clear throughout *Ultramarine* that he was striving for more levels of meaning than were provided by *The Ship Sails On*, and even in the simplest of his borrowings this note of restlessness, of probing, of experimentation, comes through.

In connection with his use of Grieg's material, a related question arises as to why Lowry gave such a relatively strong Norwegian flavour to his first novel, and how he could bring this aspect off without the sense of artificiality or awkwardness that one might expect from a non-Norwegian. Indeed, even when he resorts to the many examples of the Norwegian vernacular throughout *Ultramarine*, the note of appropriateness is achieved, as well as an aesthetic integration between the experience of the moment and the vision evoked by the disparate and seemingly disjointed Norwegian phrases. It is clear that throughout his life Lowry felt a strong affinity for Norway and the Norwegians; he was fond, for example, of romanticizing his maternal grandfather, Captain Boden, and transforming him into a Norwegian seaman who went down with his ship.[9] And aside from his friendship with Grieg, he undoubtedly met many Norwegians during his sea voyages, particularly when he sailed to Norway as a coaltrimmer on a Norwegian ship. It seems, too, that he must have undertaken at some time during his early years a formal study of the Norwegian language,[10] his command of which stayed with him sufficiently to translate in 1941 a Norwegian letter found in a bottle in the North Atlantic and sent to the Canadian government.[11] It is interesting that on this occasion he signed his name "Malcolm Boden Lowry," as though invoking his "Norwegian" grandfather to properly inspire him. The continued recurrence of Norwegian names and phrases throughout his later fiction provides evidence of the lingering effect that his early identification with Norway produced. To the youthful and romantic Lowry, Nordahl Grieg must have seemed a remarkable man indeed, all the more so since he had already written much the same kind of novel that he himself was attempting, so it is perhaps little wonder that his idolizing took at times the form of plagiarism and paraphrase.

Set out in tabular and abbreviated form, the passages from *The Ship Sails On* that Lowry apparently availed himself of suggest at first glance a rather alarming

degree of plagiarism, but a close examination of their contexts reveals that much more was involved than outright borrowing.

The Ship Sails On	*Ultramarine*
She is a warehouse that moves about from port to port. . . . a community of human lives. . . . A Moloch that crushes the lives of man . . . and then calmly turns its face to the solitudes as though nothing had happened. (2)	. . . that permitted him only vaguely to be aware of the ship as a sort of Moloch, as a warehouse. (41)
	. . . how incredibly swiftly they had become a community. . . . (21)
	. . . gliding calmly among the solitudes as though nothing had happened. (p. 22 of "On Board the *West Hardaway.*")
. . . it was all so unreal, a beautiful white dream. (10)	. . . as for Janet, she seemed to him at this moment to be a white dream. . . . (p. 13 of "*West Hardaway.*")
He folded it carefully . . . and dropped it into the chest. Is was as though he had buried a part of his life. (10)	. . . folding them over and over and then, with such remorse, dropping them into my sea box, a part of my life gone. The end of a chapter. (85)
You'd do better playing at Child Jesus in the temple instead of going to sea. (19)	It'll teach 'im that not every little Christ Jesus in the temple can come running round cargo steamers. (131)
For a second Benjamin looked down into the abyss of his own contemptibleness. . . . (19)	Hilliot stared for a moment down into the depths of his own contemptibleness. . . . (34)
Outside was the roar of the sea and the darkness. (26)	Outside was the roar of the sea and the darkness. (173; also p. 22 of "*West Hardaway.*")
. . . the town roared, the siren shrieked. (37) . . . the town roared around them. (149)	. . . the siren roared . . . and the town roared back. . . . (29) Behind the numbered sheds the town roared. (36)
You son of a bitch, you bastard toad — (52)	. . . that was the way to treat him, the bastard toad — (22)
A mystery was present. . . . From out of this hard iron world . . . had come something alive, something tender and helpless. (111)	Something had happened . . . a tender voice from home . . . a mystery had shown its face among the solitudes. (26)

A white motor-boat came skimming out of the harbour, making for the *Mignon*. (139-39)	A white motor boat came curtsying out of the harbour, rolling nearer and nearer. (28)
Seamen's letters are only for . . . Narvik, Sivert, Leif, and Risor. (142)	Letters for . . . Seamen Mcgoff and Bredahl. (74)
It's the dire disease — you know what. (170)	Look! How everyone he touches is smitten with the dire disease. (73)
It would not take much, the relaxing of a muscle, and then he would be in the power of the sea and the sharks. (219)	How easy . . . it would be to put an end to everything. . . . the relaxing of a muscle, and it would all be over. (40)

In addition to these extended passages, there are a number of simple literal borrowings, chiefly Norwegian geographical and proper names from Grieg's novel, and with these Lowry does some interesting things. The seaport of Tvedestrand, the home of Grieg's character Sivert, becomes for Lowry the birthplace of both Andy and Norman, as well as the original registration port of the *Oedipus Tyrannus*. The names "Leif" and "Pedro" appear in both novels, as does "Nikolai," and with this latter name Lowry goes so far as to emulate Grieg by adding a rider, though in a reverse way from Grieg. Grieg's character, "the white-haired lad, whom they call Sivert, though he was christened Nikolai" (*The Ship Sails On*, 6), thus rejects his name, while his counterpart in *Ultramarine* accepts it: "I am the one they call Nikolai, but my real name is Wallae" (*Ultramarine*, 17). It is interesting, too, that in each novel it is this Nikolai figure who initially befriends the respective protagonists, with Lowry making his a fireman instead of a seaman as in Grieg. Both novelists, finally, exploit the standard Norwegian joke/insult concerning Bergen which, incidentally, was Grieg's birthplace, so undoubtedly he understood the epithet's implications. " 'You Bergener!' shouted Oscar, though he knew very well the steward came from Flekkefjord" (*The Ship Sails On*, 52) represents an insult whose magnitude Lowry apparently understood when he used it to reveal a kind of perverse integrity of Andy, who had been fired twelve years earlier as second mate because "he had struck the new captain, a Stavanger man, for calling him a Bergener" (*Utramarine*, 16).

Even in these elementary borrowings we are aware of Lowry's ability to manipulate fictional material, and to extend the components of Grieg's literal realism into a more complex structure and aesthetic. *The Ship Sails On* lends itself chiefly to a narrative level of reading, and a closely related social protest

level, though I don't find this element as strong as one critic suggested in his brief study of Grieg in 1945.[12] For example, when the mate scolds Sivert and Benjamin for idling, warning the former that he "will never see Tvedestrand again" (*The Ship Sails On*, 61), the name simply represents a seaport in Norway, and the mate's belligerent and unfeeling attitude towards the seamen reflects a stock situation found in scores of sea stories. Lowry, in that brilliant opening scene of *Ultramarine*, does a different thing entirely when he reveals the fact that both Andy and Norman had been born in Tvedestrand. Everything in this terse, stichomythic scene rapidly establishes the isolation of Dana Hilliot: he has replied first to the anonymous Board of Trade clerk and awaits, as it were, the replies of Andy and Norman, which turn out to be identical except for names and ages, and thus a double opposition to Dana's identity is established at the very outset. Andy and Norman have in common their Tvedestrand birthplace and their current Liverpool address, while Dana is separated from they by all factors — age, birthplace, and residence. I am not suggesting that the mere repetition of "Tvedestrand" is sufficient to carry this burden by itself, but it is one of the elements of this remarkable scene that reflects Lowry's conscious manipulation of what otherwise might simply be regarded as borrowed material.

Throughout the first weeks of his voyage, Hilliot has many occasions to muse upon his isolation and expatriation, and in a parenthetical interior monologue addressed to Janet he links all this — through a description of the ship — with Tvedestrand again:

> — the tramp steamer *Oedipus Tyrannus*, outward bound for hell. When you come to think of it — an ideal match. Both of us born of Viking blood, both robbed of our countries and left to make out as best we can; both, finally, with the same wandering, harbourless, dispossessed characteristics. Her very history is enough to fill me with a narcissistic compassion! First she was registered in Tvedestrand, then bought by an English firm.... She sailed out an exile, an expatriate, with *Seamen* scarcely substituted for *Matroser*, or *Firemen* for *Fyreötere*. (*Ultramarine*, 53)

Andy and Norman, born in Tvedestrand, clearly belong with the ship from the start, while Dana, in spite of his desperate wish for it to be otherwise, is an outsider on that score as well, as he is constantly reminded in the course of his ship-board duties. And of course one of the major themes of this novel is the tracing of how he ultimately effects a community with his shipmates, and with Andy and Norman in particular.

On the whole, the passages that I have listed above reveal a much more subjective and introspective character in Hilliot than in Benjamin Hall, who frequently emerges primarily as a spokesman for Grieg's own social and political views. Hall "guesses," even before he boards the *Mignon*, that "she is a warehouse . . . , a community of human lives . . . , a Moloch that crushes the lives of men," but there is no urgency or threat experienced by him at this point, though he does feel "drawn to her and afraid of her" (*The Ship Sails On*, 2). Hilliot's parallel reflections about the *Oedipus Tyrannus* occur during his first night at Tsjang-Tsjang, while he is still in isolation from the shore-bound crew, his mind in turmoil over his fleeting thoughts of suicide, the homosexual advances of the quartermaster, and in general the "roar of the town" beyond the dock. He recalls that at school he was unable to grasp a sense of order even in a discipline like geometry, and now in his suffering state he is unable to assign a tangible shape to the causes or nature of his alienation. "This was it, this was always it, this lack of order in his life which even now permitted him only vaguely to be aware of the ship as a sort of Moloch, as a warehouse" (*Ultramarine*, 41). Benjamin Hall becomes a part of the "community of human lives" almost in his first confrontation with Aalesund and Oscar, and his transformation from "a new hand who knows nothing" (2) to one "who suddenly understood what the sea means to seamen" (35) occurs with virtually no inward turmoil and only a brief bout of sea-sickness and vomiting to signify the purging of his former self. When Hilliot, on the other hand, thinks about how swiftly the "fourteen men in a forecastle . . . had become a community," he is immediately propelled in thought from "his place there on the poop" towards a chaotic eternity, a "world within world, sea within sea, void within void, the ultimate, the inescapable" (*Ultramarine*, 21). Since he is not part of this community as yet, he takes refuge in the tangible things around him, "the visible structure of the ship", and is soon momentarily elated by the endless possibilities of what the ship represents. The restricted "community of human lives" which we see literally being decimated one by one in Grieg's novel, is being transformed in Hilliot's imagination into "another land line, another climate, another people, and another port which would emerge, inevitably, out of such nothingness" (*Ultramarine*, 22-3).

Grieg clearly is motivated by a deterministic impulse in his concern to show us the devastating effects of "the dire disease"; his world, represented by the *Mignon*, is ordered, predictable, inflexible, and ultimately destructive, and the only way for one to survive is to leave the ship before it destroys him. Of all the

crew, only Narvik can do this, and it is significant that he never goes ashore with the crew to partake in their endless orgies, and he is thus spared the destruction which inhabits this ship-seaport ambience. All others who leave the ship, like Aalesund and Little Bekhardt, leave as doomed men, ravaged by "the dire disease." The threat of venereal disease runs through Lowry's novel as well, but as far as the immediate crew of the *Oedipus Tyrannus* is concerned, it is present off stage rather than on stage, as it were: only Norman of the present crew has been infected but, along with everyone else, he passes "short-arm inspection" and is ready for action again. But the accounts that Dana hears about the ravages of syphilis on former crew members, and the vivid specimens he sees in the Tsjang-Tsjang anatomical museum all provide dramatic reasons for Hilliot's obsessive fear of infection. The projection he has of what he will be once he breaks "all the shy, abstemious promises with which [Janet] invested him" reflects this paranoia:

> . . . see him if you will for yourself, Dana Hilliot, the syphilitic, as he strolls aimfully down Great Homer Street. Look! How everyone he touches is smitten with the dire disease. It is just that one little word, the word that kills. Now everything is wasted. . . . This is he, the human husk, the leaf of ash, ashes to ashes and dust to dust. (*Ultramarine*, 73)

But of course all this does not come to pass in Lowry's book, while "the word that kills" performs devastatingly in *The Ship Sails On*. When Little Bekhardt tells Benjamin that he is infected by "the dire disease," its effects are already apparent in his increasing blindness and growing madness. And Benjamin's subsequent glimpse of the Cape Town hospital ward full of inert, bandaged victims reveals in tangible form that there is ultimately no escape from the consequences of his transgression. Lowry's vision, by contrast, though more chaotic than Grieg's, is optimistic and expansive, for Hilliot and his mates do receive second and third chances, as it were, whereas for Grieg's characters one slip spells out irrevocable doom.

Much of the effect that Lowry achieves in his use of Grieg's material derives from the skill with which he expands it beyond its literal limitations and integrates it with his shifting styles. Grieg's novel rarely transcends its literal dimensions, although in a sense it depends on how one starts the novel: it is in one way as effective as a total allegory as it is as a realistic social document, but it has to be one *or* the other, and can't effectively change in midstream, as it were. *Ultramarine*, on the other hand, repeatedly moves back and forth between its literal and non-literal levels, just as it moves backwards and forwards in time,

and it is in these shifting contexts that Grieg's words and situations are effectively transformed. When Benjamin Hall changes from his shore clothes to his seaman's attire and puts away his blue suit, he feels "it was as though he had buried a part of his life" (*The Ship Sails On*, 10), but his action is merely a chronological and mechanical step in his transformation. The equivalent scene in *Ultramarine* unfolds in retrospect as Hilliot after weeks at sea prepares to go ashore in Tsjang-Tsjang:

> . . . I reentered the forecastle to dress. There I took my blue suit out of my sea box. While dressing I remembered how the first night aboard the ship I had creased these self-same trousers, holding them under my chin, folding them over and over and then, with such remorse, dropping them into my sea box, a part of my life gone. The end of a chapter. . . . But now it was the right time to wear my blue suit again. (*Ultramarine*, 85)

Grieg's Benjamin Hall *does*, of course, bury permanently a "part of his life," for there will never again be for him "the right time" to wear his suit in any kind of innocent reunion with Eva. Hilliot can still do so with Janet, for though he becomes insensibly drunk every time he goes ashore, his forays leave him sexually as chaste as ever. The "end of a chapter" is not in Hilliot's case the end of a book as it effectively is for Benjamin, for whom indeed "everything is wasted" after his seduction by the prostitute.

Basically the difference here involves Lowry's comic vision of life as opposed to the bleak determinism of Nordahl Grieg, outlooks which are reflected in the consequences of the "letter" episodes of the two novels. Benjamin Hall fails to receive his expected letter from Eva during the normal mail delivery in Cape Town, and in a fit of disappointment and revenge goes ashore where he is willingly seduced by Rita and, as he later discovers, venereally infected by her. The next day Eva's delayed letter arrives, full of the innocent love which would have saved Benjamin the day before; irrevocably doomed, he decides against suicide, and remains to become part of the corruption of the ship and its crew. Dana Hilliot also fails to receive his letter from Janet during the regular mail call and, like Benjamin, he feels he now has sufficient grounds for breaking his vows of chastity. "Surely Janet wouldn't mind that," he rationalizes; " she would *want* me to be a man, a hell of a fellow like Andy. . . . Tonight things would all be changed, tonight I should be the hero, the monster — " (*Ultramarine*, 79, 81). Though Janet's letter does arrive before he goes ashore, he is still determined to "become a man," but at the point of succumbing to the prostitute Olga he hesitates, remembering the letter: "Give me half an hour," he tells Olga, "I want

to cool my brain a little and think" (*Ultramarine*, 116). Olga, however, is not in a cooling mood, and when Dana returns, she has given herself over to Andy, and Hilliot's chastity is thus for the moment preserved.

There is a strong sense of the comic in this scene as there is, indeed, in much of *Ultramarine*, and it is in this respect that Lowry most sharply differs from Grieg. In a relatively minor borrowing — the episode of the motor boat approaching the *Mignon* — this aspect of Lowry's art is subtly illustrated. Grieg's depiction of this scene is precise and literal, not charged with any hidden possibilities, and when we learn that the boat is bringing the pilot on board, we recognize the incident simply as another example of Grieg's familiarity with a common marine procedure. Lowry makes subtle changes in Grieg's wording: "A white motor boat came *curtsying* out of the harbour, *rolling* nearer and nearer" (*Ultramarine*, 28; italics mine), changes we begin to understand upon learning the boat's mission: "the order came for all hands to muster for a short-arm inspection while a fat doctor hauled himself up the Jacob's ladder" (28). When we realize that during the course of his inspection, the fat M.O. is a homosexual (he takes Norman inside for "an interview"), we grasp the appropriateness of the words "curtsying" and "rolling." There is no such comic relief in Grieg from the spectre of venereal disease and indeed, the sense of the comic rarely is present in any form in his novel, let alone in connection with "the dire disease." Grieg may have given Lowry the vocabulary, but Lowry's vision and aesthetic powers enabled him on most occasions to achieve a satisfying transformation of his borrowed material.

In assessing Lowry's debt to Nordahl Grieg, it is impossible to determine infallibly the dividing line between borrowing and originality, but it seems clear that the passages I have indicated in this paper derived specifically from *The Ship Sails On*. With other similarities between the two novels — the young, romantic hero, the existence of the idealized, innocent girl back home, the confrontation between innocence and experience, and so on — attribution is more tenuous, for fictional elements like these are as much the stock in trade of *Bildungsroman* in general as they are borrowings from any specific author. And of course Lowry's own experiences aboard the *Pyrrhus* and other ships probably counted more than any readings he may have done when he began the writing of *Ultramarine* in 1928. I do not know exactly when Lowry inserted the Grieg material into the body of his novel, but the evidence I have examined suggests that it was some time between the fall of 1930 and the fall of 1932, at which time he first submitted his manuscript to Chatto and Windus. Though according

to Earle Birney, Lowry had read *The Ship Sails On* in translation before going to Cambridge in October of 1929,[13] the first explicit reference to Grieg in anything Lowry wrote occurs in his short story, "Punctum Indifferens Skibet Gaar Videre", published after his return from his visit to Grieg in the fall of 1930.[14] And since Conrad Aiken makes no mention of the influence of Grieg in his reminiscing about the revision of *Ultramarine* during the summer of 1929,[15] it is likely that it didn't occur to Lowry to use Grieg's material until after he had met him. His letter to Grieg in 1938 indicates the close identification he experienced with Benjamin Hall, and of course it is quite possible that Lowry's attempts to write a stage version of *The Ship Sails On* led him to make some fictional use of this material.[16]

According to Douglas Day, Lowry was "literally terrified that some reviewer might check . . . *Ultramarine* out of a library and discover that it contained material stolen from Conrad Aiken and Nordahl Grieg."[17] It does of course contain such material, though Day states it doesn't, but it contains it in somewhat the same way that, say, Eliot's *Waste Land* contains material stolen from others: it is transformed through the borrower's vision and art into something quite different from the original. Lowry may have been putting us on about his fears, but I think he did protest too much about the mediocrity of *Ultramarine*; George Woodcock pointed out some years ago that "it is not an unworthy work,"[18] and a not insignificant part of its strength derives, I think, from the effective use that Lowry made of material from Nordahl Grieg.

NOTES

[1] Nordahl Grieg. *The Ship Sails On.* (New York, 1927). Subsequent references are indicated internally.

[2] Douglas Day. *Malcolm Lowry.* (New York, 1973), p. 119n. The sentence appears, slightly modified, in *Under the Volcano* (New York, 1947), p. 229. ("Yet this day, pichicho, shalt thou be with me in — ")

[3] Tony Kilgallin. *Lowry.* (Erin, 1973), p. 108.

[4] Malcolm Lowry, *Ultramarine.* (Philadelphia and New York, 1962), p. 173. Subsequent references are indicated internally.

[5] Malcolm Lowry. "On Board the *West Hardaway*," *Story*, Vol. III, No. 15 (October 1933), 22.

[6] Earle Birney, ed. *The Collected Poems of Malcolm Lowry.* (San Francisco, 1962), p. 9.

[7] Malcolm Lowry. *Selected Letters*, ed. Harvey Breit and Marjorie Bonner Lowry. (Philadelphia and New York, 1965), pp. 15-16.

[8] Quoted in Day, *op. cit.*, p. 117.

[9] Conrad Knickerbocker states flatly that Captain Boden was "a Norwegian seaman." *Prairie Schooner* XXXVII (Winter, 1963-64), 303. Day, however, states that he was "a well-known Liverpool shipowner and mariner." *op. cit.*, p. 58.

[10] Day, *op. cit.*, p. 121n. Though Day suggests that Lowry learned only "a drinker's vocabulary" in Norwegian, his precise use of Norwegian throughout *Ultramarine* seems to contradict this.

[11] *The Atlantic Monthly*, October 1941, p. 501.

[12] Dik Lehmkul, "Echo From the North: The Voice of Nordahl Grieg," *Transformation*, 3. London, 1945, p. 165.

[13] Earle Birney, "A Malcolm Lowry Bibliography," *Canadian Literature*, 8 (Spring, 1961), 82. Grieg's novel, published in Norway in 1924, was translated into English in 1927 by one of Lowry's Cambridge masters, A. G. Chater.

[14] Lowry's title contains the Norwegian title of Grieg's novel, *Skibet Gaar Videre*. This story, published in the winter of 1930-31, and "Port Swettenham," published in February of 1930, were both incorporated into *Ultramarine*. "Port Swettenham" contains no reference to Grieg, whom Lowry visited between July and September of 1930.

[15] Conrad Aiken, "Malcolm Lowry: A Note," *Canadian Literature*, 8 (Spring, 1961), 29-30.

[16] I find it puzzling that Grieg, a relatively successful dramatist, would entrust a stage-adaptation of his novel to a non-dramatist, but this is perhaps another of the many unsolved details of the whole Grieg-Lowry relationship.

[17] Day, *op. cit.*, pp. 26-27.

[18] George Woodcock, "Malcolm Lowry as Novelist," *British Columbia Library Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 4 (April 1961), 26.

MAN IN THE MAZE

Donald G. Priestman

THE RECENT reprinting of Douglas Le Pan's only novel, *The Deserter*, in the New Canadian Library should serve to remind readers both of the author's considerable technical ability and, at the same time, of how slender a body of writing his reputation rests upon. In what follows, I shall trace Le Pan's central theme of the search for individual dignity and the meaning of life as he develops it through the "maze" and "entrapment" imagery of his two volumes of poetry and his novel.[1] At first glance, he appears to move chronologically from pre-war to demobilization but, in the end, he leads us full circle. We are left with the conclusion after reading any one of his books, and more so after reading them all, that such a quest is a continuous one. Circumstances may alter but man, as Le Pan sees him, is always a kind of princely Theseus groping in the labyrinth without the assurance of Ariadne's thread.

This assurance, once believed in, never did exist Le Pan tells us in "Image of Silenus," the last poem of *The Wounded Prince*.[2] Opening with a picture of the great blue heron rising from the reeds, the poem presents us with an image of our unfulfilled desires which would at first limp then soar to some better place which we can, at best, but dimly imagine. Sandwiched between the ascent and possible coming to rest of the bird is the Silenus figure, the image of faith, and those who do it homage. Faith, "not so bright now / As when it left the hands of the makers," seldom shows its treasures, but when it does, they, Dionysius, St. Christopher, St. Francis, Apollo, and the rest, seem toys, mere "shrunken figures of desire" that are "fashioned out of desperation." It provokes the tortured song of the ill-assorted choir whose home is the labyrinthine slum described in the closing stanzas of the poem and who plead to know, "where is the land of promised good." Although the Silenus may give brief glimpses of its treasures, they are just enough to keep them wondering if the bird does, after all, know of "the misted land where time goes slow." Man cannot follow the bird, however, and he will never know whether the heron ever achieves its destination or not.

Because they lack any clearly defined purpose or destination, the figures in

The Wounded Prince are appropriately pictured as lost, trapped, or lonely. In "Twelve of the Clock," for instance, the lonely individual hearing the clock strike at midnight is likened to a ship in the icebound mid-Atlantic. His "harried heart" beats slow as the turbines; he must pick his way through the "labyrinthine city of the sea." For some, in a situation such as this, death, the poet suggests in the thirteenth stanza, is a temptation. Others escape into fantasy, but in each case they behave as they do because they can't stand being alone. This problem is also considered in the title poem, "The Wounded Prince", which takes for its subject the sorry condition of the sensitive personality humiliated equally by pity on the one hand and disappointment on the other. Hurt sensibilities, Le Pan suggests, result in withdrawal to one's inner life and are betrayed by the wounded expression in the eye which he compares with a bird impaled within a thicket, presumably the eyebrows.

A similar case obtains in "A Fallen Prophet" as we trace a first-hand observer's brief faith in Christ. It began with the walking on the water and ended with the crucifixion. Images of net and maze are few, but the poem, as a whole, seems a prelude to "Image of Silenus" which was discussed earlier because I believe it crucial to an understanding of Le Pan's ideas and attitudes. In this poem, Christ is the heron and the observer is analogous to the slum dweller who dreams of finding a way out of his metropolitan maze. He was "baffled by lights, humiliated / By mad machines, by schedules," and believed the man who walked the waters could lead him to a better place. This dream, however, like the dream of following the heron, was illusory. But Christ too is presented as a type of wounded prince; He was trapped by crucifixion, here presented as a kind of drowning, yet His death and its nobility remain a potent legacy. As we shall see, the "wounded prince-fallen prophet" motif is transformed in later works to comprehend the plight of the sensitive and knightly modern soldier.

Isolation of a different sort is the problem explored in "Coureurs de Bois". Here, the "you" of the poem is trapped by time; he was born too late to channel his need for a sense of purpose into anything as obvious and physical as the search for the North-west Passage. His idealism is even more incongruous in the contemporary world than were the brocaded coats the Coureurs de Bois packed among their rations of pemmican against the day when they would reach the courts of China. For the modern man, new Easts are only to be found, "through the desperate wilderness behind your eyes." In his search for honour, he must explore himself and wander the maze of his own personality. The man who can do this is a hero of a different stamp but a hero nevertheless. To some extent, at

least, this new type of search, carried on in the modern wilderness of the self, foreshadows Rusty's desperate hunt for honour and perfection in *The Deserter.*

"A Country Without a Mythology" and "Canoe Trip" present Canada as another type of labyrinth. Her wilderness is real enough, and its very presence is responsible for and suggestive of the cultural wilderness that often makes the sensitive Canadian feel trapped. The former offers a completely negative view of the country while "Canoe Trip", using the same journey motif hints that if the land cannot provide direct inspiration, at least its vastness and unspoiled character can impress one with a feeling of awe. In "Finale" Le Pan repeats his challenge to make something worthwhile out of the world we must live in. Whereas the journey through the maze in "Canoe Trip" was a healthful experience which prepared one to face the task with renewed vigour, the maze in this poem leads only to escapism via the paths of selfishness and crime. People who follow this route are like the "dropouts" in "Twelve of the Clock" who could not stand up to loneliness but succumbed to suicide and fantasy. By repeating the phrase, "Always the path leads back," Le Pan suggests that escape is not really possible. Like a man lost in the bush who keeps coming back to where he started, the person who seeks to escape the normal world, whether through crime or love, must always return to it. Compared to the fantasy world it may seem harsh and vulgar but it poses a challenge which must be met.

THUS FAR what we have seen in *The Wounded Prince* is a brilliantly played set of variations around the theme of the personality which feels itself trapped in a world uncongenial to its sensibilities. Instinctively it shrinks away from the source of irritation, and so experiences loneliness in the conviction, sometimes only half realized, that it is living at the wrong time and in the wrong place. Some people are able to face their loneliness and learn to live with it proudly and defiantly. Others cannot, and a number of the poems point out how struggling to escape one trap can lead to another. The other trap is the dream that somewhere there is a better place, a happier life to be led. Such an objective is but dimly perceived and may be approached through a variety of paths such as religion, crime, love, abnormality, idealism, or just plain daydreaming. All paths, however, turn out to be mazes which lead the would-be travellers back to the real world they came from. Some return hopeless misfits; others are inspired to begin the difficult job of making over this world in the image of their hearts' desires. With "Image of Silenus", I feel Le Pan draws all

his variations together and, to push the music analogy a little farther, closes on an elaborate and tragic chord.

Considering the quality of Canadian poetry in 1948, one might have predicted a brilliant future for the author of *The Wounded Prince*. Even to-day the book stands up well against those of practitioners with a similar temperament such as Jay MacPherson, James Reaney, and P. K. Page. We might have been inclined to raise our eyebrows a little at C. Day Lewis' statement in the introduction that, "there is a certain bluntness and dependability about the surface of his poems," but his enthusiasm for a poet "in whom the New and Old World have met" would have seemed justified. Every poem was not loaded with Canadianisms but Le Pan's achievement seemed to be that when they did appear, and it was not infrequently, they did not sound awkward or provincial. Herons could share a poem with a Silenus statue and coureurs de bois could be utilized without turning the poem into an adventure narrative. Virtuosity, not slick technique but an ability to look at a subject or treat a theme from a multiplicity of angles, marks Le Pan's first volume. Although the common denominator of much of his imagery may be regarded as that of the trap or maze, the actual variety of visual impression he achieves is remarkable. When Lewis said that Le Pan's poetry conveys "the feeling of assurance and satisfaction that comes from the right word set unobtrusively in the right place," he came close to describing the great promise that this poet held in his first works. Whether this promise was fulfilled as a poet or not rests on an assessment of *The Net and the Sword*, published five years later.

Two other poems in *The Wounded Prince* deserve comment. "One of the Regiment" was reprinted in the second volume and I shall deal briefly with it there. The other, "A Vision", will serve as an introduction to *The Net and the Sword*. Composed in seven quatrains of iambic tetrameter, the poem has the quality of hurrying the reader relentlessly towards its last four lines. Le Pan's vision was of the coming war and he concludes that the gods care nothing for man's suffering; it is a pleasant fiction just as the little deities in the Silenus image were nothing more than "shrunken figures of desire." This is the way man transmutes his brief:

> Imagination grew the tree
> To mock the way weak men have bled.
> Evasion turned to heraldry
> The living, sweet, imperfect red.

Heraldry, as we shall see, is one means Le Pan employs to distance his readers from the horrors of war in *The Net and the Sword.*

WARTIME ITALY is the setting for *The Net and the Sword* but even a first reading makes it abundantly clear that it is not war which primarily concerns Le Pan. This is not to deny him the quality of pity but rather to remove him from the ranks of those whose subject is blood, sweat, tears, and the hell of war. His theme remains the struggle of the individual caught in the maze of life, and he reworks the informing ideas of *The Wounded Prince.* Here, to find one's way successfully through the maze's various tensions, attractions, and dead-ends is to achieve some kind of vision, while to get lost is to die in an elaborate trap. The trap is more obviously physical but its implications are the same. It forces the individual to face his crisis alone and brings out in the truly noble personality, the wounded prince, a hitherto unsuspected dignity.

The title poem makes the basic metaphor of the collection clear and emphasizes the nature of the first kind of trap, which is the net-like paraphernalia of modern war:

> In this sandy arena, littered
> And looped with telephone wires, tank-traps, mine-fields,
> Twining about the embittered
> Debris of history, the people whom he shields
> Would quail before a stranger if they could see
> His smooth as silk ferocity.
>
> Where billowing skies suspend
> Smoke-latticed rumours, enmeshed hypotheses
> And mad transmitters send
> Impossible orders on crossed frequencies,
> His eyes thrust concentrated and austere.
> Behind his lids, the skies are clear.

Against such odds the princely personality can only pit its pride. Most of the poems contain some vocabulary of the "net" or "maze" variety but some deal more precisely with the second kind of trap: Italy, which seems to ensnare and, at times, even digest the invader. In "An Incident", the soldier's body dissolves or melts right into the landscape while in "Elegy in Romagna" we have imagery which is shifting and murky, leading the reader to see with the tired eyes of the writer a cellar which takes on the qualities of a dungeon or a spider's web. The

victims, in reality soldiers resting after a day of battle, occasionally remind one of flies stuck in jam:

> One of the sleepers moving in his sleep
> Is tangled in a mess of gear, and groans;
> One shows his back as brown as a tobacco leaf;
> One sighs, one lies as though his neck were broken.

So much for the net except to say that it has a beauty of its own, especially when it is shorn by Le Pan of most of the real horror and agony of actual warfare.

The character of the gladiator is also the product of Le Pan's poetics rather than of reporting. In the toils of the net, he struggles to keep up the belief that he is fighting for some high cause, like a knight of old. Preserving this belief, however, is not always easy. Fear and the mere havoc of war make it difficult to keep up one's illusions and, surveying a field after a battle, in "Meditation after an Engagement", he can find little solace even in having survived.

In his review of *The Net and the Sword*, Northrop Frye pointed out that in gladiatorial contests "generally the netman won."[3] Such is the case here too, though there is no doubt that the man with the sword is the hero. The method of portraying him is frequently as stylized as the battle scenes which are deliberately heraldic in their effect. Le Pan's hero is frequently a strangely impersonal youth, tight-lipped, bare-headed, possessed of a "smooth as silk ferocity", who often dissolves into a crusader or Florentine gallant as he does in "One of the Regiment", but whose memories are of "Skating at Scarborough, summer at the island." This same motif of the young crusader intoxicated by battle runs through several of the poems, but is the entire subject of "Reconnaisance in Early Light". Looking more like a picture on a Hitler Jugend poster than a kid from cabbage town, he goes into battle with every hair in place:

> His gaze alone is unperplexed.
> He sips from this thin air some sacred word.
>
> Through all his veins the sacrament of danger,
> Discovering secret fires, runs riot. His hard
> Eyes gleam with cunning pressed from some smouldering hunger;
> His coat burns sleek and lillied as a leopard's.

Again, in the title poem, although the hero succumbs, Le Pan tries to convey a magnificence to him. The imagery of the poem shifts nicely between the combat of the ancient and that of the modern gladiator but it invests the action with a kind of greatness reminiscent of the ritual struggle and death of the bullfight.

This distancing of the reader from the real messiness of war is at once an advantage and disadvantage. It keeps the reader aware that the struggle of the soldier caught in the toils of war is representative of something greater than itself and does not call forth the personal emotional expenditure, genuine or maudlin, of conventional war poetry. It also makes it possible for Le Pan, eight years after the event, to make the struggle still seem relevant. The disadvantage is that these poems with their almost rococo use of language often leave the reader with the feeling that he has been looking at a bejewelled reliquary which, however calm and beautiful it may be, conceals something whose story is one of cruelty and pain. A subdued yet typical instance of this may be found in the poem, "An Incident", where a boy who in peacetime might have been looking for an overgrown portage in his own province now scans a map and waits in the face of the enemy for relief. His death seems not only ill-timed and accidental but, as Le Pan relates it, unreal. A similar feeling is created in "An Effect of an Illumination". During a night bombardment men are frightened, blinded, and killed. Here more than in the other poems Le Pan succeeds in making us feel for a time some of the genuine emotion which the occasion must have prompted:

> The sphinctered sky seals off a livid bell-jar
> On humiliated animals lost in holes. . . .
> O mother! mother! cord to the mothering earth!
> Our hearts run dry; our blood sucked downward
> Through a straight, stretched tube, dangerously thin
> And twanging breaks . . . breaks . . . how can it hold?
> Pluck close this nested bird with brittle bones
> A little longer. Receive it. Give it suck.
> Exhausted vacuum below pulsating ribs,
> Easy to crush as wrens' bones or a blown
> Bird's egg, protect with vascular affection;
> Protect, great mother, your exhausted sons.
> And slowly through parched veins blood creeps again.

Desmond Pacey argues that, "the elaborate, ornate language and imagery is very effective in just that sense of voluptuous luxury which affords the desired contrast for the sudden brutal ferocity of the raid."[4] I would agree with him about the contrast but feel it is weakened because the horror is transmuted by the language. Not only is the passage here quoted preceded but also followed by lines whose imagery and vocabulary tend to erase the shock from the reader's mind.

None of this is bad in itself, but it does raise the question as to whether all subjects are equally appropriate to a lyric and elegiac talent. There is no denying

a strong continuity of theme exists between *The Wounded Prince* and *The Net and the Sword*. If his first volume offers a wide range of "man in the maze" situations, it is fair to say that his second is an examination in detail of one of them — man in the maze of war.[5] The youthful Canadian soldier, far from home and caught in the toils of death and danger, is indeed one type of wounded prince. But war is only one of many traps a man can find himself in and so Le Pan is obliged to utilize its imagery while not letting it run away with his reader's attention. To avoid this, he tries to turn our minds away from the pain and horror that all of us know, if only vicariously, are the very stuff of war. His technique has been to turn raw life into art, or as he called it in the closing lines of "A Vision", "Evasion turned to heraldry". As a solution to an artistic problem it is perfectly legitimate and commendable. Whether it works or not is another matter. Layton's "Archibald Lampman of the battlefield" remark, Pacey's repeating of the "Peacock Le Pan" nickname, and even Frye's rather defensive reminder that, "Besides, the poems are not battle pieces but elegies, meditations on war recollected in tranquillity,"[6] all suggest that there is an unresolved tension between the technique and the material. Like it or not, war is a subject with built-in responses that are hard to muffle. For Le Pan, the problem of utilizing war imagery while divesting it of the accustomed emotional responses may have been too great. In any event, it is part of the artist's task not to avoid challenges but to seek solutions to them and Le Pan should not be faulted for his daring.

In the last paragraph, I intimated that the poet bit off more than he could chew. One wonders, however, how he might have fared if he had kept his "heraldic" tendencies under tighter rein. Richness of technique was certainly called for if war imagery was to be abstracted from the emotions that normally go with it, but there is a line between art and artificiality over which Le Pan trespasses in *The Net and the Sword*. His first volume is superior in this respect. C. Day Lewis' statement about the right word in the right place was no small compliment, nor was it unearned.[7] The language of *The Wounded Prince* is rich but not gaudy and some of the stanza patterns such as that of "Rider on the Sands" are intricate, but functional and unobtrusive. Unfortunately, the same cannot be said for much of *The Net and the Sword*. Passages of great beauty are there too, but so are phrases like "eyelids that fleur-de-lis the dark," "the white caesura that stripped down longing," and "systole of sky" which merely jar the reader. Likewise, his use of "trumpet-tell" is common enough to be classed as a mannerism.

Similarly, the elaborate stanza structures generally fail in *The Net and the*

Sword because they constantly remind the reader of the anatomy of the poem. Up to a point, Le Pan's technique does succeed in making the difficult look easy, but his efforts are seldom unobtrusive. Tours de force such as: "The Net and the Sword" — ababcc; "One of the Regiment" — couplets; "The Peacock" — abca; "The Nimbus" — abcbbac; "Meditation After an Engagement" — abbcaddc and "The Lost Crusader" — abcadcdbc, are just too dexterous to pass unnoticed. Only less self-conscious poems like "The New Vintage", "The Nimbus", "Interval with Halcyons", or "Idyll" could have led him to a wider range of imagery and mythic forms. Instead, however, Le Pan chose in 1964 to explore again the "man in the maze" theme — this time in prose.

DURING THE SAME YEAR that *The Deserter* was published, its author wrote an article in which he undertook to outline some of the difficulties confronting a Canadian writer.[8] Not the least of these is the simple matter of being a Canadian. The home market is pitifully small and to write specifically for a wider audience involves the choice of whether or not to abandon any material that refers directly to the homeland. After considering those who opt not to suppress Canadian references, he turns to those who do:

> If the risks of such an undertaking are obvious, so are the advantages: it can produce a result of almost universal luminosity which can be understood everywhere. A strategy of this kind may also commend itself to some writers because of seeming to be congruent with contemporary critical views of myth and symbol.[9]

One of the writers to whom this "strategy" appealed was Le Pan, himself. The scene of *The Deserter*'s action is never mentioned by name, though it is most certainly London, particularly Soho and the dock area, and the hero, Rusty, is English.[10] With the disguise as transparent as it is, the reader can only wonder whether he failed in his attempt at anonymity or simply had his eye fixed on a wider audience and was prepared to make the usual concessions to get it. A more charitable way of looking at the novel is to view it through its use of myth and symbol. Seen from this angle, *The Deserter* does possess universality. Its informing myth is the Theseus story and its dominant image, the maze or labyrinth.

The hero of the novel bears a marked resemblance to some of the "wounded princes" who appeared earlier in the volumes of poetry. He is possessed of a dignity that sets him apart from his comrades; he has had a glimpse of perfection which makes everyday reality almost an affront to his sensibilities. That perfection was symbolized by Althea, a one-night pick-up, who not only provided physical

ecstasy but awoke in him the dormant yearnings for a nobler, more idealized existence. Sleeping with her was like being able to follow the blue heron of "Image of Silenus" to its home, but like the vision offered by the bird, the bliss offered by Althea was only transitory and tantalizing.[11] In a different but analogous way the precision, esprit de corps, and discipline of the army in wartime also offered the seventeen year-old who lied about his age a kind of ideal.

As the novel opens, the old ways of honour are rusting as surely as is the barbed wire around the camp; the old life is crumbling like the unrepaired air-raid shelter. It is disillusionment, not cowardice, which drives him to desert. From the "atmosphere of a swamp" in the camp, he enters the labyrinth of the city in search of a renewed sense of honour and purpose. By the time that search is done, Rusty will have learned the wisdom contained in "Finale" that, "Always the path leads back."

Once out of the camp, Le Pan's hero is not in one maze but two. There is the obvious one, the physical labyrinth of London in which Rusty wanders, first in Soho and later in the dockland, in hopes of evading the military police and afterwards, in addition, the gang he had refused to join. The other is an intellectual one through which he twists and turns in hopes of finding or at least defining the perfection which his night with Althea only hinted at. For Rusty, the two mazes seem connected. As he would see it, it was necessary to desert, and hence be on the run, in order to conduct his search. What is apparent to the reader after a short time, however, is that the two mazes lead in opposite directions. The physical maze of escape leads to isolation, a narrowing of horizons, and ultimately to the fantasy world of anti-social behaviour. Again, we are seeing the ideas of "Finale" being worked out in narrative form. Opposed to this, the intellectual maze leads Rusty, reluctantly at first, towards the normal world of love, responsibility, and even the paying of bills, the very things, in fact, he balked at even when he thought of Althea. His change of attitude, which leads him simultaneously out of both mazes, is not brought about by any one climactic action. Rather, it is the result of his ability to learn from what he has seen of others caught in similar traps.

Not much time elapses before Rusty discovers that the physical maze into which he projected himself by the act of desertion is a crowded one indeed. He is only one of thousands of deserters in London and, in Soho where he first settles, they are so numerous that he is scarcely noticed. Desertion does not trouble his conscience, although fear of detection forces him to adopt the surreptitious habits of his neighbours. It is not long before the glamour of the place wears off and,

especially after being taken by a barman as the type who would welcome an opportunity to join a robbery, Rusy begins to feel that he is not in a haven but a jungle-like maze:

> In the silence he was reminded of an explorer whom he had read about as a boy who had travelled thousands of miles down a great river only to find himself at the end in the middle of endless swamps and creeks and savannas with no outlet to the sea; . . . The foliage on the peeling wall-paper, grey-green and faded, was like snake-infested vines or creepers and sometimes as he sat in the stillness, smoking, they seemed to be hemming him in. Before long they might close in and coil round and crush him.[12]

Shortly after this, the police net around Soho tightens. Although Rusty slips through, many others don't and, particularly in the case of the young pickpocket who falls to his death, he sees how dangerous the life of a fugitive can be. Only by turning himself in can he escape feeling like a hunted animal, but he is not yet ready for this. As a result, he moves to the dock area and soon finds that he has merely exchanged one labyrinth for another. After a brief spell of employment, Rusty and another deserter, Dragon, are forced to run off in the face of a band of irate dock workers who imagine their jobs threatened. Their escape through the yards piled high with goods and timber, their retreat to the warren which Dragon calls home, are all replete with "maze" imagery. Indeed, almost every movement he makes seems twisted and circular rather than straightforward. Even when Rusty takes stock of the situation, Le Pan repeats the motif to emphasize the directionless and lost quality of his hero's life:

> He would resume his calling as a wanderer; threading his way from one street to another; circling a basin that was choked with freighters, tugs, barges, and going on to one that was almost empty, with a few boards floating on the slightly oily swell; picking up the estuary at one point, losing it, and then coming on it again.[13]

The friendship with Dragon continues and mainly serves to introduce Rusty and the reader to other deserters who have adopted a way of life that could in time become Rusty's too. Brandy's warped and perverse sense of honour is honour nevertheless and, after all, not so very different from his own. Yet, in the end, Rusty realizes that the lives Brandy and Dragon lead, though in some ways attractive, are not for him. By clever use of 'heraldic' imagery Le Pan is able to present this as a conclusion Rusty arrived at slowly, and at the same time thread the various incidents of his novel together. Early in the book, Rusty says to Mark, "Sometimes I think I'm an animal from a coat of arms, a bear or a stag, who wants to leave his post and go back to the woods." Much later, during a

marvellously described drunken orgy that takes place at Dragon's, the bear and stag images are re-introduced. Some time afterwards Mark reminds Rusty about his original remark about wanting to wander off like a stag or bear and asks if he still feels that way. His friend now replies, "Some men can live happily as animals. I can't." But even at this point he is not prepared to come back to the normal world. Before he does return, he is forced through another maze as he tries desperately to escape the gunmen of the gang who think he has informed on them.

Although he is no criminal, Rusty becomes caught in a net of circumstances which brings gangland vengeance upon himself and the totally uninvolved Stefan. Their flight through the foggy streets of the London dock area is pictured by Le Pan in the twisting, turning imagery of the maze, of which at one point he is able to say, "They were tracing out a labyrinth that seemed to serpentine endlessly." Even Stefan's death is mentioned in the newspapers as the "Cul-de-sac Murder". With the closing of this incident and his subsequent recovery from his bullet wound, Rusty deliberately emerges from his maze by turning himself in. He might have done this at any time, but he was not prepared to until he had found the perfection which led him to desert in the first place. Only during his convalescence is he able to piece together the meaning and implications of everything that has happened to him since he left the camp.

Modern parlance which might refer to Rusty as "a crazy mixed-up kid" would aptly describe the way Le Pan has envisioned him. Being "mixed-up" puts him in a kind of intellectual maze which the author is at some pains to outline and also indicates that Rusty has only a vague idea of the honour or perfection he is looking for. From the beginning, Mark insists that whatever it is, it is only to be found as a productive member of society. Against this Rusty argues he must seek his goal as a "roving picket". He refuses to accept Mark's position that the outcast or self-exile becomes progressively divorced from reality and strays ever further into the half-world of selfishness and/or crime. That Mark was right is shown by the fact that only a series of incidents, significant in themselves and cumulative in their effect, prevent Rusty from following this path.

Early in the story he begins to learn that everybody feels trapped in one way or another. The situation with the fugitives he encounters is obvious enough, but even people with exciting lives like Mark are caught. Mark's story of the man who dived into the blue grotto at Capri and came up with a piece of used toilet paper stuck to his head is illustrative. The point of the story, reminiscent of "Image of Silenus", is not wasted on his friend but its effect is delayed. Only a

short time afterwards Rusty is confronted by more fundamental problems which he cannot satisfactorily answer. After being questioned about his motives for desertion, he can only ask himself, "Who am I? . . . What am I looking for? One question succeeded another like the streets turning and flowing into one another."

It may seem to Rusty that he is seeking honour, but he is affronted several times to discover how others think of him. Once at a late night coffee stall he listens to two guardsmen-cum-male prostitutes and two second-storey men swapping stories about the night's adventures. What was told lightheartedly by one burglar turns out to be a vicious assault on an old woman as the papers tell it. He is upset when he recalls, "they had accepted him as one of themselves" and even more distressed the next day when a barman simply takes it for granted that he would be interested in joining a smash-and-grab job. A similar misunderstanding leads to his wounding and Stefan's murder while he is living in the dock area. Between these two events occurs the party at Dragon's with the bear and stag imagery mentioned earlier. What really sets Rusty apart from them, in spite of the empathy he feels, is a difference in attitude. During the conversation, Brandy and Dragon claim they have never experienced guilt. Rusty, on the contrary, tries to formulate it but falls asleep, drunk, first.

Finally, the influence of Stefan and Anne leads him back to the normal world, the world of responsibilities that Mark talked of. Each is weaker than Rusty and each has his or her own maze to contend with. Their very weakness, paradoxically, is their strength, because they instinctively reach out to others whereas Rusty is strong enough to live on his own. Now feeling emotionally drained Rusty concludes his honour has left him. Even the will to suicide is gone but from this nadir of anguish, he rises to the almost visionary experience described in the last two and a half pages of the book. It is the "deep ultimate animal courage", he realizes, that is the root of honour. In people like Brandy and Dragon it was diverted into a dead-end, but, without it, there can be "neither love nor justice nor a city, without which there could be no meaning nor anything but a spreading tundra and despair."

Reviews of *The Deserter* generally centred on the "poetic" qualities of the novel and saw them, on the whole, as detrimental.[14] In particular, they complained of the inappropriate literary quality of speech placed in the mouths of people who presumably had not been exposed to a great deal of formal education. Such a charge is valid if one assumes that Le Pan has attempted a realistic novel in which he merely failed to distinguish the voice of the narrator from those of the characters. By the same token, the complaint that some of the incidents in

the plot are time-worn is equally valid. But all this assumes that *The Deserter* was intended as a realistic novel, and there is an argument to be made that this was not Le Pan's aim at all. Certainly the episodic plot structure beginning in questioning and ending in revelation seems hardly designed for an "action" story. In fact, with its similar emphasis on maze imagery, it is more reminiscent of a "quest" story like *A Portrait of the Artist as a Young Man* than of a psychological thriller in the manner of Graham Greene. Although I have ignored most of the symbolism not related to the subject of this paper, it should be noted that there is a great deal of it — too much, indeed, to do anything but clog the works of a realistic novel. The Maze, the animals, the crystal sundial, the Plaza-Ministry opposition, etc. all give *The Deserter* the quality of a fable or a loosely constructed allegory. If the novel has faults, I suggest they lie in the other direction: that Le Pan has not eliminated enough realism from his story to allow the poetic to take over completely. His setting and hero are not anonymous enough to achieve that "universal luminosity" he spoke of in his article. What was needed, perhaps, was something closer in technique to that of Alain Robbe-Grillet. It need only be noted in conclusion that Le Pan has shown a remarkable consistency, even tenacity, in his use of imagery involving the maze and the personality trapped in it. All works of a true artist, it has been said, only prepare the way for the next one. Bearing this in mind, it is only fair to say that Le Pan's works, though not always individual successes, have been artistic in the best sense of the word.

NOTES

[1] Douglas Le Pan, *The Wounded Prince and Other Poems* (Chatto and Windus: London, 1948): *The Net and the Sword* (Clarke, Irwin, Toronto, 1953); *The Deserter* (McClelland and Stewart: Toronto, 1964; rpt. 1973).

[2] In all cases, titles of books will appear in italics and titles of individual poems in quotation marks.

[3] Northrop Frye, "Letters in Canada: 1953-Poetry," *UTQ*, 23 (1954), 256-58.

[4] Desmond Pacey, *Creative Writing in Canada* (Ryerson Press: Toronto, 2nd, ed. 1961), p. 183.

[5] The precise topic of war appears in "One of the Regiment" printed first in *The Wounded Prince and Other Poems.*

[6] Frye, *op. cit.*, p. 257.

[7] cf. E. K. Brown, "Letters in Canada: 1948-Poetry," *UTQ*, 18 (1949), 257-58.

[8] Douglas Le Pan, "The Dilemma of the Canadian Author," *Atlantic Monthly* (November 1964), 160-64.

[9] Ibid., p. 164.

[10] The review in *Canadian Literature*, No. 24 (Spring, 1965) 70, 72-73, suggests he is Canadian but this seems highly improbable from the details of the novel. Rusty

and Mark saw service in the same unit and Mark has returned to his old job in the Ministry in London — which one we are not told, but presumably a British one. Neither the location of Canada House, nor the duties of the High Commissioner or the secretaries, fit the description of the Ministry or the duties which Mark performs or the official contacts Mark possesses to help Stefan. Moreover, we are told of Rusty's mother, "She had died in the middle of the war when in many parts of the country the sky was boisterous with nightly raids." p. 10.

[11] cf. *The Deserter*, p. 33.

[12] Ibid., pp. 90-91.

[13] Ibid., p. 117.

[14] cf. *Saturday Night*, 79 (November 1964), *Montrealer*, 39 (January 1965), *Canadian Author and Bookman*, 40 (Spring 1965), *Canadian Literature*, No. 24 (Spring 1965), *Canadian Forum*, 45 (May 1965), *UTQ*, 34 (July 1965), *Queens Quarterly*, 72 (Autumn 1965), *Tamarack Review*, 34 (Winter 1965).

MANIFESTO

Dorothy Livesay

Why we drink.
Why we sleep.
Why we dream.

The constant gnawing
undergrowth desire
to escape into
the irrational

Why we murder.

Parents
struggle
never to step over
that line

Children try to see
how far they can put a foot in
and out, fast
and not be seen

Music exists
to take us there
without guilt.

CONSTELLATION TRAGIQUE

Christina H. Roberts-van Oordt

L'ÉCLOSION DU ROMAN QUÉBÉCOIS au cours des années cinquante semble coïncider avec l'arrivée dans ce pays des idées existentialistes. C'est André Langevin qui, l'un des premiers, les a introduites dans notre littérature et Jean-Louis Major a souligné en 1964 (dans *Archives des Lettres canadiennes*, III, 207-229) les affinités entre le romancier québécois et des écrivains comme Dostoïevski, Sartre et Camus.

Dans une conversation que j'eus avec Langevin à Montréal en septembre 1970, celui-ci confirma que Dostoïevski et Camus avaient tous deux fait grande impression sur lui, bien qu'il ne s'agisse pas, à son avis, d'influences conscientes sur ses propres romans (v. *Liberté* 2, no. 1, p. 51). Il précisa qu'il avait découvert le romancier russe à l'âge de dix-sept ans et qu'il lisait Camus au moment d'écrire ses romans des années cinquante.

En plus de l'apport existentialiste, l'originalité des romans de Langevin vient évidemment de la *manière* dont ce dernier exprime sa révolte contre l'hypocrisie et l'étroitesse d'esprit du milieu. Or, nous savons tous que Dostoïevski et Camus ont extériorisé dans leurs oeuvres le même type de révolte. Comme eux, Langevin pose des questions philosophiques profondes, au niveau de l'individu aussi bien que sur le plan social et universel. Comme eux également, mais contrairement à un Robert Elie ou à une Gabrielle Roy, par exemple, qui dans chaque roman concentraient leur attention sur une seule classe sociale, que ce soit la bourgeoisie ou le prolétariat, Langevin peint toutes les classes de la société à la fois, tout en atteignant un niveau esthétique et philosophique supérieur à celui de ses prédécesseurs.

Pour ces raisons, la connaissance des romans de Dostoïevski et de Camus fait ressortir le sérieux et l'originalité de ceux de Langevin, car il s'agit, n'en doutons pas, d'une affinité profonde et non d'une imitation servile. Une comparaison, même brève et incomplète, entre les trois premiers romans de Langevin et l'oeuvre

romanesque des deux grands romanciers étrangers nous aidera, je crois, à la mieux comprendre et apprécier.

Les allusions à Camus et les ressemblances partielles entre les deux écrivains abondent dans les romans de Langevin. On n'a qu'à penser, par exemple, aux nombreuses références à Sisyphe (v., par exemple, *Poussière sur la ville*, 8e éd., p. 139), à l'emploi constant d'expressions comme "ma révolte", "mon combat", "la justice", etc., au style sobre et au monologue intérieur dans *Poussière sur la ville*, qui rappelle ainsi *L'Etranger*, au rôle important des prêtres et des médecins, aux univers clos et aux symboles tels les prisons et les chaînes. Par contre, les aspects dostoïevskiens sont plus subtils mais, il me semble, d'autant plus profonds. Il y a certainement les histoires d'ivrognes et d'orphelins, la neige fondue, etc. qui font penser au Russe, mais les fortes ressemblances dans la tonalité et la structure me paraissent les plus significatives.

Ce qui me semble frappant, c'est qu'au point de vue du développement thématique et au point de vue de la structure fondamentale, les romans de Langevin, comme ceux de Dostoïevski, sont plus dramatiques, moins stylisés et plus tragiques (dans tous les sens du mot) que ceux de Camus. Grâce à l'emploi de perspectives et de voix multiples à l'intérieur de chaque roman — même de ceux qui sont à la première personne — et grâce aussi à l'emploi de dialogues en discours direct, c'est-à-dire de vraies confrontations et de conflits déchirants, se déroulant devant nous et extériorisés par les paroles et dans les actes des personnages, lesquels vivent tous une grande crise dans leur vie privée, l'art romanesque de Dostoïevski et de Langevin me paraît plus explicitement "dramatique" ou, pour emprunter les mots de Mikhaïl Bakhtine (*La Poétique de Dostoïevski*, Editions du Seuil, 1970), "polyphonique" et "dialogique". En outre, l'organisation spatiale et temporelle très concentrée, et le rôle du scandale, du crime et de la violence chez ces deux romanciers sont plus proprement tragiques. L'usage qu'ils font de ces éléments leur permet non seulement de critiquer leur milieu et de poser des questions existentielles, mais aussi d'apporter des réponses à ces questions, ce qui m'a toujours semblé l'une des fonctions importantes de la littérature tragique. Camus lui-même écrit en 1950: "Toute mon oeuvre est ironique." (*Carnets* II, 317). *L'Etranger* et *La Chute* sont des monologues; le narrateur de *La Peste* ne cherche pas à pénétrer la vie intérieure des autres personnages ou à dévoiler la sienne; ni Meursault, ni Rieux, ni Clamence ne confrontent les autres aussi directement que les personnages du Russe et du Québécois, qui se révèlent toujours dans une interaction constante et intime avec autrui. Meursault tue un Arabe qu'il ne connaît pas, tandis que Madeleine tue celui qu'elle croyait aimer, et Ivan et

Smerdiakov tuent leur propre père. Rieux soigne des malades et observent ses concitoyens de près, mais il ne communique pas intimement et directement avec ses proches. Ainsi, par ses idées aussi bien que par la tonalité et la technique romanesque qui les reflètent, Langevin semble s'apparenter plutôt à Dostoïevski.

LA RESSEMBLANCE THÉMATIQUE entre les trois romanciers nous paraissant indiscutable, nous examinerons surtout les grands thèmes à la fois dostoïevskiens et camusiens que Major et d'autres (par exemple André Renaud dans *Europe* 47, nos. 478-479, pp. 36-40) ont décelés chez Langevin: la communication, la dualité et l'absurde. L'on pourrait ajouter les problèmes de la liberté, du bien et du mal. Mais quand on examine de près la mise en oeuvre esthétique, Langevin paraît plus proche de Dostoïevski que de Camus.

Par exemple, en ce qui concerne le "drame de la communication entre les humains" (Major, p. 209), Langevin, comme Dostoïevski, nous présente d'une part des exemples d'un manque de communication; d'autre part, des personnages qui réussissent à établir un contact profond et authentique avec autrui. Camus, par contre, tend à ne montrer que des personnages isolés qui ne sont pas encore capables de communiquer directement avec les autres. Cela fait que notre compatriote se rapproche également de Dostoïevski en ce qui concerne la question de l'absurde, car il peint des hommes qui s'affirment en refusant de blesser les autres et en leur offrant l'amour, dépassant ainsi le stade d'une révolte stérile contre la condition humaine pour atteindre la vraie liberté et la vraie communication. A ce point de vue Dupas, le héros du *Temps des Hommes*, nous rappelle non seulement le Prince Mychkine (v. Major, p. 225), mais aussi Sonia Marmeladova, Chatov et Aliocha Karamazov; tandis que Micheline, l'héroïne d'*Evadé de la nuit*, fait penser à Lisa dans *Le Sous-sol* et à Dacha dans *Les Possédés*.

Comme chez Dostoïevski et Camus, la question de l'absurde chez Langevin est intimement liée à celle de la souffrance, car c'est la difficulté de la communication entre les humains, la solitude devant la mort et l'impuissance devant la souffrance des autres qui causent l'angoisse morale de ses personnages. Et la souffrance physique — la maladie et la mort — aussi bien que la souffrance morale, surtout chez les enfants, obsèdent les trois romanciers.

Mais la souffrance est, paradoxalement, nécessaire et même salutaire, car les personnages suffisants, trop sûrs d'eux-mêmes, à la carapace dure — ceux qui, insensibles à la souffrance d'autrui, n'admettent pas qu'ils sont malheureux — sont moralement des morts vivants. A ce point de vue Zverkov dans *Le Sous-sol*;

le Père Karamazov; les juges dans *L'Etranger*; Jim, le curé et le commerçant dans *Poussière sur la ville*; et les supérieurs ecclésiastiques dans *Le Temps des Hommes*, sont tous de la même famille. Ce n'est qu'en souffrant que les héros deviennent conscients — c'est au moment de reconnaître leur impuissance et leur dénuement qu'ils deviennent lucides. Curieusement, cette conscience de l'impuissance n'est pas un échec, puisqu'elle précède nécessairement le moment de la révolte contre la solitude et la souffrance, en un mot — contre l'absurde. Et cette volonté de lutter est la seule force de l'homme. Comme Camus l'a prouvé dans *Le Mythe de Sisyphe* et montré dans *La Peste*, cette lutte, ce refus d'être le complice du mal, est la seule réponse admissible à toutes les questions existentielles.

Cependant, Dostoïevski et Langevin vont plus loin que Camus, car chez eux ce refus de blesser les autres ouvre quelquefois "les voies larges et droites de l'amour", permettant d'établir un contact profond et direct. Cela arrive, par exemple, entre Micheline et Jean dans *Evadé de la nuit*; Alain et Madeleine dans *Poussière sur la ville*; Dupas et Laurier, Gros-Louis et Yolande dans *Le Temps des Hommes*; Sonia et Raskolnikov; Mychkine et Rogozhine; Grouchegnka et Dmitri Karamazov.

On remarquera que dans les exemples cités il s'agit le plus souvent d'une communication établie entre un homme et une femme. Chez le Russe et le Québécois la femme possède en effet un grand pouvoir rédempteur; c'est souvent elle qui, en stimulant son amour, apprend l'humilité et la compassion à l'homme. Par contre, dans les romans de Camus le manque de contact spirituel semble correspondre à l'absence de la femme, ou dans le cas de Marie Cardona, au rôle exclusivement physique qu'elle joue dans la vie du héros. A mon sens, le seul roman camusien où l'on voie des personnages atteindre un degré de communication authentique bien qu'indirecte, est *La Peste*, où Rieux et son ami Tarrou se baignent dans la mer et trouvent la paix, reconnaissant les liens de fraternité qui les unissent en tant qu'"alliés contre l'absurde cruauté" (*Poussière sur la ville*, p. 153). Pour Alain Dubois aussi, le lien indestructible qui l'unit à Madeleine est leur alliance contre l'absurde, mais Langevin va plus loin que Camus en ce que les relations entre ces deux personnages changent radicalement grâce à la découverte de leur souffrance et de leur révolte communes. C'est la compassion d'Alain envers sa femme qui lui ouvre les yeux et le coeur, l'amenant, à deux reprises, à demander pardon à son mari (p. 152, p. 186). Madeleine, femme d'abord si enfantine et en même temps si lointaine, mûrit en devenant lucide — c'est-à-dire consciente de la souffrance dont elle est la cause. En admettant ainsi une certaine responsabilité morale envers Alain, elle fait preuve,

pour la première fois, d'une humilité sincère. Alain ne peut empêcher sa mort, mais il a néanmoins réussi à atteindre son âme avant qu'elle disparaisse. De même, Grouchegnka ne peut empêcher la mort "trop peu digne" de Zossime, mais elle réussit à comprendre et à consoler Aliocha, ce qui leur permet (à tous deux) de progresser encore sur le plan psychologique et spirituel.

En me lisant on s'étonnera peut-être que je tienne tellement à souligner la réussite plutôt que l'échec des personnages de Langevin dans leur tentative d'établir le contact avec autrui. Je le fais intentionellement, car il m'a toujours semblé que plusieurs de nos critiques québécois (par exemple Major, Falardeau dans le numéro d'*Europe* déjà mentionné; Denis Saint-Jacques dans *Etudes Littéraires* (août, 1969) et Tougas dans son *Histoire de la littérature canadienne-française* (P.U.F., 1960, pp. 175-176)) ont exagéré l'élément d'échec. Tout en reconnaissant que l'oeuvre de Langevin est tragique, c'est-à-dire (à mes yeux) qu'elle est une oeuvre où l'on s'attend à trouver une certaine victoire morale, ces critiques tendent à souligner la défaite de Jean Cherteffe, Alain Dubois et Pierre Dupas vis-à-vis de Micheline, de Madeleine et des bûcherons respectivement. En accentuant trop l'échec matériel de ces héros on néglige le fait que tous ces personnages évoluent radicalement sur le plan spirituel et que leurs relations avec autrui s'approfondissent sensiblement. Cet épanouissement, cette intensité nouvelle de vie, cette conscience que les héros acquièrent et qu'ils font éclore chez ceux qui les entourent, sont payés de plusieurs morts, il est vrai, mais il me semble que c'est justement en cela que consiste le processus tragique. (Ainsi l'angoisse de Marcel Cherteffe, que son frère considère à tort comme la preuve d'un échec, n'est que la première étape dans ce que Quilliot — dans sa Préface à Laurent Mailhot, *Albert Camus ou l'imagination du désert*, P.U.M., 1973, p. x — appelle "le triptyque révolte/dépassement/amour" et que j'appellerais plutôt le processus "conscience/révolte/amour-dépassement".)

Il ne faut néanmoins pas oublier que dans *Evadé de la nuit* (le roman de Langevin qui fait le plus penser au *Sous-sol* et à *La Chute*) Jean Cherteffe semble hanté par la corruptibilité de la chair (p. 221). Il paraît obsédé par la peur de vieillir et par l'idée qu'il faudrait "briser le crâne" de la femme aimée pour communiquer vraiment avec elle (pp. 131-132). La méfiance de ce héros devant l'amour, le bonheur, en somme devant la vie, semble parvenir en grande partie de cette obsession qu'on pourrait peut-être qualifier de "janséniste québécoise". Et cette obsession paraît liée à la notion cartésienne d'une opposition insurmon-

table entre le corps et l'âme. Le pessimisme indéniable de ce héros reflète-t-il un manque de confiance collectif chez les Québécois de cette époque? Il me semble que l'on pourrait bien, au moins en partie, attribuer l'élément d'échec dans ce roman à un obstacle intérieur, psychologique, ayant sa source dans des circonstances historiques particulières à notre pays, puisque c'est, dans une large mesure, une sorte de méfiance congénitale (en plus de son enfance malheureuse), qui empêche Jean Cherteffe d'accueillir joyeusement la vie. Quoi qu'il en soit, ce manque de confiance lié au spectre de la destructibilité de la chair ne se trouve pas chez Dostoïevski ou Camus et paraît être un aspect typiquement québécois des romans de Langevin. Comme Falardeau l'a si bien montré: "L'époque pourtant toute récente dont témoigne l'oeuvre de Langevin était celle d'une société . . . encore paralysée par des scléroses archaïques. Cette oeuvre . . . permettait et permet encore . . . de rejoindre . . . certains des écrasants obstacles qui retardaient l'arrivée du 'temps des hommes'."

Dans *Le Temps des hommes* et *Poussière sur la ville*, en effet, les héros ne souffrent plus de cette peur de la chair. Peut-être partiellement à cause de cela, ces deux romans plus sobres, dépouillés et serrés qu'*Evadé de la nuit*, sont aussi d'une portée plus ostensiblement universelle. Le désarroi de Dupas vient, il est vrai, de l'interprétation trop étroite, dogmatique et "dualiste" (v. Major, p. 225, p. 228) de la doctrine chrétienne qu'on lui a enseigné au séminaire, mais il n'a pas peur de la vie charnelle. Son triomphe me semble justement de s'être révolté contre l'esprit cartésien et d'avoir découvert tout seul, à l'instar d'Alain Dubois, que la solution unique bien qu'imparfaite à tous les problèmes, c'est d'agir selon la vraie compassion et le véritable amour, en laissant aux autres la pleine liberté de choisir leur propre voie. Là où l'Eglise traditionnelle, représentée par le curé de Macklin et par les supérieurs de Dupas, voulait *forcer* les gens à suivre certaines règles, Dubois et Dupas découvrent qu'il faut inviter leur prochain à suivre de son propre gré le chemin chrétien — celui de l'amour et de la compassion.

Vu dans cette optique, l'échec de Jean Cherteffe devant l'ivrogne Benoît est naturel et même salutaire, car sa défaite est du même ordre que l'échec des autorités ecclésiastiques devant Dupas. Tout comme l'évêque tente de le faire avec Dupas, ou comme l'homme du souterrain le fait avec Lisa, Jean Cherteffe essaie d'exercer sa volonté de puissance en poussant Benoît de force dans la voie que *lui* trouve bonne. Mais le naufrage de ces tentatives de dominer un autre, aussi bien que la réussite relative de Micheline, d'Alain Dubois et de Dupas, qui ne cherchent pas à subjuguer les autres, sont la preuve qu'on n'arrive pas à

communiquer de façon authentique avec les autres en les dominant. On n'y réussit qu'en les laissant libres de répondre à l'appel de l'amour, s'ils le veulent et le peuvent. En tout ceci la pensée de Langevin, comme celle de Dostoïevski, est profondément et explicitement chrétienne, tandis que celle de Camus ne l'est qu'implicitement. (Qu'il me soit permis de renvoyer ici à mon article "Camus et Dostoïevski: comparaison structurale et thématique de *La Chute* de Camus et du *Sous-sol* de Dostoïevski", dans *Albert Camus* 4, 51-70.)

Il n'est pas étonnant, alors, de constater que l'une des formes principales de dualité dans les romans de Langevin est analogue à la dualité dostoïevskienne, qui consiste dans une division intérieure entre l'humilité et l'orgueil. Resté orgueilleux et tyrannique devant Benoît, Jean Cherteffe échoue; devant Micheline il renonce à l'orgueil, accepte l'amour et en arrive par conséquent à connaître le vrai bonheur:

> Il regarda longtemps tomber la neige, fixement, empli d'une extase qui transcendait la vie, la nettoyait, lui donnait une joie sereine qu'il accueillait sans l'interroger, parce que, pour la première fois, elle comblait sa soif exacerbée. Il ne lui demanderait pas si elle était durable. Les coups du sort ne pouvaient plus l'atteindre. Il marcherait parmi les hommes, inconnu d'eux, soulevé par le bonheur et nul ne pourrait le toucher.

De même, Alain essaie à un moment donné de subjuguer Madeleine physiquement et moralement, mais il reconnaît tout de suite son erreur. (Major souligne beaucoup cette lutte physique (pp. 218-219), mais sans mentionner la réconciliation.) Ce n'est qu'en renonçant à leur orgueil qu'ils arrivent à établir la vraie communication.

Dans le cas de Dupas on voit un homme qui, comme Aliocha Karamazov, veut imposer sa volonté à la nature en exigeant un miracle pour sauver la vie de quelqu'un. L'erreur de Dupas, c'est son refus d'accepter l'absurde de la condition humaine sous la forme d'une mort inévitable. Mais ce héros arrive aussi à toucher un autre homme au fond de l'âme, une fois qu'il a renoncé à son orgueil en s'humiliant devant l'autre:

> Ils étaient âme contre âme, liés l'un à l'autre dans le dessein d'un crime. Laurier n'avait pas perdu de temps à prendre la main tendue, à se décharger de son âme, de sa haine, de sa faiblesse. Quand il se serait rayé des hommes il y aurait toujours le *curé* à ses côtés. Il avait aboli la pire conséquence de son acte, la solitude morale.

On pourrait développer longuement encore les affinités et les divergences entre Langevin, Camus et Dostoïevski. J'espère seulement que ces remarques peu

détaillées servent au moins à indiquer que, malgré la grande affinité thématique entre les trois auteurs, Langevin se situe — aux points de vue technique, psychologique, philosophique et religieux — plus près encore de Dostoïevski que de Camus.

STOPPING HERE

Al Purdy

The little skeletons of rabbits
run with their fur still outside them
Animals don't sweat do they?
— but I was sweating and running
from the orchard after stealing apples
I never won anything

Always envied the birds when I got caught
being slow and terrified and hard
of hearing when someone yelled Stop
I kept on going

Was I running from or towards?
— rabbits haunt me with their breathing
guns crack in icy fields beyond the town
on market days the farmers sold their bodies
— it must have been from something

Chickens with their heads cut off still run
an axe leans softly in the backyard
the man said chickens don't know anything
but they do
I fell down sometimes and panted
on the earth the sky leaned up
to cover me with feathers
whatever touched me didn't know my name

THE TENSION OF HIS TIME

Frank Birbalsingh

A PROPER UNDERSTANDING of Pratt's poetry needs to take into account the social and intellectual background which conditioned his thought and writing. This background was stabilized by typical late nineteenth century intellectual preoccupations, the most striking characteristic of which was a tension between newly-emerging scientific theory on one hand, and traditional Christian belief on the other. It is this tension which, more than any other single factor, inspires the poetry of Pratt, and in an important way, also confounds it.

Most of Pratt's poems, especially the long, narrative ones, are concerned with reconciling man's crowning, scientific role as potential master of the universe, with his religious role as simply another creature who is subject to God's universal control. But, as a rule, a satisfactory reconciliation is not fully achieved. The poems may be divided into three convenient groups: those describing a world in which God's primacy is undisputed; those in which this primacy is challenged by man; and those in which the challenge of God by man is satisfactorily reconciled.

In the first group of poems Pratt acknowledges the existence of a stable world order ruled by an omnipotent Being who firmly controls all natural phenomena. We see this in the admiration and reverence that are shown to natural relationships in the raw world of sea and forest, man and beast. The poet betrays an almost childish fascination with the age, size and power of forces in Nature: ancient seas, impregnable icebergs and gigantic whales. He is fascinated by the sense of drama generated by the clash of these forces either with each other or with human beings. And always, essential to the drama is the implicit projection of an ageless, harmonious, cosmic pattern; elements within the pattern may often erupt into massive conflict with each other, but they invariably settle down again in rigid conformity.

Artistic success for Pratt largely depends on his ability to demonstrate, through the action of his poetry, the stable, theocratic, world order in which he believes.

Success is achieved, for example, in "Newfoundland" which describes winds blowing over the sea:

> They call with the silver fifes of the sea,
> They breathe with the lungs of men,
> They are one with the tides of the sea,
> They are one with the tides of the heart,
> They blow with the rising octaves of dawn,
> They die with the largo of dusk,
> Their hands are full to the overflow,
> In their right is the bread of life,
> In their left are the waters of death.

"Newfoundland" celebrates the cyclical, cosmic harmony which, according to Pratt, is implicit in the whole seascape of his native province:

> Here the crags
> Meet with winds and tides —
> Not with that blind interchange
> Of blow for blow
> That spills the thunder of insentient seas;
> But with the mind that reads assault
> In crouch and leap and the quick stealth,
> Stiffening the muscles of the waves.

Harmony is not accidental, but based upon the almost personal supervision of natural elements by a Power that is self-evidently the God of religious belief. The implication is that man is one of many creatures, playing a subordinate role within a God-controlled universe.

In some poems there is little attempt to mask the specifically Christian sources of Pratt's philosophical outlook. In "From Stone to Steel", for example, he describes the long, evolutionary process of human development:

> From stone to bronze, from bronze to steel
> Along the road-dust of the sun,
> Two revolutions of the wheel
> From Java to Geneva run.

While the poem acknowledges this evolutionary (scientific) description of human history, however, it ends with the following stanza:

> The road goes up, the road goes down —
> Let Java or Geneva be —

But whether to the cross or crown,
The path lies through Gethsemane.

Science may help to explain some of life's mysteries, but a full explanation, it is suggested, can only be gained from the path through Gethsemane — the Christian religion.

If we regard "Newfoundland" and "From Stone to Steel" as successful poems, it is mainly because they achieve intellectual coherence by projecting a consistent philosophical outlook. Intellectual coherence ensures structural unity and ultimately artistic success. In the same way, if we regard many poems in the second group as unsuccessful, it is because they lack strict structural unity by failing to achieve intellectual coherence based on a consistent outlook or point of view. The poems do attempt to portray a world of Christian order; but they also acknowledge human efforts to gain mastery of the world by growing scientific progress. In many cases the poet's religious point of view is directly contradicted by his scientific outlook, and the result is ambivalence or incohorence. Thus structural unity is impaired and artistic success diminished.

"The Cachalot" illustrates the harmful effect of an ambivalent or inconsistent point of view in Pratt's art; it relates an episode in which a great whale battles furiously against a whaling crew and eventually, in the desperation of its death throes, causes its human attackers to drown. The contest ends in stalemate, battle honours being shared equally between the whale and the men. The whale is part of an hierarchy in which, through his great size, he is assigned precedence over smaller creatures. By challenging the whale's claim to precedence, the men challenge the hierarchy of which it is part. In fact, they challenge the ruler of the hierarchy, that is, God Himself.

Pratt's attitude toward the men is sneering and disdainful. He calls them "a puny batch of men" and "this arrogant and impious crew". Their courage and skill arouse his contempt:

For what was iron to that head
And oak to that hydraulic thunder?

In contrast, his admiration of the whale may be seen in his description of its regal posture even in death:

Then, like a royal retinue,
The slow processional of crew,
Of inundated hull, of mast,
Halliard and shroud and trestle-cheek,

Of yard and topsail to the last
Dank flutter of the ensign as a wave
Closed in upon the skysail peak,
Followed the Monarch to his grave.

Yet this attitude — of contempt for the men and admiration for the whale — is not followed with strict consistency. The men are also shown as courageous, skilful, daring and defiant in tackling an adversary of such tremendous strength. Moreover, they persist, despite the dangers, and kill the whale even if it costs them their lives to do it. In praising the whale and sneering at the men Pratt underlines his belief in an hierarchical Christian order; at the same time he admits the progress of human skill and science which enables the men to kill the whale. The result is vagueness and uncertainty; for our reaction to the poem is necessarily confused. If we admire the whale and lament its death, our sorrow will be neutralized at the end by our natural sympathy for the men. Conversely, if we admire the men and grieve for their death, our admiration for the whale will be seriously affected.

"The Cachalot" is representative of poems in the second group, most of which weave uncertainly between asserting and denying man's subordination to God. These poems generally extol God's supremacy by praising creatures such as the cachalot which is part of a God-controlled hierarchy; at the same time they suggest that this hierarchy is overthrown by man's acquisition of dominance through scientific progress. The resulting ambivalence may harm some poems less than others; but it is always harmful; and nowhere is this harmful effect better illustrated than in "The Truant" which has perhaps greater artistic potential than all Pratt's other works.

"The Truant" deals with a man who is accused of refusing to behave like other creatures in the universe which accept subordination to a power referred to as the "almighty Lord" and "Imperial Majesty"; but the power is not God; it is "the great Panjandrum", the ruler of a universe of "mechanics":

A realm of flunkey decimals that run,
Return; return and run; again return,
Each group around its little sun,
And every sun a satellite.

In his defence the man argues that it was he, who through scientific ingenuity, discovered and harnessed the very mechanical principles by which the universe of the Panjandrum operates: he therefore refuses to accept subordination. He proudly recalls his feats of scientific advancement and defies the Panjandrum's

authority by finally saying "No! by the Rood, we [men] will not join your ballet." Thus the poem concludes with a Christian point of view since the man swears defiance by the Christian Cross.

On the surface the poem seems an eloquent attack on the presumption of mechanistic science in claiming to have explored all the secrets of the universe and therefore to have given scientists full control over it. But there is a radical flaw. On one hand the man boasts about his scientific accomplishments, while on the other he condemns their result — scientific supremacy. Moreover, the man's concluding Christian oath suggests that his scientific achievements were either directed by or in conformity with the tenets of Christian faith. Yet the poem does not demonstrate this alleged conformity between the man's scientific achievement and his Christian faith. The last line of the poem is a wholly unconvincing statement of faith (or prejudice) representing a point of view that contradicts the man's earlier boasting about his scientific progress. Pratt is moved to praise scientific progress which, in the neo-Darwinian terms of his late nineteenth century intellectual background, directly conflicts with Christian belief.

It is only in the third and smallest group of his poems that Pratt offers a solution to the underlying conflict between religion and science. This is evident, for example, in "The Titanic", a long, narrative work which sets out to expose the inadequacy of science. We are given the story of the actual sinking of the *Titanic* as it occurred in 1912. Scientific achievement, in this case in the field of engineering, is presented as an act of impiety against a God-given natural order. Pratt successfully reproduces the ironic shift from over-weening confidence at the beginning of the voyage to chaotic desperation at the end. The human suffering involved is secondary to his exposure of the ultimate futility of human scientific endeavour. The distress of the passengers is reported factually without any significant appeal to our sympathy. Whatever sympathy the poet invokes for them pales completely before his unbounded fascination for the iceberg that is the cause of their doom:

> And out there in the starlight, with no trace
> Upon it of its deed but the last wave
> From the Titanic fretting at its base,
> Silent, composed, ringed by its icy broods,
> The grey shape with the palaeolithic face
> Was still the master of the longitudes.

The iceberg's victory reinforces the permanence of an ageless cosmic order which, although challenged by man's science, reasserts itself and vindicates the poet's belief in it.

Because of its consistent, anti-scientific bias "The Titanic" remains an artistic whole, unlike poems such as "The Cachalot" and "The Truant" which waver and equivocate in dealing with their main theme. But even "The Titanic" should not be regarded as a wholly successful poem; for it gives an incomplete treatment of the conflict between religion and science, by ignoring or, at any rate, failing to emphasize the real advantages which science has produced. A satisfactory resolution to the conflict would have to take account of both man's accomplishments and his duty to God. Ideally, what was required was a situation in which man, through his science or skill, could appear to be serving God. In this way Pratt could demonstrate that scientific advancement, far from challenging it, reinforced and enhanced God's supreme authority. This was precisely the situation provided by the story of Jean de Brébeuf, the French priest who lived between 1593 and 1649.

"Brébeuf and his Brethren" tells the story of a group of French Jesuits who endured incredible privation and eventual martyrdom in their efforts to proselytise Huron Indians in seventeenth century Canada. As in "The Titanic", the poem is based on an event or a series of events that is historically authentic. So far as the facts are concerned then, as in "The Titanic", the poet deserves praise for historical scholarship. But we do not read poetry primarily to learn history any more than we read novels chiefly to obtain sociological information. More important is the poet's or novelist's vision of life, his philosophical outlook, which is implicit in the way that he presents his information. This is why "Brébeuf" is the culmination of Pratt's poetic career; for it gives the most complete expression of his vision of life or philosophical outlook, elements only of which appear in his other poems.

Brébeuf and his fellow Jesuits prepare themselves for their missionary activities with scientific thoroughness. They exhibit courage, heroism and ingenuity — the same qualities which bring doom to the whaling crew in "The Cachalot" and disaster to the builders and passengers of the *Titanic*. In "Brébeuf", however, these qualities bring triumph and glory to the priests. Whereas the whaling crew and the *Titanic*'s builders commit acts of impiety against God, the French priests operate within a divine framework and, by their courage and ingenuity, reinforce it. While in "The Cachalot" and "The Titanic" Pratt feels warm admiration for the whale and iceberg — the agencies which frustrate human aspiration — he

expresses no similar feeling for the Indians who torture and murder Brébeuf and his fellow priests. The Indians are described as crude and savage, and the best that Pratt can manage is to see them as rather innocent, though dangerous simpletons, in need of humane civilization. If this attitude seems inhumane or racist it serves, nevertheless, to highlight the sacrifice and martyrdom of the priests and to emphasize their admirable qualities.

The martyrdom of the priests is fully consistent with the motives of their mission and their own philosophy of life:

> On the prayers,
> The meditations, points and colloquies,
> Was built the soldier and martyr programme.
> This is the end of man — Deum laudet,
> To seek and find the will of God, to act
> Upon it for the ordering of life,
> And for the soul's beatitude.

The death of Brébeuf and his brethren is the logical climax of both their human aspiration and religious faith. Nowhere else has Pratt been able to fuse so successfully the two contradictory elements of his thought — his belief in special human qualities which appear to give men dominance in the universe, and his faith in God as absolute ruler of the universe. In "Brébeuf" alone are men able to exhibit dominant qualities while remaining all the time subject to the absolute rule of God. It is this intellectual coherence that so richly enhances the dramatic intensity of the poem, making it the work in which Pratt's potentiality for dramatic narrative poetry is most fully realized.

"Brébeuf" confirms Pratt's narrowly orthodox, if nominally nonconformist Christianity. The fortitude and self-sacrifice of Brébeuf and his brethren are not inspired by motives such as selfish advancement, diplomatic advantage, military gain, patriotic glory or political manoeuvring. No doubt some of these results did follow the priests' activities which, after all, certainly helped to extend French colonial ventures in Canada. Some secular implications of Brébeuf's mission are mentioned, for example, in Pratt's description of Fort Sainte Marie:

> Strategic as a base for trade or war
> The site received the approval of Quebec,
> Was ratified by Richelieu who saw
> Commerce and exploration pushing west,
> Fulfilling the long vision of Champlain —
> 'Greater New France beyond those inland seas.'

But these results were adventitious. The motives of the priests were wholly religious:

> not in these [secular motives] the source —
> But in the sound of invisible trumpets blowing
> Around two slabs of board, right-angled, hammered
> By Roman nails and hung on a Jewish hill.

In "Brébeuf" Pratt finally succeeds in demonstrating, in its entirety, the view of life that he held throughout his career. It is the view of a harmoniously working, God-controlled universe in which men have a superior rank in relation to their immediate environment, but an inferior one in relation to God.

It would be foolish to deny the narrow and rigidly conventional mould in which Pratt's basic outlook is cast. He was strongly given to spacious scientific generalizations. Like his partial contemporary, Grant Allen, he too digested the basic modes and preoccupations of neo-Darwinian science, especially as they were popularized by Herbert Spencer and, to some extent, by Allen himself. This explains Pratt's apparently inhumane treatment of the Hurons in "Brébeuf"; for he was a social Darwinist. But he was neither a social snob nor a political autocrat. His profound sympathy for the socially deprived or disadvantaged is revealed in several poems, for example, "The Depression Ends" and "The Man and the Machine". His attitude to the Hurons suffers from the limitations of his neo-Darwinism.

Pratt's simple or, at any rate, conventional view of life is wholly consistent not only with his own temperament and upbringing as the son of a clergyman, but also with the social and historical circumstances in which he spent his most formative years. Experiment and innovation were alien to him. In his "Introduction" to *Selected Poems of E. J. Pratt*, Peter Buitenhuis recognizes the poet's tradition-bound cast of mind at least in his style: "Stylistically Pratt remained a contemporary of Tennyson and Hardy." The truth is that Pratt grew up in a Dominion still within the British Empire: his work both in philosophical outlook and technical accomplishment bears the stamp of the colonial conditions in which his basic outlook took shape. He was imitative rather than innovative. While his contemporaries abroad, Pound and Eliot, were blazing fresh trails in poetic theory and technique, he stuck doggedly to safer, more well-beaten paths. No one can seriously praise Pratt for his originality. His best work, "Brébeuf", is a thoroughly conventional poem. Yet for all, it remains, as Northrop Frye has said, "not only the greatest but the most complete Canadian narrative."

review articles

CRITICISM AND THE WHOLE MAN

Germaine Warkentin

A. J. M. SMITH, *Towards a View of Canadian Letters: Selected Critical Essays 1928-1971*. University of British Columbia Press. Cloth $9.00, paper $5.50.

WE HAVE TWO DESCRIPTIONS of A. J. M. Smith in his mid-twenties. One (implied, of course; we must respect the disguising *persona*) is in his own poem "My Lost Youth":

> I remember it was April that year, and afternoon.
> There was a modish odour of hyacinths, and you
> Beside me in the drawing room, and twilight falling
> A trifle impressively, and a bit out of tune.
> . . . . . .
> I thought of my birthplace in Westmount and what *that* involved
> — An ear quick to recoil from the faintest 'false note'.
> I spoke therefore hurriedly of the distressing commonness of American letters,
> Not daring to look at your living and beautiful throat.
>
> 'She seems to be one who enthuses,' I noted, excusing myself,
> Who strove that year to be only a minor personage out of James
> Or a sensitive indecisive guy from Eliot's elegant shelf.
> 'What happens,' I pondered fleeing, 'to one whom Reality claims. . . . ?

Leon Edel, on the other hand, as a mere observer is uninhibited by the modernist *topos* of ironic self-deprecation; in a forthcoming memoir he remembers Smith with hearty generosity:

> Smith, when I first met him, was a slim youth of medium height, with fine dark-brown hair which he combed back; usually a few strands fell over his forehead and his gold-rimmed spectacles, so that he looked like the young Yeats. He carried himself with an excess of politeness that was in his English breeding . . . but he was a tempest of poetry and revolt against establishment hypocrisies. . . . Arthur started to study science; after a while he moved into the English Department where we would sit at the back of a classroom and pretend to listen to Cyrus Macmillan expound Shakespeare (remembered from Kittredge) while Smith wrote poems and gave me T. S. Eliot to read. I remember the shock of recognition when I first read *The Love Song of J. Alfred Prufrock*. Here was *my* language; *this* was "modern". I had been reared on Horatio Alger Jr., with a smattering of Shaw and Wells, Upton Sinclair and Louisa Alcott. Smith first taught me the meaning of literature, how words could be made expressive and shaped into a poem. He made me feel the modern idiom, the use of words as this year's language shorn of old accretions of meaning.[1]

Edel's memoir chronicles the beginning of the *McGill Fortnightly Review*, which published its first issue in November 1925. Fifty years thus separates the Yeatsian youth and the august figure who, last year, presented us with the selected fruits of five decades' concern with the ideals of modernism in Canada. *Towards a View of Canadian Letters: Selected Critical Essays 1928-71* is austerely but characteristically titled: the stubborn hesitation of "towards", the resolute discrimination of "selected" all bespeak that old proud king for whom we must now author a parable.

Though Smith will continue, we hope, to add to his distinguished record in Canadian literature, the shape of that parable can now be discerned. Its outlines have been suggested by Desmond Pacey, who spoke of Smith in a recent address as the "representative Canadian critic of the forties and fifties."[2] Smith exemplifies a period in Canadian literature beginning with the modernist revolution of the twenties, and continuing until the now very apparent historical change that occurred in the late fifties. About that time, *Canadian Literature* began to appear, the Readers' Club of Canada was founded, and Margaret Laurence began to publish. As a result of these three events, lasting connections among the critics, within the audience, and between the writers — all fundamental elements of a healthy literary culture — began to develop as they never had before. Presiding as he did over a period when these essentials had yet to appear, Smith thus belongs to a time of expertness amidst fragmentation. Indeed to the extent that any cohesion was possible for the literary culture of Canada in the difficult years between 1925 and 1955, Smith was its architect, first of the modernist revolution itself (as Edel's portrait makes clear) and second of the great historical synthesis represented in the first edition of the *Book of Canadian Poetry* (1943), with which Smith began a career as anthologist fully as important as his others in poetry and criticism.

The date 1955 is significant, because it is a cruel fact of Canadian literary history that despite his achievement, Arthur Smith's critical position was firmly rejected by his fellow poets at the historic Kingston Writers' Conference of that year. In his paper for the conference he had contended that the poet should write for a "restricted, knowledgeable, exacting audience" (other poets, in fact) rather than for a "large, undiscriminating" one. Though he had stated with great feeling his sense of the poet's responsibility to mankind as well as to his art, he could only do so by presenting an aristocratic notion of poetry which rejected what he felt were the crude responses of the great mass of ordinary men. He was courteously repudiated by a conference heady with the discovery that a literary community might at last be possible in Canada, and that it would necessitate a very broad audience indeed.

It is the achievement of Smith's critical career that he sharpened — when we needed to have it sharpened — the distinction between pious and pure poetry. It is his failure that he was unable to build in criticism a bridge between the pious and the pure of the sort which was eventually to be supplied in poetry by Layton, Birney, Purdy, Reaney, Newlove, and Atwood, and would result in the creation of a literary community with a poetic voice both civic and exacting. In surveying Smith's criticism, then, we have a dual obligation: to see Smith as archi-

tect of the contemporary, and to recognize that most of us have moved out of the house he built.

The collection of essays that represents that house seems at first sight impervious to the wrecker's bar. It comprises an anthology of himself, by an anthologist of unchallenged merit, and to complete the effect, it contains in its terminal pages a self-review. It is irresistible to think of it as *The Book of Canadian Smith*. The essays are not arranged chronologically, but in a kind of topical synthesis, and the "Author's Note" urges us to pay attention to the dates when the pieces were written, though chiefly to warn us that we will find in them "either a remarkable consistency or a remarkable lack of development". The first part presents us with a history of Canadian poetry; not Smith's famous 1943 preface to the *Book of Canadian Poetry* but the more evolved version that introduced his Oxford anthology of 1960. Attached to this is the related article "Eclectic Detachment: Aspects of Identity in Canadian Poetry". The volume then takes up a historical arrangement, moving from Smith's work on Canadian prose before Confederation, through some writing on Roberts and his period, to a variety of essays on the modern poets. Gathered at the conclusion are "Some Polemics Early and Late" and "A Personal Epilogue". The book is thus an act of self-definition, in which the critic surveying his career lays out before us synoptically the historical ground of his critical method, illustrates its application in two areas, and then caps it all by re-stating the terms of the art that ties together his three *personae*: poet, critic, and anthologist.[4]

Smith's sensibility is perhaps the most purely critical of anyone who has written about Canadian literature. His most characteristic mental act is to discriminate with exquisite caution the component effects of a poem so as to establish its quality according to an absolute standard of taste; though there are frequent historical and analytical observations in Smith's parentheses, his central preoccupation is with judging and ranking, and he has defended fiercely the critic's responsibility to evaluate. In its mature form, this impulse to evaluate is rooted in a broad humanism, which to my mind Smith best expressed in a 1954 article, "Refining Fire" (later disassembled to serve other purposes, it does not appear in its original form in this volume). There he wrote that the arts are central to man's experience, and the poet, as "prophet, medicine man, and informer" is at the centre of the arts. "The poet is one who *tells on us*. He is our secret conscience. He reveals hidden and uncomfortable truths. He lets light and air into dark, closed places. . . . He exposes suppressed evil, and can make us whole again."[5] The very act of creation, then, is one of discrimination, and it produces poetry which is "an instrument of search and research" and as "music for the inner ear" may never appeal to the multitude. Criticism too is a "difficult, lonely music": " . . . the reading of imaginative literature is itself an art — both a fine art and a useful art — an art that involves perception, apprehension, and evaluation. . . . To neglect it or merely pay it lip-service or to substitute vague appreciation for the hard work and discipline that is involved in the technique of accurate reading . . . is to corrupt the spiritual life of the community."[6]

Though the poet and the critic may end up speaking only to a small audience,

he must nevertheless do so with all his faculties: " . . . poetry does not permit the rejection of every aspect of the personality except by intuition and sensibility. It must be written by the whole man. It is an intelligent activity, and it ought to compel the respect of the generality of intelligent men. If it is a good, it is a good in itself." In this search for wholeness, Smith's standard of value thus becomes metaphysical; poetry seeks a "union of sensuous richness with verbal exuberance", it "fuses thought and feeling", in an act done "with all one's wits about one and purified by the senses". Yet the ideal poem that emerges from this fusion of all the human potentialities is curiously non-human; it floats completely free of history in a realm of pure poetry: "a poem exists as a thing in itself. It is not a copy of anything or an expression of anything, but is an individuality as unique as a flower, an elephant, or a man on a flying trapeze. . . . Such poetry is objective, impersonal, and in a sense timeless and absolute. It stands by itself, unconcerned with anything save its own existence." Like the frozen fountain in his own Marvellesque poem,

> . . . fragrance here has grown to form,
> And Time is fooled, although he storm.[7]

Andrew Marvell is of course the poet to whom Smith always returns as a standard of excellence, seeking everywhere the signs of a fusion of thought and sense like his, a union so perfect that through it "ideas . . . [enter] so deeply into the blood as never to be questioned." Which puts them, presumably, not merely "beyond formalism", but beyond criticism entirely. It comes as no surprise that one who is a seventeenth-century poet *manqué* envisions (or did once envision, for the passage in question was written in 1936) an epiphanic end for art. But as we shall see, this places in quite another light his claim that his criticism is "remarkably consistent", and his view that the best poetry is definitely cool, controlled, and intelligent.

But "what happens," then, "to one whom Reality claims?" The earliest piece in this collection is Smith's 1928 polemic, "Wanted — Canadian Criticism," and it represents two historical conditions. One was the very real need at that time for Canadian criticism to become truly "critical," rather than continuing to serve as an outlet for what Smith glumly referred to as "the prevailing spirit of pep and optimism." The other was Smith's conviction — which he shared with most of the serious English-Canadian writers of the day — that to achieve this, Canadian criticism and poetry would have to denationalize themselves. His 1936 "Rejected Preface" for *New Provinces* makes the point clearly: "We do not pretend that this volume contains any verse that might not have been written in the United States or Great Britain. There is certainly nothing specifically Canadian about more than one or two poems. Why should there be?" This statement belongs to an era when outside the boosterism of the C.A.A., it was impossible to imagine a self-sustaining literary culture in English Canada, to say nothing of a literature with its own aesthetic. In the 1920's young Americans who viewed their society with a scepticism akin to Smith's exiled themselves physically, to London, Berlin, and above all to Paris. The Canadians, on the other hand, exiled themselves by becoming uncritically dependent on literary standards created abroad. These standards were undoubtedly more polished, but for the writer living outside their

original sphere of influence, that polish was unearned. Few of them seemed to have realized that a true cosmopolitan is one who is only as much at home in other countries as he is in his own.

Smith's career reflects the strain on his critical position caused by conflicting obligations to the native situation and the cosmopolitan mode. Those dates he asks us to pay attention to in his "Author's Note" fall into a neat pattern: first there is an early modernist period from the mid-twenties to the beginning of the war, then the brief but fruitful period in the early forties when he prepared his groundbreaking anthology *The Book of Canadian Poetry*. These were followed by fifteen years in which he continued to write poems himself, and published several anthologies of English poetry. From the late fifties on he has been giving a great deal of attention to practical criticism of individual Canadian poets. Throughout all these phases his central values remained those with which, in the early forties, he confronted the challenge of reorganizing the Canadian anthology: "to illustrate in the light of a contemporary and cosmopolitan literary consciousness the broad development of English-Canadian poetry."[8] But he has had to apply them to a poetic scene which has changed in ways that could hardly have been predicted in 1943.

The legacy of definition provided by the *Book of Canadian Poetry* forms — along with the notion of the "garrison mentality" — one of the historically important structuring concepts of English-Canadian literature. Its major feature was of course the division of Canadian poetry into "native" and "cosmopolitan" schools. "The one group," Smith wrote in 1943, "has attempted to describe and interpret whatever is essentially and distinctively Canadian and thus come to terms with an environment that is only now ceasing to be colonial. The other, from the very beginning, has made a heroic effort to transcend colonialism by entering into the universal, civilizing culture of ideas."[9] In choosing his poems Smith thus was imposing a cosmopolitan taste on a literature which by his standards had been cosmopolitan for little more than a decade, and producing a historical synthesis through the application of a literary theory that was avowedly non-historical. Taking up the task, he wrote:

> A revision, a weeding out, a new discovery — this is the task that is waiting for an anthologist with taste and courage. There is an immediate and vital need for a revaluation of our standard poets, based upon a careful examination of every poem, line by line and stanza by stanza. What it is useful to know is not the historical significance of a poem in the development of Canadian literature but its absolute poetic vitality. We want to know whether the poem is alive or dead. Can it speak to us in a language we recognise as that of a man, not of a bird or a book? Can we accept it without putting half of our personality — the mind — to sleep? Has it ever been or can it become again, a part of life?

To the vast range of minor poets he had to represent, Smith was always courteous. But essentially he solved his critical problem by repeatedly choosing from their work the simple, the uncluttered poem his modernist taste permitted. The excellences he discovers in G. F. Cameron and D. C. Scott are those an heir of Eliot would admire: clarity, impersonality, exactness. Though he tried hard to represent the virtues of the "natives" — realism and homely originality — he clearly preferred the cultivation of the cosmopolitans. That the two might mingle and create some new possibility seems to have

dawned on him only slowly; in 1943 he failed to take note of the early poetry of Irving Layton, and it was not until the revised synthesis that appeared in his Oxford anthology of 1960 that he was willing to admit that for the cosmopolitans the ever-present "danger . . . was to be merely literary." Nevertheless in 1960, as in 1943, Smith idealized the timeless present in which he conceived poetry ought to exist, and then isolated in the past the image of that idealized present. In doing so he replaced the romantic fiction of Canadian criticism as he found it in the early twentieth century with another one more austere, but just as much a creation.

The result was controversial, but of the first importance. Smith's anthology (chiefly as a result of its omission of Layton) led immediately to John Sutherland's nativist anti-anthology *Other Canadians*. It also led to a prompt reappraisal of the English-Canadian poetic heritage which has left us, quite literally, without an authoritative alternative perspective on its development. Every Canadian reading poetry today has had his taste shaped by Smith just as thoroughly as the readers of the twenties and the thirties had theirs (Smith quite rightly complained of it at the time) shaped by Garvin and Campbell.[10] Furthermore, almost all that is known of our poetry abroad is gathered from Smith's various prefaces; it is assumed that what he despises, we despise, that what he has not found is not there to be found. Though a revised view of Canadian poetry seems in the making, it has not yet taken shape, and when it comes it will have to have an authority as great as Smith's in order to challenge the master's own terms.

And there is little doubt a revised view is needed. Smith's synthesis, brilliant though it was, had three major flaws. The first was that it emphasized as its chief critical value a discrimination without basis in a native history of style, and consequently was heedless of the audience's plain need for organizing conventions and assumptions close to its own experience. The result was to exacerbate the already pathologically destructive social mythology of a community deeply biassed against itself. The second flaw was that in presenting us with the timeless perfection of his cosmopolitan selection, Smith shielded us for thirty years from our most interesting mistakes. It seems to me very clear that if one is interested in formal perfection of a minor sort, one anthologizes Roberts' nature-sonnets. If one is interested in the growth of poetry in his community, one struggles with the fascinating muddle of his attempts at philosophical verse. A third, and major problem, was the historical unself-consciousness of Smith himself. A brilliant critic may for a time persuade us that his taste is absolute and timeless, but in doing so, he substitutes one kind of invulnerability (which history will surely demolish) for the more lasting kind which comes when a fine mind looks back upon the edifice it has built, and smiles.

If we turn from Smith's historical synthesis to his practical criticism, we find both the critic's familiar rigour, and some interesting paradoxes. At the end of his review of the *Literary History of Canada* (in which he rightly charges the writers of many chapters with a failure of synthesis), Smith makes clear his puzzlement at the notion of analytical criticism: for him it can signify only some species of classification and bibliography. His own critical method is modernist in motiva-

tion, but pleasantly old-fashioned in practice. Though he seeks to present a full or close reading of a poem, he habitually concentrates on a straightforward study of imagery and theme; his treatment of *The Roosevelt and the Antinoë* is little more than a narrative reading, and the analysis of Frank Scott's "Lakeshore" does not begin to suggest the resources of that wonderful poem. Except for "The Fredericton Poets", which is an ill-judged piece of encomium, Smith is paradoxically a better guide to nineteenth-century writers than he is to the moderns. Though he persists in applying standards of "taste" about which I for one feel very sceptical, it is common sense and human sympathy that tell him these writers are more valuable than we are yet prepared to acknowledge. He is far in advance of most Canadian critics in recognizing the importance of para-literary works like explorers' journals and settlers' diaries. He has single-handedly kept before us the excellences of Duncan Campbell Scott, and has even written about Bliss Carman with a personal sympathy which may in time find its audience too. The result is to re-create for us the universe of nineteenth-century literature in Canada in a way we would never have expected from the young poet of *New Provinces*. "Everyone seems ready to discard the colonial pioneer poets to the junk pile," he grumbles in a late essay:

> I myself would not wish to discard and do not think it necessary to scorn our older poetry. It is worth preserving because it shows us what our ancestors were able to do when they tried to do their best.... They had not read Hulme or Eliot or Dylan Thomas, but we must not condemn them entirely for having read Wordsworth, Shelley, Keats, or Matthew Arnold.

There is a fine irony — quite unrecognized here — in Smith's defence of the nineteenth century against the effects of the very criticism he had been instrumental in creating.

In his study of modern poetry, however, a fatal selectivity has been at work. Smith's bibliography presents the paradox of a critic who has so carefully pre-evaluated his subjects that he writes only infrequently about poets who are not amenable to his method. One wishes that the sharp edge of the critic's discrimination had been wielded on a really uncooperative victim instead of on poets like F. R. Scott, Anne Wilkinson, and P. K. Page. (The *Queen's Quarterly* review in which he reversed his stand on Irving Layton has not, alas, been included, nor is there a hint of his *copromachia* with Layton and Dudek in the *Canadian Forum*, 1956-7.) Because of this deliberate narrowness Smith cannot create for

us the universe of twentieth-century English-Canadian verse as he does so unexpectedly for the nineteenth century. He withdraws in anger and hurt from the "urbanized hitch-hiking social realists or the lung-born egoists of instant experience" without giving us a chance to see him challenge them as he implies they should be challenged. His special excellence, however, is well displayed in the fine essays on Margaret Avison and Earle Birney. The first is a fluid and sparkling set of "critical improvisations" in which, stimulated by a poet of manifest quality, the critic steps briefly outside his own method and indulges in a kind of marvellous and illuminating play. The second is a review of Birney's *Selected Poems*, where Smith's stuffy objections to Birney's typographical experimentation are the framework for a contrastingly generous recognition of his "indigenous music and imagery" and "northern style", poetic values that would have gravely troubled the cosmopolitan of *New Provinces*, who preferred not to view the poem in its northern isolation.

Earlier, I suggested that Smith had been set apart from recent movements in Canadian literature because he had refused to allow the literary culture which he had sustained Atlas-like in the thirties and forties to be democratized. It seems to me that despite the pose of ironic wisdom exemplified in "My Lost Youth", he has been equally isolated from himself. Beneath the seamless fabric he would like to think his criticism presents, there are deep and interesting fissures. Chief of these is his failure to see and appreciate historicity — both ours and his. Like other modernist and cosmopolitan critics, he has, despite his absent-minded rescue of the nineteenth-century, generally deprived us of the special vitality with which historicity endows a poem. "The historical significance of a poem in the development of Canadian literature" is for me an essential part of its poetic vitality; if this is true of the old poetry, it is equally true of the new, where no amount of scorn for the merely local ought to prevent us from recognizing that the possibility of metaphor is literally everywhere. Smith struggles with his own historicity in several places in this volume, most importantly in the essay "Eclectic Detachment", which appears near the beginning, and the section "A Personal Epilogue", which is at the end. The argument of "Eclectic Detachment" is destroyed by Smith's attempt to shore up the structure of his cosmopolitanism and at the same time reach out in sympathy to a Canadian poetry moving in a direction he could not have predicted. "A Personal Epilogue", on the other hand, is mysterious and suggestive, for it explores a subterranean world in which "everything beneath the surface of technique remains obscure". It holds out the possibility that Smith is yet another of our "drowned poets", while confirming that he is certainly our first drowned critic.

In the epilogue Smith claims on one hand that his poems "are not autobiographical, subjective, or personal.... None of them is reverie, confession, or direct self-expression. They are fiction, drama, art.... The I of the poem, the protagonist of its tragedy or the clown of its pantomime, is not me. As Rimbaud said, *Je est un autre*, I is another." This control and impersonality is part of the "intelligence" which in 1928 he argued was essential to make poetry whole in Canada. On the other hand, the operations of the poetic process as he describes

them in the final essay are deeply personal, and disclose huge areas of sensibility that escape such control. For Smith, it is out of the wordless womb of the unconscious that the well-born, articulate poem emerges. To this birth, the conscious mind is merely the mid-wife. Smith pictures the moment:

> Perforce the poet stops. He sits bowed over the typewriter like a devotee at the shrine of some cruel deity. His mind is blank: there is an almost trance-like concentration until, if he is lucky, imagination begins to cloth itself in words again.

In these conditions, Smith tells us in a beautiful and revealing image, form is born as

> a crystallization in the mind, a sort of irradiation of light or warmth that surrounds the 'subject' of the poem and begins to delimit it. This is the ultimate source of the poem's form. Where this light or warmth is, there is the poem. The place where dark and cold begin marks the edge or formal frontier of the poem.

The beauty of his statement does not disguise the fact that this poet and critic of the intelligence ultimately bows before the "change-born catalytic effect" of a power beyond the critical intelligence, and which requires, we must suppose, some further faculty yet to make the poet whole, and his critic as well.

We are left, then, with a final picture of the poet awaiting his epiphany, listening for some knowledge yet to come. There is no sense anywhere that what Smith says in his epilogue about the genesis of poetic words contradicts what is overtly said everywhere else in the book about how we go about listening to that speech. There is, however, poignance (that cruel deity is not much like the mischievous and unfaithful goddess worshipped by the poets I know) and great humility. It is moments like these that save Arthur Smith from being the "awful aristarch" of Canadian criticism, and provide a perspective from which we can — perhaps almost despite himself — see the man whole.

NOTES

[1] Leon Edel, "When McGill Modernized Canadian Literature" in *The McGill You Knew*, forthcoming from Longman Canada Limited.

[2] In an address to the *Association of Canadian and Québec Literatures*, Learned Societies Meetings, Toronto, Wednesday, May 29, 1974.

[3] Smith's bibliography is extensive, but almost everything of importance he has written about Canadian literature is included in this collection. Among the omissions (besides those officially noted) are a now outdated article on A. M. Klein from *Gants du Ciel* (*printemps*, 1946), and the splendid essay "Refining Fire" from *Queen's Quarterly*, 61, 1954-5. "Refining Fire" has been adapted to several purposes over the years; one form of it appears here as "Poet" but a look at the original version is worthwhile because it shows Smith the cosmopolitan writing about poetry in the specific context of international modernism. I regret the omission of the useful article "Canadian Anthologies, New and Old" (*UTQ* 11, 1941-2), and even more "The Recent Poetry of Irving Layton: A Major Voice" (*Queen's Quarterly* 62, 1955-6), in which Smith tried to do justice to the most important young poet omitted from his 1943 anthology and the expanded version of 1948. The essays are apparently unrevised: one or two errors are not corrected, there are several typos, footnote references appear only unpredictably, and, woe to the inquiring reader, there is neither index nor bibliography.

[4] A. J. M. Smith, "Refining Fire," *Queen's Quarterly* 61 (1954-5), 362.

[5] *Ibid.*, 361.

[6] A. J. M. Smith, "The Fountain", *Poems New and Collected*, 63.

[7] A. J. M. Smith, ed., *The Book of Canadian Poetry* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1943), 3.

[8] *Ibid.*, 5.

[9] A. J. M. Smith, "Canadian Anthologies, New and Old," *University of Toronto Quarterly*, 11 (1941-2), 457-474.

PURDY'S PRELUDE AND OTHER POEMS

George Woodcock

SEYMOUR MAYNE, *Face*. Blackfish Press.
DOROTHY LIVESAY, *Disasters of the Sun*. Blackfish Press.
PAT LOWTHER, *The Age of the Bird*. Blackfish Press.
AL PURDY, *On the Bearpaw Sea*. Blackfish Press.
Blackfish, Nos. 1-5. Blackfish Press.
MIRIAM MANDEL, *Lions at her Face*. White Pelican.
AL PURDY, *In Search of Owen Roblin*. McClelland & Stewart.
PETER STEVENS, *And the Dying Sky like Blood*. Borealis Press.
EUGENE MC NAMARA, *Passages and other Poems*. Sono Nis Press.
EUGENE MC NAMARA, *Diving for the Body*. Borealis Press.

WHETHER IT is intentions, good or otherwise, that pave the road to Hell I have not yet been able to establish, but I know that they form the flagstones of every editor's path. There are always so many interesting subjects to be covered that neither space nor time will accommodate them all, and so — at the moment with total sincerity — the editor promises to note this journal, to get that book reviewed, and the months slip by on these promises until in the end it seems too late to redeem them. But is it ever too late to notice a good book, to celebrate a good idea? Time can indeed sort out the worthless books about which one is glad in the end that a promise was broken. Yet surely (unless one deifies topicality — a temptation which quarterly publication fortunately removes) it is the books and ideas still in one's mind after unforgiveable procrastinations that are often the most worth discussing. They have survived time and neglect by reason of some special quality — and it need not be a good quality, for often it is something negative about a book that has stayed in one's thought for a year or so and still insists on being said.

So this is an essay in redeemed intentions, and, to begin, let me say what I meant to say when it was alive about an excellent small press that seems to have quietly expired about a year ago. This is the Blackfish Press; it flourished in Burnaby, British Columbia, from the spring of 1971 to the summer of 1973, after which I can find no trace of further publications. It was started by two young poets, Alan Safarik and B. T. Brett, of whom Brett appears to have dropped out before the end. It published its own magazine, of poetry with a little criticism, *Blackfish*, of which four issues (the last a thick double one) appeared. It brought out four sets of broadsheets by poets with at least some West Coast links; I have three of them, *Face* by Seymour Mayne, *Disasters of the Sun* by Dorothy Livesay, and *The Age of the Bird* by Pat Lowther. The most ambitious Blackfish production — and apparently its last up to the present — was a long poem, *On the Bearpaw Sea*, by Al Purdy, published in a limited

edition, very elegantly printed and illustrated; twenty-five copies were signed and bound in calf-skin.

Blackfish itself struck one immediately as several cuts above the ordinary little magazine brought out for two or three issues by frustrated poets trying to get their own work into print. Safarik and Brett are indeed themselves poets worth publishing, both — though little resembling each other — with a sense of the poetic magic and resonance of the West Coast waterscape: Brett inclined to catch at the philosophic lifelines, as in "The Flow of Long Beach":

Dragonflies the sand
eating itself dissolving
into smooth waves of
time folding over on
timelessness a foaming
mass of green-tiered surf
I want to reach out
and grab this tide
with fingers of thought
and drag it back in to
see anything but leaving . . .

Safarik inclined towards an imagism refuelled by a return to the inspiration of classic Chinese poetry, as in a poem on Siwash Lake in the Chilcotin country:

muskrats splashing into the water
their heads and a trailing V behind
visible in the reflecting waves

on shore a dry snag pitch-fed
blazes orange against the evergreen
& into the black sky.

But *Blackfish* is interesting also for the way Safarik and Brett have chosen and combined the work of other poets as well as their own. Many of the contributions are by established poets — Birney, Atwood, Page, Purdy, Acorn, Mayne, Livesay — and these for the most part are good examples of the artists' familiar manners, offering nothing startlingly beyond competence except for Patrick Lane's fine elegiac cycle, "Macchu Picchu", on the last days of the Incas, and Pat Page's metaphysical gem, "The Yellow People in Metamorphosis". It was in fact mainly the work of lesser-known western poets that made *Blackfish* most memorable, for there were at least half-a-dozen unfamiliar names whose work was that of genuine poets with — one hoped — a widening future. To name a few: Jayne Berland, Christine Hearn, Susan Landell, Jim Green. Susan Landell writes still and patterned poems with a kind of luminous gravity, like her elegy on the Indian past, "The White Buffalo":

They challenged Man's lightning
armed with the curse
of a mad shaman

They crumbled
as the birch tree falls

in a fire of feathers
and screaming ponies.

Jim Green is a less reliable poet: a divided man. He can write straight evocative poems of the northern wilderness like "Beyond Here", sharp facets of impression that lodge in the mind like glass splinters, but he is just as capable of presenting a tedious diary in verse, and he has too frequent a predilection for the kind of fake-tough vernacular which nobody actually speaks, even in the bush, and which reads as artificially as Tennysonian poeticisms. Still the spark is there, erratic, perhaps capable of burning in a steady flame.

Two more comments on *Blackfish*. The last issue, 4 & 5, includes a whole selection of translations from the Chinese and Japanese, the former by Jan W. Walls and Kenneth Rexroth, the latter by Alan Safarik. All are good — i.e. rendered into evocative English verse — but the best, in my view, are the series of short early

Chinese poems (8th to 11th century) Englished by Jan Walls, on whom no information is given. There is nothing new and nothing fatal in our misfortunes, these men from a past world of troubles seem to tell us, like Keng Wei in "Autumn Day".

> Sunset rays shine down the alley,
> worries come, but no one to tell them to.
> Along an old and near-deserted road
> the autumn wind stirs the grain.

Of all the less-known poets I read in *Blackfish*, I was most pleased by Pat Lowther, whose *Age of the Bird* — a cycle suggested by the guerilla campaign and death of Che Guevara (garnished, one suspects, by memories of *Green Mansions*) — was easily the best of the Blackfish Press cycle of broadsheets. There were, as well, nine Lowther poems in issue 2 of *Blackfish*, and, taken with *The Age of the Bird*, they present a poet of versatility; of an impeccable verbal appropriateness; of the ability to write discursively or densely, to trace a tense narrative through a series of poems leading to a muted climax, or to catch a complex binary image in a brief poem like "Vision":

> The Woman looks out of the whale's bone
> her eyes eroded
> sinking
> into the marrow
> the source of vision.
> The whale cutting
> the water
> sings like a huge machine.
> All his bones
> have eyes.

* * *

Pat Lowther is writing verse on a level with poets who are much better known in Canada, and better verse than some winners of awards, such as Miriam Mandel, whose *Lions at Her Face* was given the Governor-General's Award for poetry written in 1973. This is the second of the points I meant to discuss long ago; in this case procrastination was caused in part by embarrassment, since I was one of the jurors for awards that year, though I dealt with non-fiction prose and had no part in picking *Lions at Her Face* for the poetry prize. I found the award inexplicable then, in view of the better books up for consideration, and after reading *Lions at Her Face* twice recently, I have found my comprehension of the poetry jury's action diminishing rather than growing. These are indeed poems of personal agony, and totally sincere in expressing it, but that in itself is not enough; the voices of emotional convalescence have too long created a dominant tone in our poetry. In the other qualities that make for good poetry, *Lions at Her Face* seems to stand on the fussy edge of the amateurish, at times extraordinarily clumsy in phrasing, dull in imagery, conceptually banal. Read this to any ear, inner or outer:

> What did I hope to gain?
> Integrity? A laugh!
> I can't even tie my shoes
> without regret for that phony relationship
> which was my life's meaning.
> No, there was no intercourse,
> verbal or otherwise.
> Yes, it was a sham from early morning
> till late at night.

Is that poetry for the laurels? Honesty is not enough. Indeed, a touch of insincerity often makes the better poet, because it means a poet concerned with something more than externalizing his emotions.

* * *

Back to Blackfish; the cessation of the Press's activities is, of course, what usually happens to good small ventures of this kind, and in any case there are rumours

that it "is not dead, but sleepeth", and may waken with some new and rather different publications very soon.

Meanwhile, there is its most ambitious production, Purdy's *On the Bearpaw Sea*, which I delayed considering a page ago because I wanted to relate it to another recent Purdy book, *In Search of Owen Roblin*. Between them they represent a notable new departure, for both are long poems, longer than anything Purdy has attempted before, and both are used for a rather intensive elaboration of philosophic and moral and historic reflections on the nature and direction of human life, of all life. One is tempted to describe them as the acts of faith of an agnostic, acts of belief in meaning in a world where no meaning is to be discerned, of belief in continuity where the verdict of mortality is absolute.

On the Bearpaw Sea is the shorter and simpler of the two, and vintage Purdy, in the sense that the clowning and the solemnity flow into each other, leaving one with the sense that though the peg may be a bit of kitsch wrought-iron, it has in its time supported the winged cap of Hermes. On one of his interminable peregrinations, Purdy visits a dinosaur museum near Brooks, Alberta, and sees the skeleton of a duckbill dinosaur with a kink in its tail where it was once bitten, so many millenia of millenia ago, by a carnivore bigger than a locomotive. This little fact sets Purdy's mind going. He invents a living dinosaur, names it, sets it in its steamy world, and re-enacts the primitive drama of pursuit and escape. Then, in the second part of the poem, switching himself by sleight of mind to and fro across the glass screen in the museum, he examines his own reasons for becoming fascinated by the suffering of a beast dead longer than man finds it easy to conceive:

> And what may have seemed comic
> about the great patient reptile
> with wounded tail who once lived and moved
> in the exact space I move in now
> and criss-crossed my life track
> has lost any possible humor for me
> even a beast's pain scarcely less real
> than a man's ingrown toennail but less
> important
> except that I make it important
>
> In my mind the healed wound
> becomes a kind of bridge
> the scar tissue extending
> across aeons of time
> and I a mammal witness
> a bright thread connecting my brain
> to savage brains in the Bearpaw Sea
> but with an eerie feeling
> in the backbone of being
> observed myself

In Search of Owen Roblin was originally conceived as a "poem for voices" to be broadcast over CBC radio, and it takes Purdy back to two crucial passages of his life — his relationship in boyhood with the grandfather who had been born in 1840 and lived until 1930, trying to hold on to memories of that remote pioneer past when most of Ontario was still forest, and the moment of failure and deep dejection years later when he himself went to live beside Roblin Lake at Ameliasburg, and by entering into the past of that Loyalist village and tracing the life of its leading personage, the Victorian miller Owen Roblin, began to recover a sense of himself. It is easy, looking back over Purdy's poems, to believe these may indeed have been the two symbolically significant events in his mental life, the keys that opened his mind, that opened a way for the many fine poems he has written about the environs of Roblin Lake and about the country of his grandfather's youth.

In Search of Owen Roblin is a poem

about time and death and the beauty of transient things, and yet it is also, like *On the Bearpaw Sea*, a poem about continuity, about the strange sense of being part of an enduring whole (one aspect of which Jung called the collective unconscious), about the way in which the action of our minds gives life again to what is dead and recreates links where the links have all decayed.

> In search of Owen Roblin
> I discovered a whole era
> that was really a backward extension of
> myself
> built lines of communication across two
> centuries
> recovered my own past my own people
> a long misty chain stretched thru time
> of which I am the last but not final link

Perhaps this is Purdy's *Prelude*. Certainly it is a fascinating poetic document on the way in which the writer absorbs and processes his material into a form with meaning and by his very actions becomes one with that material:

> embedded in all I've written about
> a fly speck in history
> dust mote cruising the galaxies.

* * *

A long poem of a very different kind from Purdy's is Peter Stevens' *And the Dying Sky like Blood*, which concerns the career of Norman Bethune. I confess that, while I can see myself liking and admiring aspects of Bethune the man if I had known him (and detesting others), I react negatively to the myth of Bethune, because I believe that the memories of heroes and martyrs have always been manipulated by leaders for the ends of power; I am consistent, for I reject anarchist heroes like Durutti as well as communist heroes like Bethune. Certainly Bethune's myth was used threadbare by the rulers of China, and it is interesting to see how, now that we have found it politically expedient to seek China's friendship, this formerly almost unknown Canadian has all at once gained heroic status even at home.

So I opened *And the Dying Sky like Blood* with caution. I would have been surprised to see Peter Stevens slip into hagiolatry, but still.... When I had finished reading, my caution was dissolved. If Stevens did not ask all the awkward questions I might have offered (Where was Dr. Beth when Orwell spilled the Spanish beans? for example), he has given us not the picture of a hero, but that of a man, fault and virtue compacted, a man enslaved as much as liberated, within the history where he has an undoubted place.

And the Dying Sky like Blood is described as a collage. Poems are interspersed with documentary material relating to Bethune and his times. For me, this arrangement seemed the major error of planning in the work. The documents certainly add a little, but essentially on a prosaic, informational level, and if anything they detract from the unity and clarity of the poems, which are often lyrically very appealing as well as full of close insights into states of mind. My second reading was of the poems only, and I found them such a fortunate unity that I hope one day they will be published as a cycle on their own. I was, incidentally, interested to see Stevens returning in a modest way to traditional forms: a couple of small ballads, a very well-turned sestina, some other poems in eccentrically rhymed quatrains.

Peter Stevens, of course, is one of the poets who in recent years have been working in Windsor and who have formed a loose group which has even gone in for

publishing poetry. Another of my unfulfilled promises was to write an article on the group, which appears to have included Joyce Carol Oates, Eugene McNamara, Dorothy Farmiloe, Len Gasparini, as well as Peter Stevens. This was a case where I could not find the linking thread. They were all interesting poets, they had worked together, and it is possible that, as happens often in such group situations, they had sparked each other off in their writing. Yet in origin they were various, and looking at their work, it was hard to find the kind of links that existed between, say, the McGill poets or the Preview poets. The people writing at Windsor had already formed their poetic personalities before they arrived there, and so they did not experience that interaction of partly formed talents which makes a real school of poets, and which dooms schools to break up as soon as their members become mature.

But, if for nothing else, I am glad I conceived this finally abandoned plan, since it made me read the poetry of Eugene McNamara more attentively than I might otherwise have done. McNamara's career up to now has had a quietness that reflects the quietness (not necessarily the serenity) which is the prevalent tone of his poems. He has, between 1965 and 1974, brought out some seven books of verse, all of them with small but good presses. He had never been published by one of the commercial houses, and he is unlikely ever to make the poetic big time in the way Layton and Purdy, Atwood and Birney, have done. For there is nothing flamboyant about his poetry, and I suspect that in personality he lacks the theatrical quality that would make a good star on the reading circuit.

His characteristic narrow column — sometimes two narrow columns echoing each other on one page — suggests the austerity of his poetic temperament; it gives even visually a classic (not classicist) quality, while the short lines slow down emotions, delay the effect of images. McNamara writes like a man of the pre-cinematographic camera age, his scenes taken on long exposures. (He is in fact interested in old photographs as emblems of a past between the twenties and the fifties that fascinates him.) This continual urge towards a static, remembered vision gives even a poem about a couple practicing *soixante-neuf* a curiously elegiac tone as if to be trapped in any routine is a kind of death. One catches the special quality of time stopped in the image in a poem like "Dillinger Leaping" from his *Passages and other poems*:

his face floating in
the tall dry air
above his collar
not needing to brace
himself on the bank
counter vaulting slowly
not needing to hold the
rim of the straw hat
the gun held loosely
his face floating in
a mask of unconcern
brute matter overcome
by his high sailing . . .

or in the ambiguous ironies of "Portrait by Sargent", with its evocation of a lost Edwardian world and of the kind of nostalgia that is now sweeping Britain and will undoubtedly send Margaret Thatcher to the seat of power:

gone
the silver headed cane
the good school
the proper regiment
a chair beside the row

only the luxury
of bitterness remains
and a fog of petty
doom closing down all

the common airports
of the world

McNamara is — and I use the expression to define and not to evaluate — one of our best minor poets, in form and in key. There are bounds rather than limitations to his sensibility, his ambitions and his use of words and images, which suggest that he will never attempt poetry that is major in snatch and scale, whereas Purdy, of course, has made that attempt in *In Search of Owen Roblin*, taking the risks but also the promises. Yet there are satisfactions, and perhaps the surest ones to poet and reader alike, which the minor key only can offer.

OTHER MONTREALERS

Seymour Mayne

4 Montreal Poets, selected by David Solway. Fiddlehead Poetry Books. $2.50.
MARC PLOURDE, *The White Magnet*. DC Books. $2.50.
HARRY HOWITH, *The Stately Homes of Westmount*. DC Books. $2.00.

WHAT HAS HAPPENED to Montreal as a centre for English-speaking poets? David Solway's anthology represents the work of four Montreal poets: Peter Van Toorn, Marc Plourde, Arty Gold, and Richard Sommer. In a slightly polemical "Introduction" the editor puts his finger on some of the reasons for the relative quiet that has attended the literary scene:

> And the English-speaking poet in Montreal labours under the greatest disadvantage of all poets in Canada. His position is a lonely and untenable one: on the one hand he finds himself rejected by the French in Quebec, and on the other, neglected by the English in the rest of the country. It is perhaps not unfair to say that over the last ten years, and from this point of view, Montreal has been a kind of deadwater sump, the literary boondocks of the nation.

But the neglect of Montreal poetry over the past decade reflects a shift that has occurred since the early sixties. Montreal is no longer the poets' capital. And to underline this shift, a number of the leading English-speaking poets of Montreal have left the city for short, intermittent, or extended periods: Layton to Toronto, Grier to Vancouver, Cohen on his wanderings, and a number of lesser lights to places in between. That milieu which nourished and sustained the *First Statement*, *Preview*, *Northern Review*, *CIV/n*, *Delta*, *Yes* and *Cataract* groups, perhaps lost its cohesiveness under the impact of Quebec nationalism, and the beginnings or continuation of literary activity in such other centres as Vancouver, Toronto, Kingston, and Fredericton.

The four poets in this anthology do not represent a tremendous step forward, a continuation with new energy and force of the Montreal movement. And it would have been more to the point for the editor to have included a number of other Montreal poets so that a less eccentric choice might have been presented. The inclusion of the best poems of Avi Boxer, Bryan McCarthy, H. Moscovitch, the maritimer Raymond Fraser, a number of the newly published poets, and the editor himself would have rounded out the collection and afforded the reader a fuller

selection. As it stands, the book is too partial to match the anthologies which have emerged in the past few years from Vancouver, Toronto, Windsor, Edmonton, Fredericton, and Ottawa.

It is difficult to agree with Solway's judgment that Richard Sommer and Peter Van Toorn are "among the finest that Canada had to offer". Solway's claims fall into the line adopted by many advocates — he overstates and exaggerates his case. The oldest of the four poets, Richard Sommer, emigrated to Canada from Minnesota. As in his two previous collections, his poems, on the whole, are cerebral and are given to statement and aphoristic expression. Compression is lacking in his longer poems, and more often than not he overdevelops his imagery and relies on the unnecessary and rhetorical repetition of key phrases and clauses. And there is a lack of intensity and tension so that the emergence of an individual voice is found wanting.

It is also difficult to go along with the rather extravagant claims Solway makes for Van Toorn's work. There is a definite flair for language apparent in Van Toorn's poems, yet there is a curious oblique manner to his images and expression. The long poem, "In Guildenstern County", though it plays and delights in language finally does not shape itself into a coherent and moving poem. Yet Van Toorn is more inventive and individual than Sommer. His sounds are unmistakable, but one asks for clarity that welds statement and image, language and meaning into a memorable whole. The eccentric wit plays on private and almost secretive associations of imagery, syntax and syllabic patterns.

In Arty Gold's poems there is greater risk and involvement. The poet places himself in his words and writes out of his moods and perceptions. There is a reticence to his voice, but it is one of a genuine voice coming through. The hesitancies are somewhat pronounced in this talented poet's voice, and they seem to stem from the way he turns his back on Canadian poetics. Like many of his generation, Gold is too eager and willing to assimilate U.S. language and poetic practice, and his allusions to the writings of Jack Spicer and Frank O'Hara are rather the pathetic affectations of someone who wants to belong to an in-group. There would be more in common for his fantastical and elusive persona in the lyrics of Louis Dudek whom Gold purports to have read. The careful and crafted rhythms and imagery which Dudek's work may have taught him suggest modulated and finer lines:

> I want to make the space around the poem
> real. Solid as the air about kilos of cotton
> or the air things fall between.
> My muse must be a neighbour with
> a street address. Others may see enough
> silhouette sexily bending by a drawn curtain.
> It is late for them though, I may visit her
> whenever I am able / she waits for me only.
>
> ("The Space Around the Poem")

Marc Plourde's poems are striking with their concrete immediacy, and he is by far the strongest poet represented in this anthology. Bilingual and bicultural in his sources, his range is the commonplace and the ordinary. More than any other poet who has emerged in Montreal in the past decade, he writes in a manner that is close to the social realism of the early Layton and Dudek. His book, *The White Magnet*, is an impressive first collection comprising a selection of twenty-one poems, a one-act play and three stories. The tentativeness in some of Plourde's more descriptive poems finds surer forms

in his portrait poems. Here his observant eye and straightforward voice give a more moving and evocative expression:

> Fitting, the earth turned a cake of stone
> when you died — and how they drilled,
> picked, chopped through ice and rock-
> ground
> to find some small black opening and
> drop your bones there through the mouth
> of winter, and forget you. . . .
>
> A sixty watt lamp's light jets yellow
> through the worn shade. Photos before me,
> faces
> your face, lies now in the crust
> of this winter sun. The lamp, yours once,
>
> chipped sunflowers crowd its base; now is
> my heritage
> it comes of a time, a past I had no part
> making
> though I will believe and believe the white
> lace
> collar that trims your neck, and here a
> hair-lock
> falling near to your eye: eighteen,
> unmarried, a girl
> only, here you are smiling that way I never
> saw.
>
> ("Elizabeth Through Winter")

Harry Howith has received little critical attention in the past decade. Author of five collections, he tends to turn his poems to the satirical and polemical. It is these qualities, perhaps, which may account for the unjust neglect of his work. Wit, verbal play, statement, public and political comment are features which seem to go against the grain of the predominant practitioners of minimalist and projectivist poetics and their apologists. Yet the irony and polemics of Howith's latest poems are refreshing. The persona in these poems is a satirist and ironist who seems disappointed with the charades and masquerades of the colonially minded rich and middle class of central Canada. Public clichés and shibboleths, journalese and the expressions of English-Canadian gentility are the targets of his satire. In a poem dedicated to F. R. Scott he is trenchant in his juxtaposition of fancy and the absurd:

> The earth is flat.
> The moon is made out of green cheese.
> And another Great Depression is impossible.
>
> Hair can be grown on a billiard ball.
> The U.N. prevented the Six-Day War.
> And thanks to TV, kids are smarter than
> ever before.
>
> Smoking doesn't cause cancer.
> Automobiles are built to last twenty
> years.
> And Quebec can separate without economic
> disadvantage. . . .
>
> Hermann Goering was a gentleman.
> R. B. Bennett really repented.
> And the Nobel Prize is awarded for literary
> merit.
>
> The stork brings babies.
> Santa Claus brings Christmas presents.
> And the Prime Minister is an
> intellectual. . . .
>
> Every day in every way, things are
> getting better.
> God's in his heaven, all's right with
> the world.
> Human nature is ultimately perfectible.
> The land is strong.
> And there's never justification for being
> cynical.
> And the earth is flat and the moon is made
> out of green cheese.
>
> ("Axioms")

The persona in these poems vacillates between apparent cynicism and a desire for certainties, for those experiences that would be the impulse for urgent lyricism. When the persona tries to resolve ironies and contradictions, the verse often becomes less direct, and it is then diffuse in its attempt to resolve moods articulated in a more abstract or allusive manner. Howith's satirical persona is not as direct and successful, as yet, as the personae of the two poets he owes much to — Scott and Layton. But this is a transitional volume, and it would be timely for a

judicious selection of his poems to be published in the near future. But considering the lack of responsible editing and publishing in the small presses today, his best work may still have to languish in out-of-print and limited run publications. Of these five poets, Howith with his public voice suggests that we should be listening to him with more attention than he has been accorded in the past.

INSISTENT FLUIDITY

Donald Stephens

W. D. VALGARDSON, *Bloodflowers*. $2.95.
BETH HARVOR, *Women & Children*. $3.50.
73 New Canadian Stories, edited by David Helwig and Joan Harcourt. $2.95.
GEORGE BOWERING, *Flycatcher and Other Stories*. $3.50.
JEAN-GUY CARRIER, *My Father's House*. $2.95.
GEORGE MCWHIRTER, *Bodyworks*. $3.50.
74 New Canadian Stories, edited by David Helwig and Joan Harcourt. $3.50.
All Oberon Press publications.

THAT MASTER of the English short story, H. E. Bates, once said that "the short story can be anything the author decides it shall be . . . it has an insistent and eternal fluidity that slips through the hands". As I read these collections of short stories, I recalled the Bates statement, for surely in Canada today the short story is anything the writer decides it should be; for the most part, what the writer decides is good, for these collections represent not only the range of short story writing in Canada over the past two years, but also they reveal again that the short story is alive and well, living in Canada.

Let me begin with the two volumes from the autumn of 1973 written by individual authors: W. D. Valgardson's *Bloodflowers*, and Beth Harvor's *Women & Children*. Valgardson uses Newfoundland as the locale for his title story and moves to northern Manitoba for the landscape of the rest of the volume. The power of the land, its influence and its harshness, are stressed in all the tales, and at first I assumed the stories were geared to Atwood's sense of survival as a predominant theme in Canadian fiction. But as I finished the first, and best, story of the collection, it occurred to me that Valgardson was dealing with the wider implications of survival, of how man's primitive instincts are brought to the surface by the land in which he lives. These characters were not merely surviving; instead, their impulses made them grow and discover not only others but also themselves. The care in the descriptions also attracts the reader, for Valgardson has a keen eye when he looks at the world, and with deft strokes can fill in an entire landscape in a few sentences.

Beth Harvor is equally adept in portraying character in a few sentences. *Women & Children* focuses in on character, and Harvor carefully demonstrates how members of a family use each other for their own purposes, but in ways that are socially acceptable. She examines the

means by which people appear to work against each other but indicates that frequently this working is for the mutual good. With this examination of the unconscious reasoning behind states of everyday emotion, Harvor calls upon the reader to become a part of the stories she is telling. It is not that the reader can identify with something that could have happened to him, but that he identifies himself with the character's reaction to what is happening. Harvor subtly brings the reader into the action. Hers are not stories dependent on entertainment value; rather they are emotional and intellectual experiences for the reader. There is something in Harvor's craft as a writer of short fiction that reminds me of Alice Monro; she has the same tenacious hold on the subtle qualities of human nature and displays them with similar intensity. I expect more and better stories from her. The book is nicely put together, and has a good cover design by Alex Colville that is most compelling; but it is worth much more than just its cover.

George Bowering's *Flycatcher* collection is Bowering at his prose best. The stories are bright and clean, and Bowering does not attempt in any way to confuse the reader with references to a private world that are not clear. He uses a kind of autobiographical persona to tell the stories, so that the reader is not only aware of what is being told but also by whom; with this device a proper distance is acquired by the reader so that he, too, can "half listen and half compose" as he reads the stories. Bowering moves from British Columbia to Calgary to Mexico, recording random experiences as the narrator, George Delsing, looks for his friend, Ebbe Coutts. But Bowering never tries to make the ordinary extraordinary; instead, he attempts to record the awe in being ordinary and having average relationships within normal landscapes. In his poetry Bowering senses the wonder at being alive, and this sense infuses his latest book of short stories with a strength that is missing in his other attempts at fiction.

George McWhirter, another poet working in short fiction this time, tries for the surreal in his book *Bodyworks*. Though at times there is some good descriptive writing here, I found the book too fragmented to be effective. McWhirter tries for a very private symbolic overlay in his stories and rarely does he give any clues to where the story is going. Consequently I am puzzled by what is going on. It is as though he were indulging himself in some private world. For me, the first test of a short story is the measure of how vitally compelling the writer makes his selected facts or incidents; with McWhirter, I am at a loss as to why he felt a certain analysis was necessary in the first place. Elizabeth Bowen said that the story "must spring from an impression or perception pressing enough, acute enough, to have made the writer write". I do not feel this has happened with George McWhirter in *Bodyworks*.

It has happened, however, with Jean-Guy Carrier in *My Father's House*, a most excellent collection of short stories that covers life in rural Quebec and in Ontario. Carrier has given a new life to all the well-known clichés associated with life in rural Quebec: the father who does not understand and who tries to bully his family by asserting his authority over them; the church that tries vainly to control its flock; the hardworking and exhausted mother who never complains about her role. Carrier adds new dimensions to these stock types by showing us

"how" they work rather than "why"; by adding new types which are created with a deft and careful touch, Carrier's characters shine as examples of people who refuse to be burdened in a world where most people are drained by forces over which they have no control. Carrier has given a new cast to the face of Quebec and the country life there; he writes very well, never trying to fool his readers but rather to clear their minds with details that compel an understanding of what has happened rather than making a judgment of it.

These individual volumes, for the most part, show promise, not only for the authors themselves but also for the development of the short story in Canada. But by far the most impressive and compelling fact about the life of the short story in Canada are the two anthologies edited by that most adventuresome and discriminating duo, David Helwig and Joan Harcourt, in *73 New Canadian Stories* and *74 New Canadian Stories.* These are the third and fourth volumes in this annual series, and both collections have been excellently selected and arranged. The variety of the collections ranges not only in subject matter but also in the attempt to give the reader recent work of established writers and stories from new, and promising, writers.

The *73* collection displays the consciousness of craft that has been so essential to the growth of the story in Canada. Hugh Garner at his best is a master of technique and "Losers Weepers" is one of his finest. Though the stories in this volume appear not to be connected in any way, there is a subtle working of theme and idea fusing them together; one story finishes but leaves an idea in the reader's mind that melts into the statement of the next story, so that when one is finished with the book there is a sense of wholeness left. Helwig and Harcourt should be commended for this, though it would be interesting to know whether or not it was done on purpose. *73 New Canadian Stories* introduces Jean-Guy Carrier and Beth Harvor whose first collections of stories are mentioned above. It gives a story by Hugh Hood, a master at the craft, and reveals the experimentation of Matt Cohen, who in my view may end up to be the best fiction writer in Canada of the seventies. In fact, in each of these collections he is represented by an excellent story: "Amazing Grace" in the *73* collection, and "The Secret" in the *74* one.

The most recent collection has again a most effective arrangement of stories. It begins with an anecdotal story by Fred Euringer, whose very title, "The Rat and the Goose", brings to mind the whole tradition of the short story beginning as an idea of fable and minstrel song. The next two stories — "Ada" by Margaret Gibson Bilboord, and "Rapunzel" by Audrey Thomas — have an assured quality to them; both make the reader want more, especially from Audrey Thomas whose interpretations of our times become more heady and pre-primitive the more she writes. But by far the most enjoyable story in the collection is John Sandman's "The Real Mrs Hunter"; I say "enjoyable" because it is so funny; in fact, it is the first time in years that I have burst out laughing when reading a book.

The rest of the book is also memorable, especially as it ends with Alice Monro's "Home"; there is no doubt in my mind that Monro is the best short story writer in the country and this story is consummate Monro as she deliberately and care-

fully cuts deeper and deeper into man's behaviour, telling us all that we are not really very different from each other after all.

Oberon should be congratulated on bringing these books to the public, and Michael Macklem particularly for his book design and cover choice. Reports of the short story being dead in Canada have been exaggerated by some reviewers, and Oberon has proved it. The story is in fact developing rapidly in Canada, changing from a form whose focus was once on plot and now is on character synthesis. This is a time of introspection, and a space of complete immediacy; the Canadian short story reflects very well the problems of its own society.

INFERNO, PARADISE AND SLAPSTICK

Tom Marshall

P. K. PAGE, *Poems Selected and New.* Anansi. Paper $3.95, cloth $7.95.
PHYLLIS GOTLIEB, *Dr. Umlaut's Earthly Kingdom.* Calliope Press.

. . . it is shot
from an acute high angle. In a pit
figures the size of pins are strangely lit
and might be dancing but you know they're
not.
Like Dante's vision of the nether hell
men struggle with the bright cold fires of
salt,
locked in the black inferno of the rock:
the filter here, not innocence but guilt.

("Photos of a Salt Mine")

Those people in a circle on the sand
are dark against its gold
turn like a wheel
revolving in a horizontal plane . . .

I see them there in three dimensions yet
their height implies another space . . .

. . . all their movements make a compass rose
surging and altering . . .

Nearer I see them dark-skinned.
They are dark. And beautiful.
Great human sunflowers spinning in a ring
cosmic as any bumble-top
the vast
procession of the planets in their dance . . .

("Another Space")

INFERNO AND PARADISE: these quotations reveal something of the dimensions of Patricia Page's imaginative universe. At one pole a vision of hell shading into social concern; at the other a mandala expressing harmony and wholeness, like Dante's multifoliate rose. In "Photos of a Salt Mine" a picture of innocence and beauty gives way to a vision of evil. In "Another Space" what appears to be a "primitive" (and, because of a reference to Chagall, brings to mind a Chassidic) ritual dance expresses the ultimate wholeness and harmony of a universe that is forever "surging and altering" and yet forever one.

"Most of my poems," Miss Page has written, "have been doors closing. A few were doors opening." In this smaller group she includes "Another Space" along with "Arras" and "Stories of Snow". All of these particular poems involve journeys into inner space — through and behind the eye. I once observed of another poet of Miss Page's generation that she was a survivor, not an explorer. P. K. Page is an explorer too.

This latest version of her *Selected Poems* is arranged in four sections. The first contains mainly poems of social observation, many of which yoke together an obviously genuine compassion (especially for girls and women) with a somewhat too-decorative metaphoric busyness and much alliteration: it is to a large extent the period style of the forties, the kind of neo-Freudian neo-Marxist Auden-Thomas rococo that drives a reviewer in desperation to the sort of facile labels I've just applied. These don't, of course, do any justice to the best of the poems. And the style becomes sharper, cleaner, more refined and more definitively Page's own as the book proceeds.

The second section is made up of poems about the loss of childhood innocence and security (like "The Bands and the Beautiful Children"), case-histories of neurotic childhoods (and, in some cases, neurotic lives), and more positive suggestions of the theme of illness turned to beauty. It contains the highly successful "Adolescence" and concludes with "Images of Angels", a witty poem about the loss of the visionary faculty in the modern world. Here Miss Page seems to be reaching beyond the depiction of social flaws and psychological problems to an examination of the deeper roots of these in the atrophied human imagination. In so doing she enters her "other space", a larger dimension of perception and being. This is a natural tendency, it seems, of twentieth-century thought and art. Behind and beyond the highly useful analyses of Marx and Freud is a larger realm of understanding whose nature was perhaps best articulated by Carl Jung (though he does not, of course, have a monopoly on wisdom and insight). Now that psychology and physiology (combined in biofeedback), art, meditation and a number of other disciplines are beginning to see themselves once again as parts of one science, the much-longed-for re-discovery of the psyche (i.e. of the whole mind-body in its whole relationship to the universe) may well be at hand (I mean the full consciousness of it may be at hand; in another sense it was and is always present); Miss Page's rather pathetic angels would then become like Rilke's angels, at home in all worlds.

Interior worlds make themselves felt in the third section; they had, of course, been implicit in the earlier sections too. Metaphors are now more consistently and simply symbolic rather than gaudy and self-serving. We are presented with personal landscapes and with landscapes of love lost or very difficult, with a white "landscape without love", with contrasted white and green, male and female landscapes. Lovers turn one another to water, to stone or mineral. There is interest again in the sick or disabled and in the private worlds they might explore. The final poem is the difficult "Arras", in which the speaker apparently feels the stillness of death in the cold perfection of the world of art, and seeks to alter it with vivid life. A peacock insinuates itself into the scene through the poet's eye.

The book's final section contains poems of travel, poems about animals and gardens, poems enlarging upon the themes of the power of metaphor to transform reality and the power of the human imagination to extend itself into the cosmos in a new direction, another space, in spite of physical decline and death. There is here, as throughout the book, considerable emphasis on "see-ing":

> . . . something rare and perfect, yet
> unknown,
> stirs like a foetus just behind his eyes.
>
> ("Now This Cold Man")
>
> . . . a new
> direction opens like an eye.
>
> ("Another Space")
>
> A lung-born land, this,
> a breath spilling,
> scanned by the valvular heart's
> field glasses.
>
> ("Personal Landscape")
>
> . . . through to the area behind the eyes
> where silent, unrefractive whitness lies.
>
> ("Stories of Snow")
>
> I confess:
> It was my eye.
>
> ("Arras")

The poet is a seer. Miss Page has written of A. M. Klein that in 1944 she was struck that "for all his acceptance of ideological and psychological theory, he seemed to reach beyond both to a larger reality. And this, though I comprehend it only vaguely, I recognized as real . . . " She too became what I must call — for lack of a better adjective — a religious poet. I like to think that all poets operate at the interface between inner and outer worlds, but some seem to delve more deeply within than others. One can compare Page's "see-ing" to that of Margaret Avison, who seems to me to effect a more complete union of inner and outer worlds (so that neither threatens to be swallowed up by the other), or to that of Margaret Atwood or Gwendolyn MacEwen in the next generation; Atwood in particular seems to have picked up a great deal both from Avison and Page (not to mention Jay Macpherson, whose visionary world seems, however, much more self-enclosed and literary): thus are traditions developed.

As I've suggested, Page's style has been refined and perfected as her insight into the nature of her experience has clarified. She has learned to deploy rhyme, image and sound-effect, and to move lightly in and out of a basic iambic pentameter line, with unobtrusive skill. As poet and calligrapher she delights in details and images, but has learned (as Klein did) to subordinate whimsy to the microcosmic design or large metaphor that captures a sense of the macrocosm. This requires that one go beyond "normal" seeing:

> And choir me too to keep my heart a size
> larger than seeing, unseduced by each
> bright glimpse of beauty striking like a bell,
> so that the whole may toll,
> its meaning shine
> clear of the myriad images that still —
> do what I will — encumber its pure line.
>
> ("After Rain")

She is one of our best poets.

To turn to the work of Phyllis Gotlieb is to move from the cool and contemplative to a world of whimsical play and driving nervous energy. Mrs. Gotlieb is more a dramatic than a lyric or meditative poet; she revels in both the ordinary and the mythic (which she tends to reduce to the ordinary, often very humourously). Everything becomes play; in good Jewish fashion, Gotlieb questions God, Death and the other large and frightening realities as to their competence, morals and intentions. A kind of verbal slapstick is often her strategy for dealing with the terrible.

Dr. Umlaut's Earthly Kingdom is Mrs. Gotlieb's third collection of poems; it contains three poems for voices commissioned by the CBC and a number of shorter pieces. One of these, called "The thoughts and quotes of Mao Tse Tung as seen by Master Kung Fu Tze", gives some indication of the range of her in-

terests. But the poems are so lively and action-packed that it is difficult to get much sense of a whole vision of the world. Perhaps this doesn't matter with a poet so entertaining (at her best). It is apparent that she sees life as a show, a more or less absurd circus or carnival, the ultimate meaning of which is impossible to fathom. One lives as well as one can, employing the liberal decencies. Mrs. Gotlieb would apparently like to be a sybil, but is thoroughly conscious of being an earthbound one:

I wonder if I'll ever get to touch a star
and live victorious, not just vicarious
but I'm stuck down here with things-as-
    they-are
while others cross the border into
    Cloudcuckooland
I sit here in my tollbooth and add up the
    cash-in-hand
in the sentry-box, in the concierge's closet
in the oracle's cleft
in the twilight band

Both Page and Gotlieb owe something to A. M. Klein: Gotlieb's work reflects his zest for scholarship, Page's his religious sense of design. Each poet will appeal to a different sensibility, speak to a different experience (or, as in my own case, a different mood). P. K. Page seems to me to have the larger view. But those who feel her sense of cosmic harmony disposes rather too easily of the problem of evil may well find Gotlieb's honest bewilderment and relative bloody-mindedness refreshing:

Noah: but — damn,
    what am I gonna do with that
        woman of mine?
    got no more sense than a mule's
        hind end
    hangs out with her cronies in a
        tavern in the city
    and tanks up till she's blind
    — Lord, she'd sink the thing
God: that's your problem

("Garden Varieties")

THE GEM-LIKE FLAME EXTINGUISHED

Anthony Appenzell

JOANNA M. GLASS, *Reflections on a Mountain Summer*. McClelland & Stewart. $7.95.
JOHN BRUCE, *Breathing Space*. Anansi. Paper $3.25, cloth $6.50.
DON BAILEY, *In the Belly of the Whale*. Oberon.
DAVID ADAMS RICHARDS, *The Coming of Winter*. Oberon.
ALAN FRY, *The Burden of Adrian Knowle*. Doubleday. $5.95.

THERE WAS a time when it was assumed that first novels would be high adventures in self-discovery; e.g. *Sons and Lovers*, *Stephen Hero*, and even, in its own ironic way, *Crome Yellow*. The implication was always that the discovering process, even if its results were jarring and disconcerting, cleared the way for growing up, for enlightenment, for profiting by the enrichment of experience. Wilde and Pater cast a lambency over their age that lasted long; for more than one generation of writers in the English language experience, whether or not they chose to admit it, had always to be distilled into the "hard gem-like flame"; to

burn with that flame, "to maintain this ecstacy", continued to be regarded as "success in life". Hemingway sought the joyful and destroying flame as assiduously as Lawrence; so in their different ways, in poetry as in prose, did the wild young men of the Thirties, whether in Spender's paeans on human brotherhood or Dylan Thomas's celebrations of the joys of a never-completed childhood.

Somewhere in the background, of course, there had always been working the deeper, darker knowledge, the knowledge of Hardy and Yeats and Proust, that the ecstasy is intermittent, that the flame is flickering rather than crystalline, that tragedy is sordid more often than splendid, that the lives of most men most of the time have neither flame nor ecstasy. The realization became part of the ugly and tortured prose of writers like Sartre and Beckett; it became the sardonic vision one saw through Orwell's "prose like a window pane". And by now the shadows that darken our world as we hasten towards that year of destiny, 1984, have so affected our attitudes that a writer is no longer taken seriously if he treats in anything else than a burlesque or at least ironic manner of the ecstasy of aesthetic or other experience. True, there are places still for the ecstatics, but in the incidental writings of fashionably mystical cults rather than in literature per se.

It is a sense of the transient, insubstantial, almost unreal quality of joy that in one way or another pervades the four first novels among the five fictions I am considering. They all reflect on the ultimate meaninglessness outside itself that experience seems to have assumed in this world of the Yeatsian Second Coming. This is not to say that joys are absent on this our sorrowful pilgrimage; indeed, the lack of a holy city at the end of the progress has left time to appreciate some of the beauty of the wayside scenery, and in all these novels there are passages that move or delight the reader as well as the characters involved, but without any feeling that the enjoyment can be prolonged, that the Slough of Despond can be skirted or even, ultimately, escaped from.

Take Joanna M. Glass's *Reflections on a Mountain Summer*. Somewhere, in a context the dust-cover does not reveal, Mordecai Richler has described Mrs. Glass as "an enormously talented novelist", and if that vague praise is meant to convey that she has a live and penetrative imagination and a fine way with words, it is justified.

Her basic story is of a marriage of convenience and its consequences. Jay Rutherford, the narrator, is the child of a shy and awkward rich girl married off to a clotheshorse of a man purchased for the purpose by her mother. One summer the family, Jay and his bought father and his mother Laura, go off to a house they have had built in the Rockies, and there his mother is awakened to a passionate, joyful and doomed love for a half-literate wandering man called Winger. The clotheshorse husband is discarded; Laura seems to be offered a prospect of emotional security and Jay an example of natural manhood. But Winger, the natural man, turns out to be elusive of bonds, and leaves Laura to a life of deprived solitude in which her awakened independence shades off into ageing eccentricity, while Jay settles into moneyed futility, haunted by the thought of the might-have-been which — given Winger's character — could not have been: haunted so relentlessly that forty years later he sits down to write the account of it which is the novel.

In the end, for all the joy that fleetingly comes to Laura, the leitmotif of *Reflections on a Mountain Summer* seems to be that the pleasures incidental to existence bear examination only in the light of irony; they are, one is led finally to feel, the illusions with which pathetic human beings fill their memories. All this Mrs. Glass conveys with a remarkable virtuosity in the reminiscent chronicle wherein the telling of the past alternates with the recording of the ageing narrator's ineffectual present, all told from an entirely plausible masculine point of view.

Though this is Mrs. Glass's first novel, she has written a number of plays, and her prose shows in its assurance and in the tightness of its verbal texture the evidence of a practiced hand and a cool head. One's sole misgiving is stirred by a bravura quality that distinguishes the book from beginning to end. It is a sustained performance of great vitality and high polish, but one wonders if this kind of virtuosity can be repeated, and if it can, whether such a shining surface quality may not become eventually an integument imprisoning the author and constricting her further development.

A much less ambitious book, and one consistently darker in its shadings, is John Bruce's *Breathing Space*, a sardonic and beautifully written novella by a professional philosopher which poses some disturbing moralists' questions. A group of prosperous, intelligent, unattached, middle-class, middle-aged people — three men and a woman — gather for a weekend party at the house to which one of them has retreated in the Ontario countryside. On one level — the ground-floor level of the house in which they meet and play witty and sentimental games with each other — it is a comedy of manners about shallow and selfish people who have done nothing with their minds and have been frightened to commit their emotions. But on another level — appropriately that of the basement where a frightened fugitive killer has taken refuge — it is a novel about the dark forces that hem in and threaten our attempts to live smooth and civilized lives. If the joy of ecstasy is not lasting, the pleasure of security is not sure, and beneath the witty surface there is a sinister relentlessness in the denouement of *Breathing Space*, as the self-satisfied weekenders fail to deal with — even to understand — the violence that breaks in upon them when the police finally flush out the criminal and kill him like a hunted animal.

Glass and Bruce, born between the wars, retain much of the concern with an eloquent and dramatic style that distinguished writers who still believed in the hard gem-like flame; one feels they would like such a flame, even if it cannot exist in life, to burn on in art. The other two first novels, Don Bailey's *In the Belly of the Whale* and David Adams Richards' *The Coming of Winter*, are by younger writers, and in them the Paterian flame is not even present as an artistic convention; it has been replaced, at best, by a flashlight with a flickering battery that records only life's inconsequential nature, its intermittencies.

Don Bailey, one judges from various bits of evidence he presents, must be about 30; David Adams Richards is only 23. Bailey's *In the Belly of the Whale* is the simpler, more tentative book. It records — first-person presentation — the few days after a man comes out of prison, as he lives in the limbo between one world and another, wondering how he can re-establish his place in a setting from

which he abruptly disconnected himself when he accepted a friend's suggestion to rob a bank, how he can rebuild the links with his family, and in memory recapitulating his life of a discarded child (whose name was not his real name) that led him to this point. What he discovers is nothing very dramatic; it is a small advance in self-knowledge, a resolution to be braver with himself. And perhaps the fragmentary form, as if the novel were a cut-off section of a longer picaresque, is appropriate to the tentativeness of the conclusion. Perhaps it represents a recognition that self-discovery is most often an undramatic shift in understanding, and rarely a blinding illumination or a bruising shock, as earlier novelists tended to portray it.

In *The Coming of Winter*, a more ambitious and more closely structured novel, David Adams Richards deals with the bleak process of growing up in a dying Maritime society. The novel records a series of crucial events that cluster together in the life of the central character, Kevin; they are either brought about casually, or sink down into the monotony of an existence that has neither social nor individual imperatives. Kevin kills a cow in mistake for a deer; the scene between him and the farmer, full of the potentialities of violence, peters out into a banal money arrangement. His best friend kills himself in a car accident; Kevin celebrates the fact in desultory boozing. He has been carrying on an affair with a nurse of slightly higher social standing, and they decide abruptly and without any obvious reason to get married; the wedding, full of the possibility of clashes between the two mutually incomprehending families, falls away into an exchange of boredoms. Even the threat of real poverty, which in some ways braced individuals and localities within a sick society during the Depression, has, one realizes, been removed almost everywhere in Canada; *The Coming of Winter* is a novel about inner, not outer, impoverishment in one of the remoter backwaters of the welfare society. It is carefully done, with the good craftsmanship that in our age is reviving as high art collapses; there are shadings of characterization, and there is a very credible use of the background detail of a world which has lost its own purpose without ever being integrated into the wider world that devitalized it. The futile lives of Kevin and his friends merely mirror the moral and social waste lot on which they have grown up.

Beside all these books, each of which attempts to give some kind of appropriate verbal shape to the malaise of our times, Alan Fry's *The Burden of Adrian Knowles* has an outdated air of contrived optimism. Fry began his career as a novelist with a somewhat didactic little book, *How a People Die*, which drew attention to the conditions of life on Indian reservations. Since that time he has moved into the role of the entertaining story-teller, something of a latter-day Zane Grey on a minor scale, specializing in ranchers and Indians in the inland parts of British Columbia. He describes ranch life with a documentary authenticity of detail, he can evoke a landscape in a way which suggests that he might be a good travel-writer, and he has learnt from the success of his first book always to have a problem about which his readers can comfortably agonize. In *The Revenge of Annie Charlie* it was sexual relations between Indians and others, satisfactorily solved by novel's end. In *The Burden of Adrian Knowle* it is the ana-

chronicity of the rancher's ruthless ethic in a modern setting, worked out through the conversion of such a rancher by the long-suffering of his sensitive son (not of course his real son) Adrian; again the problem is satisfactorily solved and self-knowledge gained by all. Perhaps such automatically happy endings have their appeal to people who turn nervously from the world as it is, but in our age they can only resonate hollowly in the mind. And that is unfortunate, since Alan Fry, when he deals with something outside human relationships, often writes well. He has the kind of talent for descriptive narrative which writers like Heather Robertson have put to good non-fictional use, and he might well, if he chose to do it, produce an excellent documentary book on the ranch lands of British Columbia.

FOR THE NEW YEAR

Dorothy Livesay

Stamped in the throat
bird song
biologists say
is as inevitable
as that beak, that eye
that red wing:
It is not *learned*
it is born with the bird

Perhaps then there's another dimension
behind our learned
word patterns —
perhaps an infinite song
sways in our throats
yet to be heard?

books in review

TEMPERAMENT VERSUS TECHNIQUE

RALPH GUSTAFSON, *Fire on Stone*. McClelland & Stewart, $3.95.

Fire on Stone continues the tradition of Ralph Gustafson's poetry, a tradition that began with *The Golden Chalice* in 1935 and that, apart from *Rivers Among Rocks*, 1960, and *Rocky Mountain Poems*, 1960, has grown deeper and stronger with the nine other volumes he has published.

I should say, two traditions, for in the work of Ralph Gustafson, it seems to me, temperament is very much at odds with technique.

In temperament, thought, outlook, Ralph Gustafson is essentially an elitist, a believer in a continuous tradition of men and women who by their gentleness, their love of beauty and goodness have preserved in the Western World music, art, sculpture, poetry, and the decencies of life which go with these things. So much is Western Humanism an integral part of Gustafson's emotional and cultural inheritance that when an artifact in Rome or Greece lives up in reality to what in his mind it ought to be, it elicits the stock response from him that tradition assigns to such an encounter between poet and artifact. At the same time, incongruity between object and symbol and his notion of what these things should be easily shocks him. His reaction seldom goes beyond praise of beauty and decency and revulsion against their opposites. He never seems to understand the interrelationship comprised in the Buddhist prayer, "Om Madi Padme Hum". His is essentially a simple, incomplicated response to experience. He is in this a kind of less robust Browning, lacking the latter poet's insight into the ironic relationship of innocence-guilt, beauty-ugliness, good-evil throughout the universe.

Although the very antithesis of a revolutionary in outlook and temperament, Ralph Gustafson grew up during an age of technical revolution in English poetry, and adopted that aspect of revolution without questioning whether or not he was by nature fitted for it. To a young man at Oxford in the 1930's, the rhythms of Hopkins, Yeats, Pound, Eliot, and Auden spoke with a music more in tune with the rhythm of the time than anything that had been written in the past, and Ralph Gustafson had a good ear to listen and to adapt to his own use. Long practice has made him a master, and *Fire on Stone* abounds in happy phrases and rhythms that are a delight to the ear regardless of whether or not they are conveying anything other than tonal nuances. Take, for example, "The Star-Catcher":

> Scintillant, sharp,
> A collapse of stars
> At his shoulders glorious,
> On his earthsprung arch
> Diminutive ember
> Midstretch battered
> By burden, he stands.

And when feeling and imagination are roused by real experience, Gustafson's skill can find words for such poems as "Of Answers and Her Asleep", which is a truly beautiful and noble love poem:

> This haggard heart attached to me,
> Conduit, valves, ligaments, I suppose
> Not knowing the structured procedures of
> This determinable physical world —
> I would not want to know the slow

Red-blood drippings of the heart's thunder
Only its presence, dear, since
I love the world and you. I
Should find inevitable wrongness. I
Am afraid of hurt, the presentable flaw
Which demands compassion — I would give
it,
But O how better no compassion,
The wound not at all, or healed, the child
Pickaback hoisted, the unspoken love
Aware no less of shouting harm
And the silence of irony — I would leave all
Such biopsy of answers to the physician
Dependent on him only if need be,
Knowing the need will be. I have only
Requirement of indeterminable things
As fill the hour and hour, the way
The shape of you lies asleep, beyond
Discovery, your head under my touch
My hand that does not wake you, you
Only moving in that knowledge
Slightly as if, as the rain, as the moment
Of petals, that question were all of need.

If every time he had written — or even every other time — the urgency and depth of experience had forced Ralph Gustafson to go beneath or beyond the stock response, as he has done in the poem quoted above, he might well have been our finest poet. As it is, like Bliss Carman he responded too easily, too decently perhaps, and found the words much too readily. He is, I feel, a victim of his very erudition and facility. That is why when I read *Fire on Stone*, as when I read all his previous books except the two written in 1960, I do so with mixed admiration and exasperation.

FRED COGSWELL

LARK ASCENDING

RONALD SUTHERLAND, *Lark des Neiges*. new press.

RONALD Sutherland's *Lark des Neiges* can best be judged within the framework of his own criticism in *Second Image*; although the novel stands on its own merits, as a one-day journey in the mental life of a French Canadian housewife, it can also be read as a symbolic representation of the French Canadian consciousness coming to terms with itself, a reconciliation between an outer and inner reality.

In *Second Image*, Sutherland discusses the search for a new morality to replace traditional values lost in the twentieth century. Most post-war novels offer one of two possibilities — either there is an existential vacuum, a state of nothingness, an alternative which is clearly anathema to Sutherland, or there is "realistic involvement", a "willingness to accept life as it is and to struggle for any possible improvement through sympathy and love for other human beings." At present, the existential vacuum is in vogue, but Sutherland feels that earlier writers like Simard, McDougall, or MacLennan may have hit on the vital truth with the idea of realistic involvement, which could serve as a cornerstone for a new morality. *Lark des Neiges* works in this direction.

Suzanne Laflamme is a twenty nine year old housewife in East End Montreal, wife of an underpaid *college classique* professor, mother of four pre-schoolers, on the brink of mental disintegration. Daughter of a French mother and an English father, Suzanne was confused by her mixed religious and linguistic background and early became aware of the animosity that separated English and French, husband and wife. The conflict between the parents is one between two modes of facing existence, the instinctive, spontaneous response of Yvette and French Canadians against the reasoned, restrained response of Andrew and Anglo-Saxons. Suzanne embodies both impulses within herself, making her, on a second level, a symbol of the entire nation attempting to reconcile two races, two

cultures, two languages. Sutherland attempts an analysis of — and diagnosis for — the moral and political schizophrenia that has split the country. As Suzanne tries to order and find meaning in her past, so that she can face the future, she offers simultaneously what Sutherland feels is the only road open to Canadian unity.

On doctor's orders, Suzanne's husband Georges has taken the children out for the day. Suzanne dozes fitfully, has snatches of dreams about the past that haunts her, talks to her cat Minou, and as the hours pass, gradually comes to self-recognition. The book opens with a dream. A woman stands alone in a frozen, desolate landscape of ice and snow, "the branches of a large maple tree extend grotesquely upwards like the legs of a dead spider" — Canadian emblem as ominous portent. "The woman is alone. Where is she?" The closing dream before the family returns is again of a woman trudging through deep, falling snow, but this time she knows where she is going. She heads for a house on the outskirts of a small town where Georges and the children are silhouetted in a window. She rings the bell of the house just as Georges rings the bell of their apartment. Somewhere between these two dreams, Suzanne has found the answer.

Suzanne has always used sex as an escape from the world. She tells Minou, "I've always abandoned myself completely. It's a marvellous, fantastic feeling, like a bird soaring into the sky. Like a lark. 'Lark des neiges'." The problem is that when she returns to earth, she is wracked by guilt. Unlike her mother who listened unquestioningly to the priest, Suzanne derives no sense of absolution from confession. In fact, her memories of clergymen, Catholic and Protestant, are of two-faced peacemakers who preach brotherly love while encouraging and exploiting the chasm between the two faiths.

Georges is the voice of sanity, at least in part echoing Sutherland's views. He counsels Suzy, "We can't just wipe out past experiences. But we can refuse to be obsessed by them." The alternative is to "create a little world of peace and love around ourselves. Our own little sane world."

Suzanne remembers some of Georges' theories, in particular the one about the myths. "Georges says that when one race or ethnic group or whatever you call it wants to protect what it thinks is its purity, then a myth develops about the others being sex crazy." These myths are what Sutherland has elsewhere labelled "the body-odour of race"; it goes beyond the myth of "la femme fatale Canadienne" to embrace the one about the French Canadian deficiency of business sense or the one about the link between Catholicism and the French language. Although the author admits that these ideas are rapidly losing ground, and that the myth of the French girl has been reversed so it is now recommendation rather than condemnation, he is trying in *Lark des neiges* to administer the final blow to all such myths.

As the day wanes, Suzanne has a final nightmare about being raped by a priest and awakes screaming for LOVE. Then leafing through an old photo album, she discovers that Georges' Aunt had dark hair, not fair as he had told her whenever she mentioned the eldest child's light colouring; she realizes that Georges has known about the child all along and has been making things easier for her. Then there is a coming together. She decides

that "they should promote him to the top, that's what they should do. He'd put a little love into the system. He'd get rid of all the hate and teach the kids to love. He wouldn't let people put stupid prejudices and twisted ideas into kids' heads". And Suzanne hurriedly straightens the apartment and fixes her hair before Georges returns home.

The reader pauses. Today it is love and reconciliation. But tomorrow there is still the stench and rotting wood of inner city poverty, and four kids cramped in three rooms, and rising prices. Can love and sympathy triumph over all that? Psychiatric statistics say no.

Sutherland has a sensitive perception of the Quebec scene and draws an incisive portrait of a bilingual character so comfortable in both languages that the switch from one to the other is imperceptible. The novel weakens when the author feels compelled to make his message explicit. The final judgment depends on how one reacts to Sutherland's sociopolitical philosophy. The apocalyptic ending has been the fetish in literary circles; his love-sympathy formula seems to belong to another era, as he himself acknowledges. But it is not the sense of its being outdated that leads me to question the resolution — the old masters still reveal unchanging truths about human nature. The question is rather whether a personal solution can be translated into a national one. Ethical and moral categories are hazy in the realm of politics. So Sutherland's conclusion becomes too facile on the symbolic level as well as on the level of plot, yet in the end, *Lark des neiges* is an important novel because it aims at exposing the reality of Quebec society to English speaking readers in the rest of Canada, and because it contains a subtle study of a young French Canadian woman who actually does find love without contracting a fatal illness or entering a convent, both considerable achievements in a literary or social context.

LINDA SHOHET

COMEDY OF SURVIVAL

ADELE WISEMAN, *Crackpot*. $10.00.

I'M GOING all out against my carefully acquired academic caution to recommend *Crackpot* as the most alive, daring and tempestuously human literary creation in Canadian storytelling. Hoda, its heroine, is largely the reason, but there are important other ones: a level on which this book is a marvellous kind of mystery play, another level on which it is a portrait, superbly brought to life, of a community in all its foibles of human comedy and error. Adele Wiseman has proved that she is as adept in the comic mode as, in her first novel, she was in the tragic.

Yet one must be alert: in turning to a comic mode — perhaps tragi-comic is more accurate — she immerses herself in a way of being and describing that is new enough in Canadian fiction to risk inviting inappropriate responses. I have to admit that I, for one, had trouble on first reading. Though excited by admiration, I was confused by dismay; the book at times seemed pushy, it strained credibility, it bordered on bad taste. As Hoda began taking it over (rather like a too-active yeast dough overflowing its pot) she sometimes stuck in my throat. Wiseman, I wanted to say, where is your aesthetic sense of decorum, your restraint? I was remembering the dignity of *The Sacrifice*,

its austerely balanced design of hope and tragic inevitability. I could only imagine Wiseman had become so obsessed with her creation that, swept up in Hoda's momentum, she has lost authorial distance. I was deceived: a second reading proved unalloyed delight. Reviewing *Crackpot* in the light of how it has revealed itself to me, I recognize it as a masterpiece of narrative and projected viewpoint.

Its inspiration is Hoda, conceived as the larger-than-life epitome of an entire milieu, with ramifications that embrace all humanity. This is a bold enough scheme. What makes it even bolder is that Wiseman has drawn on a source of her Jewish-European-Canadian heritage which, in its essential spirit, almost defies cultural translation. One might say she has written a Jewish book in English. This expresses itself in style as well as in viewpoint; in the form she has given to characteristics of her milieu, moving familiarly from moods of mystical reverence to tender irony to biting satire to earthy humour, allowing her heroine to be intimately experienced in all her inner riot of feeling and emotion.

Intrinsically, *Crackpot* is a story of the triumph of the human spirit over adversity. Hoda's humble immigrant parents have given her in childhood the strength and wisdom to see herself as a unique and valuable person worthy of respect. Accordingly, in a life which taxes all her resources — through poverty and humiliation suffered at the hands of institutions, and against the sordid aspects of her calling with its social opprobrium and guilts — she is able to withstand shocks and retain a robustly independent identity.

The first chapter contains in embryo the shape of all that is to grow in the book. The setting is Winnipeg's Jewish immigrant community near the beginning of the century. Both Hoda's parents are marked with a physical disability which society treats as a social one, Hoda's ballooning fatness already marking her off for a similar fate. The small family is blessed in its harmony of loving interdependence. Her mother works as a cleaning woman to support them. And through his eloquent storytelling, Danile, Hoda's blind father, instructs her in the family history, recreating the drama of his extraordinary marriage conducted in a graveyard, which had the effect of turning him and his bride into saviours of their village. A man of gentle purity, he imbues Hoda with his wonder and belief in their meaningful destiny, so that she grows up trusting, against ever-increasing doubt and despair, that the future will make clear and justify the shattering events which rock her life.

Hoda lives for "the important things," indulging a childish fantasy obsession with the Prince of Wales, her topical image for the "one-and-only" who will come and choose her as his Queen Esther, enabling her to command the respect which will lead those who at present scorn her to recognize her worth. Becoming sexually aware, the fat unpopular schoolgirl finds her frank eagerness matched by the boys who, on this basis, admit her to their rough comradeship. The reward of acceptance from those with whom she enjoys her sexuality makes viewing it as a business a logical solution when, unable to find other reliable work after her mother's death, she is faced with the problem of supporting herself and her father. Danile contributes by learning to make baskets which Hoda hustles to her clients while anxiously and guiltily shield-

ing him from the facts of her life. She builds her clientele from the boys she has grown up among, rejecting the "bigtime" of the downtown scene after an instructive brush with its degrading brutalities. Because Hoda has only the most confused notions of how pregnancy occurs, she is unaware when it happens, giving birth alone in the night in a horror of pain and disbelief, thinking that like her mother she is dying of a tumour.

Though deep symbolic structure is far less obvious in this novel than in Wiseman's first, being muted, it now becomes unmistakeable in the advent of a child who comes sheathed in mystery, growing like everyman to ask: From whence did I come? To what end? In her first panic of fear and concern for the child, Hoda deposits him at the Jewish Orphanage door, tagged with a confused message hinting at his princely origin and his future as a redeemer of the Jews. In handing him over to the community with this note Hoda acts both astutely and naively, ensuring he will be treated with respect, and projecting on to him her dream wish that he might be the son of that actual Prince around whom centred her childish fantasies of an ideal love. Given the auspicious name of David ben Zion but known as Pipick (or Bellybutton) because of his crudely tied navel, the boy grows up sensible of being set apart. His identity remains Hoda's guilty secret. For a while she is able to glean news of him through Uncle Nate, one of the novel's most brilliantly and satirically realized characters. Shortly after his Bar Mitzvah, Pipick has repeated occasions to impress the elders in the synagogue — an obvious reference to Jesus in the Temple — and in this period Hoda, preoccupied with her inner conflicts, loses sight of him.

From this time, a subtle shift begins in Hoda's relationship to life, though not becoming evident until the future has tried her with yet another set of horrendous shocks which forms the novel's dramatic climax. It is a tour-de-force that this part of the plot, which, abstracted from its context might be seen as melodrama, in Wiseman has an impact I can only leave for the reader to experience directly. Suffice it to say that Hoda, as always, rises to the challenge of the crisis, turning it to best advantage, refusing to go under.

In telling its story the novel presents some interesting perspectives on class structure and mores. Early in life, Hoda's fervour for justice and freedom turns her into a minor heroine of the Winnipeg General Strike, and a member — though she never sees eye-to-eye with her comrades — of the Communist party. "If only they'd lay off free enterprise," she complains at a later date. "I don't mean the big capitalist bloodsuckers, but small little businesses like mine, where you give value for money." Though hilarious, the passage underlines the point that Hoda does not see herself as oppressed. Hers is a straight exchange. Unlike the factory worker with whom she compares herself, moreover, she enjoys the freedom of working when and where she pleases. The problem is only in how society regards her.

The shift from a life geared to personal hopes to a more selfless instrumentality can be seen when, her last hope of being able to help her son ended with his final disappearance, she settles into a role that is pure function. She has also given up all hope of being redeemed from her profession through the appearance of a predestined lover. She attends to her clients,

servicing and solacing them in their needs, especially the younger ones for whom she has a tender concern that their first experience be a memorable one. When World War Two breaks, she rallies with zest to its "just cause," using herself unsparingly. As Mamma Hoda, she has a peculiar notion that the men who have lain in her arms will not die of the war, nor does she exclude "even the bastards who made fun of her afterwards." Wiseman depicts the transformation in Hoda, since the coming to responsible age of her son, from a Magdalen into a Mary, Mother to all men. And soon after this Hoda receives her first marriage proposal, which she rejects.

The war's end finds her in business partnership with a former client as hostess-manager of his restaurant-gambling enterprise, having ended her former activities. Becoming respectable, she loses integrity; she engages two younger prostitutes on a commission basis, unperturbedly turning into a capitalist exploiter. This willingness to profit off others is Hoda's real loss of innocence and comes as one of the quieter shocks of the book. Here Wiseman is ironically realistic.

But redemption is in store, though the sudden revelation that would bestow meaning on the crazy pattern of Hoda's life as she has suffered it has failed to materialize. Happiness she regards with sceptical contempt. So when she receives a second proposal of marriage from a "deepee" survivor of the Nazi concentration camps, she is unreceptive. However, Lazar, a Lazarus even without his name to tell us, reaches her through his need to blot out the memory of the field of death from which he crawled over the corpses of his kin. Hoda cannot refuse this invitation to life, to renewal. Almost in spite of herself, she accepts him, new bourgeois dreams and hopes reforming in a kind of madly joyous dance on the graveyard of the old, idealistic ones.

This, then, is Wiseman's second testament to the immutable promise of God's covenant with Abraham. *Crackpot* is her Jewish reading of the New Testament, which puts it back in context, with the Old. Thus the chosen people are not merely of the tribe, but embrace all the lowly and despised who, with God's help, celebrate humanity by rising above its limitations. The novel's main characters are pointedly chosen: Hoda's parents, as an altar-gift to God, Uncle Nate as the unwitting instrument of the family's taking root in the New World, Lazar as the manifest bridegroom ascendant over the grave, Hoda as the female generosity of the people itself out of whom a son is born in all his mortal vulnerability, and Pipick: world centre, comically and promisingly human, hope upon which the future rests. But it is with the mother — Hoda-Judah in her primacy and toughness of endurance — that the novel rests, Hoda's dream of a second child named for her father bringing us round to where the story begins, in a circle of continuity.

HELENE ROSENTHAL

SPIRES AND SNOW

Poets of the Capital, ed. Frank M. Tierney and Stephen Gill. Borealis Press.
39 Below: The Anthology of Greater Edmonton Poetry, ed. Allan Shute and R. G. Fyfe. Tree frog.

ON THE PAPER COVERS of these anthologies, the spires of Parliament stand vigil over 46 poets of the capital, and 39 Edmontonians are huddled together inside snow white covers with a thermo-

meter registering 39 below. Despite this way of introducing the books, neither selection is narrowly regional. The editors have not collected poems about particular localities, but have assembled useful overviews of the work of poets (mostly Canadian, many of them admittedly minor) now living in the two cities. *39 Below* has the fresher, more contemporary selection. *Poets of the Capital* includes a fair number of poems indebted to what is least memorable in nineteenth-century Canadian verse.

The poems with civic or regional subjects tend to be vague, wordy, rhetorical and imitative (e.g., *Capital* 73, 137, 145). Often the place seems a mere accident (e.g., Dorothy Livesay's "The Pied Piper of Edmonton", in *39 Below*) but the poems that do evoke the spirit of a place show sharply observed details ordered in a fashion that creates its own poetic logic. A few examples will suffice. In "Canadiana" (*39 Below*), Dorothy Livesay deftly balances two milieux — her schooldays in Winnipeg, present-day Edmonton youngsters — and two types of prejudice — the old anti-semitism, contemporary discrimination against Indians and Métis. With sympathy and humour, John Penner captures something of the ordinariness of the disappearing Ontario village ("Blueberry Plains", *Capital*). The place does not necessarily have to be Canadian. Joy Kogawa writes of an uncomfortable "Night in a Boat between Beppu and Kobe" (*Capital*); squeezed in a corner below deck with three hundred Japanese, she watches everything through "east-west eyes", "Too curious to sleep too proper to be comfortable", and is wise enough to recognize her masks and admit "Having dramatized my corner all night." Other poets treat unnamed places. Douglas Barbour (*39 Below*) observes "fog at the drive-in" diffusing and refracting the light from the projection booth. Finally, in the imagination of Christopher Levenson, a ride in a "Horse Sleigh" (*Capital*) is the occasion for musing about ultimates. Apart from the literary reminiscences, it has something of the haunting quality of Jean-Paul Lemieux' barren winter landscapes:

> And now our horses,
> revenants
> in mourning whiteness,
> move soundlessly,
> charting the waste lands
> between huddles of trees,
> outgrowths of evergreen,
> leaving behind them
> a wake, a permanent way
> that will heal over soon,
> with the next snow.

Love and sex interest practically every poet, and it bears repeating that what is pleasurable or painful, hateful or admirable, commonplace or unusual in real life does not necessarily make good poetry. John Donne quipped that he had written best when he had invented most freely. Here there are many pained confessions and strained conceits, much raw sentiment and too many pieces where images are strung together without much thought. There are more striking lyrical lines (e.g., Seymour Mayne's "Come back with your eyes/of desire and foreboding", *Capital*) than completed poems. There are, however, several good pieces in both collections, like Brenda Fleet's crackling "Anger" (*Capital*), which is nagging, frustrated and submissive by turns, or Nella Kowalow's "Cheaper than getting drunk" (*39 Below*), whose one, two and three word lines show a childish, adolescent infatuation turning to claustrophobic desperation. In "Song 50: the visit" (*39 Below*), Douglas Barbour uses crisp,

simple images (snow-fire-ashes, heat-cold) to heighten the contrast between a couple still in love and a couple falling apart. The first stanza has too many tortuous metrical quirks to wear well with me, but the halting rhythms of the last stanza fill what could have been bland verse with choking anguish:

> our love a fire still
> a part of us
> in the ashes of your marriage bed
> in this cold & lonely house
> full of friends held
> apart
> by the cold
> silences.

A full range of other themes appear elsewhere. Nature is still accessible beyond the urban sprawl, and a welcome change from the boredom of the super highway in Richard Hornsey's "The Detour" (*39 Below*). The psychedelic period is represented, for example, by Wolf Kirchmeir's "The sea son's eyes are blue and green . . ." (*39 Below*) — meretricious, like much serious psychedelia — and Tom Farley's more successful "The Lonesome Game" (*Capital*) a humorous ballad about a candy stick shootout in Cinnamon Town. Moving to political issues, Candas Dorsey (*39 Below*) reminds us that the world is larger than Canada by relocating the Vietnam war in "New Orleans, La." ("be quiet now mrs delaroy it's only the apocalypse", "napalm blackens *all* the skins") "heavy", as the current vernacular has it. The age of the jet, international media and professional mobility are (whatever else they may be) the greatest threat to purely national or regional concerns. Robin Matthews successfully satirizes some of the stereotypes in a funny poem entitled "And When the Liberal Admiri-can Couple" (*Capital*). It bears rereading, but probably not much imitation.

Then there are the poems that are consciously literary — among them some of the weakest in the collections. "Fable" by David Andrew (*Capital*) champions grasshopper singing (in rhymed quatrains) above ant-like labour (in truncated blank verse). The shift in meters is a clever idea, but not very skilfully handled. Elizabeth Brewster's "The Prince who married the Sleeping Beauty" (*39 Below*) tells what happened after the happily ever after of a few months of wedlock. The prince is too modern; the beauty finds herself more comfortable with the prince's grandfather. There are some wry touches, but too much stilted scene-setting. The wit works better when she discusses the reasons for her "Disqualification" as a poet — I wish there were space to quote it. More successful literary poets are Tim Lander, whose "All the old words" (*39 Below*) deals with the difficulty of finding the right word, and Leona Gom, whose "Persephone" (*39 Below*) draws her lover into the earth with a vegetative passion.

A. P. Campbell's "Eviction" (from Eden — *Capital*) is indebted to Old and Middle English alliterative verse and Hopkins. Sometimes the effect is too mannered for my ear ("Down the gray groove/That will not green again/Till judgment day"), but it is good to read a poet aware enough of prosody to set himself working in the tradition. His talents carry him beyond mere imitation to compose some fine verse. The first line, "We are fugitives from the land, all", resonates with intimations of disaster like the King James Bible's descriptions of Cain or the messengers who tell Job about his losses. It is no mean feat, as shown by compari-

son with Glenn Clever's Tennysonian-Keatsian-Shakespearian pastiche, "The Escalator" (*Capital*). It is also comforting to see a poem showing that religion can spring from genuine experience and can still be written about. Campbell's "Holy Week Prayer for Exiles" has flesh and sinews — hard, crisp diction and taut rhythm, a good antidote to pie in the sky cream puffs. Elsewhere religion is treated very differently. Glenn Clever has a jaunty bagatelle about Joseph as cuckold ("Occam's Razor", *Capital*). A prayer, satirically deflating escapist pietism, is addressed to "my immaculate Piece of Pie" by a hermaphrodite named Man-Woman (*39 Below*). David Bittle (who deserved to be represented by more than the three fine poems included) writes of the "Visit" of the Carpenter to an aging woman (*Capital*). The poem is not unlike Lawrence's "The Man Who Died", but is more sensitively handled.

ALEX GLOBE

THE BUTTERFLY AND THE WHEEL

MICHAEL JACOT, *The Last Butterfly*. McClelland & Stewart, $7.95.

WHEN I WAS a child somebody taught me to sing an old song which I loved then and haven't heard since, although I still remember how part of it goes:

> Even though you're only make-believing,
> Laugh, Clown, Laugh;
> Even though something inside is grieving,
> Laugh, Clown, Laugh;
> Don't let the world know your sorrow,
> Be a Pagliacci,
> Laugh, Clown, Laugh!

The figure of the sad clown — like that of the honest lawyer or the frog prince — is a paradox whose attractions the human imagination finds itself hard-pressed to resist. Few people must understand this better than Michael Jacot, whose fourth novel *The Last Butterfly* describes the final engagement of Antonin Karas, a desperate and dispirited man whose misfortune is to be a professional clown in Nazi-occupied Czechoslovakia.

"It's not only me, it's the whole bloody country.... They expect you to go out onto that stage and wipe out the whole depressing world from their minds... and make them laugh." Karas's wife has been dead for just a year; his act has grown stale and his stage manager knows it; he is half-Jewish. (Already his uncle has been taken to Terezin, a concentration camp the size of a small city near Prague.) Karas is desperate with good reason.

A mad act of defiance alerts the Nazi administration and Karas, too, is shipped off to the camp. Not as a prisoner, Lagerkommandant Burger assures him, but as an entertainer. Terezin is soon to receive a visit from the International Red Cross and must therefore be prepared to masquerade as a model town for a day. And besides, why shouldn't hungry children awaiting extermination be encouraged to laugh?

The Last Butterfly, its dust jacket informs us, is "based on a true account." Of all the horrors described in the book, this one is by far the worst. As we all know, the systematic brutality of the Nazis plumbed sickening depths, depths that perhaps only the Spanish Inquisitors could match. It is entirely probable that reverberations from a crime of this magnitude will be felt by sensitive imaginations for many generations to come.

Which is why, despite the fact that it deals with a well-worn subject, Michael

Jacot's novel seems as timeless as *The Red Badge of Courage*. Further strengthening it is the presence of Jacot's tragi-comic hero, the vulnerable clown figure whom we recognize as both archetype and fellow human being. It must have been a great moment for Jacot when he grasped the dramatic potential contained in that "true account"!

He writes with Spartan economy, with a command of small detail that gives his work both colour and authority. Occasionally a kind of bitter irony invades the story ("Samuel . . . wasn't singing to thank God he was still alive. He was a far more sophisticated child than that. He sang because he felt like singing"), but for the most part *The Last Butterfly* is remarkable for its controlled objectivity of tone. Its impact on the reader is all the greater for the simplicity with which its miseries are described. ("On the snow-covered grass in the centre of the square sat an old man. He had been given some bread crumbs to feed the pigeons. But he had been hungry and had eaten them all.")

If ever a story demanded comic relief, it is this one; fortunately Jacot's handling of Karas's "turns" is convincing and effective. "It's all I've ever known about life," says the clown to Vera, a young schoolteacher whom he meets in the camp, and proves it by being able to summon up an automatic professionalism ("the mask") under some of the most adverse circumstances imaginable. Confronted with the sufferings of others, he is at last empowered to forget his own.

The Last Butterfly is the story of a small man made great by trial. The book takes its title from a poem written by a young girl prisoner (. . . "That butterfly was the last one,/Butterflies don't live in here, in/the ghetto"), in which the departing butterfly suggests the loss of precious freedom, but as the novel progresses the image of the butterfly becomes more closely linked with Karas himself. Vanity and bluster turn to compassion and love, and a genuine hero is born — or metamorphosed.

Michael Jacot is also a film-maker, and is currently working on an adaptation of *The Last Butterfly* for the screen. Already the novel is heavily visual in emphasis; indeed, my only real criticism of it is that Jacot is more successful in making the reader *see* his story than in making him feel it. But for that, perhaps, one should be grateful.

PAT BARCLAY

VOLCANIC VAGUENESS

M. C. BRADBROOK, *Malcolm Lowry: His Art and Early Life — A Study in Transformation*. Cambridge University Press.

THERE IS SO MUCH IN *Under the Volcano*, and in *Ultramarine*, that seems to be successfully objectified personal experience, and so much in the later work which seems, at first glance, "subjective", that the question of the way a writer transforms his experience as he draws upon it for image and structure is especially perplexing in Lowry's case.

Professor Bradbrook was born in the same year as Lowry, grew up near him, and attended Cambridge during the same few years as he did. Consequently, she says, "without attempting to compete with the labours of Douglas Day [*Malcolm Lowry, A Biography* (1973)], I may claim that fortune has given me the advantage of being able to correct and

supplement the earlier parts of the biography. This, chiefly in order to present an alternative view of the late works, since my aim is not biographical but critical." Her argument in this last respect is, in effect, that once *Volcano* was achieved — the *conventionally* great novel sent to join the canon — Lowry's writing became a semi-neurotic attempt to make sense of his own life: "He was no longer possessed by other writers, or by the need to write a great novel, since that ordeal had been surmounted. The new ordeal was to struggle with the self ... to grapple with himself through his art."

These general claims have *some* substance, and she has discovered fresh information that bears on her topic: new primary evidence in the form of a letter written by a shipmate of Lowry's on the Yokohama voyage (May-October, 1927); interviews with members of Lowry's immediate family, and with other acquaintances from the early years. Instead, however, of presenting this material within the framework of some well formed and clearly explained argument concerning Lowry's creativity after *Volcano* was completed, Professor Bradbrook submerges it in a series of chapters spanning all Lowry's life and published prose, and offering, in most cases, little more than graceful, sensitive, and allusive paraphrases of the fiction. These are interspersed frequently with only passing and tangential references to the personal experience upon which she thinks Lowry drew: "Floating submerged in this narrative [*October Ferry*] are images from Lowry's early days.... Perhaps indeed the carefree little boy, rather indifferent to his parents, and devoted to his schoolmates, the ten-year-old son of Ethan and Jacqueline, serves as reincarnation of something that had been lost from the author's life."

Apart from the general lack of overt argument, Professor Bradbrook has the irritatingly self-assured habit of "explaining" aspects of Lowry's creativity by reference to work by other writers that simply strikes her as opposite:

> The difference between that novel [*Volcano*] and the later torsos may be suggested by comparing Blake's early lyrics and his Prophetic Books ...
>
> Parallel narrative and comment block the way for the reader, to make the meaning deliberately impenetrable, in the manner of certain modern French poets of the *Tel Quel* group, such as Denis Roche ...
>
> Yet a free spirit also blows through these later works, a *pneuma*, a wind whose echoes may be as lovely as those of Coleridge's Aeolian Harp.... (*The Ancient Mariner* was perhaps not the only Coleridge poem Lowry read.) ...

This overall vagueness in response to the problem of transformation in the later works is very disheartening, not only because it is such an interesting one for Lowry students, but also because the theme of the man who regards his life as text, calling for interpretation in precisely the same way as literature, is such a crucial one for postmodern literature as a whole. What is interesting in Lowry's case is the extent to which he appears to have felt, concretely, the pain of not knowing this unknowable — of not being able to know whether the rules for interpreting one's random experience are grounded in a supernatural reality, or whether the interpretive rules that provide order are rooted only in our need for that order.

But Professor Bradbrook seems scarcely aware of the implications of her preliminary recognitions regarding this. The re-

lationship to experience of interpretive codes, conventions, and especially codes of perception derived from literature, which is the real subject of much later work (where Lowry's protagonists are often, themselves, writers) remains almost completely unexamined. The fundamental distinction she fails to make is that between fiction which undertakes only to make sense of the author's own life (and this is the way she tends to read the later work), and fiction whose *subject* is both the need to find, and the impossibility of finding, absolute meaning in one's past.

ANDREW POTTINGER

THE RURALISTS

W. J. KEITH, *The Rural Tradition: A Study of the Non-Fiction Prose Writers of the English Countryside.* University of Toronto Press. $15.00.

"RURAL writing is a curiously neglected topic," says W. J. Keith in the first sentence of *The Rural Tradition.* He is, of course, correct; critics have for the most part failed even to establish the kind of criteria one should apply in discussing the considerable body of non-fiction writing about the countryside that exists in Great Britain and, to a less extent, in the United States and Canada. It is doubtful if, with the single exception of Thoreau, any significant rural writer has received the attention he deserves. Yet the rural writers have not only provided books that were widely read and that represented an important facet of the Anglo-Saxon sensibility. They have also influenced both fiction and poetry in their respective countries; the novels of D. H. Lawrence and the poetry of Thomas Hardy, Andrew Young, and Edwin Muir are examples of works that would hardly have taken the forms with which we are familiar if a considerable tradition of non-fiction rural writing has not been there to influence the perceptions of their creators.

W. J. Keith did a great deal to break down this critical barrier with the study, *Richard Jefferies,* which he published in Toronto some years ago. Now he tackles the genre on a broader scale in his new book, *The Rural Tradition,* which will be welcomed by all aficionados of the English school of country writers; he takes eleven examples, from Isaak Walton and Gilbert White, through Cobbett and Borrow, through Jefferies and Hudson and Edward Thomas, down to relatively recent writers like Henry Williamson and H. J. Massingham. It is a long-needed task, well done, and one hopes Professor Keith will follow it with other studies comparable in length to his *Richard Jefferies,* on some of the other writers on his list, notably Massingham and George Sturt, both of whom need closer critical study than they have received.

One also hopes that the appearance in Canada of this excellent study of the English ruralists will lead to a similar work on Canadian writers who have dealt with man and nature in the wilderness and farmlands of our country. Writers like Roderick Haig-Brown and Fred Bodsworth have been too long neglected as significant contributors to our literary tradition, and even Grove's country narratives, so much more fully realized than any of his fiction, await effective critical discussion.

G.W.

opinions and notes

PORT COLBORNE'S CANADA DAY

THE SUCCESS of Port Colborne's experiment in broadening the literary consciousness of Canadians was something no one could have foreseen. Everything seemed against it; the place and the timing seemed liabilities rather than assets; in the beginning no finances were available; even those who conceived and executed it were amateurs.

Port Colborne, a small Niagara Peninsula city touching Lake Erie at its northeastern extremity, depends primarily for its livelihood on the International Nickel Company and the St. Lawrence Seaway. Except for the automobile and a bus that jiggles and bumps its way to St. Catharines, it is isolated. No passenger trains, planes or cross-country buses stop here. Unless the non-driver is back in St. Catharines by 7:05 p.m., he has the choice of taking a taxi or staying overnight at a hotel. Margaret Atwood referred to Port Colborne as "the ends of the earth"; the late *Toronto Telegram* called it "a city that is not even on the map"; *Time* described it as a "lunch-pail town" and the *Toronto Star* as a "one-horse town".

Whatever it may be in the present, Port Colborne had gone to great lengths to preserve its links with the past, and few other cities can rival its acute awareness of its own history. Tennessee Avenue, with its imposing gates, surrounding walls and buildings, is much the same as it was when Jefferson Davies, President of the Southern Confederacy, used it as his summer estate; Mrs. Davis' legend, *The Grasshopper War*, a mythical story about an Indian battle accounting for the bones and artifacts uncovered on Tennessee Avenue while the Davis servants were putting up a pole for the Confederacy flag, is now housed in the public library; a century-old building has been transformed into a marine museum and an even older mansion has become a favourite stopping place for travellers; the ghosts of the past still walk the streets, kept alive by word of mouth, handed down from one generation to the next. Many Port Colbornites distrust intrusion from the metropolis, and in some ways they are still possessed by small town puritanism.

In 1970, when the Port Colborne experiment was first conceived, Canadian literature — so far as secondary schools were concerned — was in a state of limbo. Colleges of Education were offering no courses in Canadian books and writers; a high school teacher was refused an upgrading of his teaching certificate because Canadian literature was one of the credits he offered in support. The Ontario Department of Education has issued *Curriculum R.P. - S4*, containing prescriptions for English courses and books to be introduced into secondary schools during 1964, and in 1970 this collection of guidelines was still in force. It named approximately two hundred and eighty-five books. Approximately four were Canadian.

Up to now I have deliberately avoided referring to the Port Colborne experiment as Canada Day, the name by which it is

generally known, since Canada Day is only one late-developing aspect of a many-sided programme. In the beginning, indeed, we had no ambitious programme designed to involve other schools; we saw no Canada Days on the horizon. Our programme first evolved as a joint effort by the principal of Port Colborne High School, the students and myself — as Head of English — to meet the needs of our own school, and it was our research in developing our own course outline that led us in the direction of Canada Day. A request which we circulated to one hundred and eighty secondary schools for copies of their Canadian literature programmes resulted in eighty-four responses, telling us they had no such programme. It then became evident that we must abandon the academic temple and go down into the streets.

With the help of Eli Mandel, Jack McClelland, Hugh Garner, Miriam Waddington, Hugh MacLennan and Ron Marsh, our programme began to take form. Their help led us to reassess our entire classroom approach to literature. It also led me into more trouble and criticism than I had ever encountered before. Phyllis Grosskurth's characterization of the typical Canadian book reviewer in a 1970 issue of *Canadian Literature* gives an accurate feeling of the climate of opinion in which I found myself: "When confronted with a spanking new literature in his own country, he tends to become timorous, hesitant or evasive; or at the opposite extreme, he becomes truculent, contemptuous and vitriolic."

Perhaps the two most formidable obstacles were academic traditionalism and elitism. By 1970, most secondary school teachers were specialists in one or another discipline. An English and a history teacher may be the best of friends socially, but academically they are miles apart. It is rare indeed to find voluntary interdisciplinary co-operation between teachers at the secondary school level. Such specialization and the elitist attitudes it induces have notably retarded the development within the schools systems of a true Canadian Studies programme.

It was considered presumption on my part to break with tradition and to invade the hallowed sanctuaries of the historian and the geographer, but the very nature of Canadian literature demanded this. As a teacher, I found that the treatment of novels and short stories had changed little from the time when I myself was a high school student. Like teachers before me, I continued to dissect such works of art into plots, characters, settings and themes, leaving them at the end in much the same condition as Benet's falcon left its victim, the heron, completely dismembered. I realized that if such an approach were sustained, I would be training students who would leave high school — as I did — with heads full of plots, themes, similes and synecdoches but with no appreciation of the works they had studied.

But Canadian literature brought with it an extra dimension that cannot generally be found — by Canadians at least — in other literatures. This dimension was in the reader rather than in the literary work itself. Most Canadian students had a strong awareness of their country, through travelling in its various regions, visiting its cities, being exposed to it through the media. Few were unaware of events like the October crisis in Quebec, and all had parents or relatives who had described to them the Canada of the remembered past and the changes that had taken place. To such students Can-

ada was a real place, not an abstract definition in time and place; it was not one of those famous lands of world literature which they had never seen, but a place they knew and with which they had emotional ties. Thus history and geography could breathe life into our understanding of Canadian books. Conversely, Canadian literature could deepen our understanding of the land and its history.

But this kind of interdisciplinary approach could only be successful in terms of invigorating Canadian studies in our schools if it aroused support and interest outside the educational system itself. We had to gain the co-operation of those who wrote and published books, and our experiment gained a new dimension and a new impetus on our first Canada Day, February 28th, 1971. Hugh Garner, Max Braithwaite, Miriam Waddington, John Newlove, Jeann Beattie and Elizabeth Kimball were present, as well as Premier William Davis and representatives of three publishing companies. Between them they opened up what to most of the teachers and students who participated was an entirely new literary world. Even the sceptics were converted, and, among those who attended, the old negative attitudes to Canadian literature evaporated. Teachers and students came from as far away as North Bay and Manitoulin Island, and they were to return on each succeeding Canada Day. A strong sense of pride in our Canadian writers and affection for them was created on that day, and in many minds a new interest was engendered.

During the following three Canada Days we added historians and geographers to our guest list. Directors of Education, superintendents and principals of schools, politicians and business men, students and parents became involved, and the number of Canadian literature courses in schools increased with a growing momentum.

But the very success of Canada Day made all the more urgent a problem that had pre-dated our activities: the need for gathering and disseminating information. Few teachers in Canada, we found, knew who our Canadian authors were, what they had written, what they had written about. We attempted to cope with the situation by collecting a resource library that included seven thousand Canadian books, and over forty-five thousand pages of related media material taken from newspapers, magazines and periodicals. We hired television crews to tape interviews with writers, which we loaned to schools free of charge. And we set up an information bank, so that we could refer educators to specific books or media material to suit their needs or advise what books would be best for specific courses. As a result, our mail has now grown from ten to twenty letters a month during our first year, to between fifteen hundred and two thousand phone calls and letters per month requesting information.

Canada Day 1974 showed the spread of interest in our experiment by the fact that educators from every province of Canada attended. More than fifty writers and thirty-seven publishing companies volunteered their services. But, ironically, such success sounded the knell for Canada Day in Port Colborne. It had created too much interest; it had grown too large for our small city to contain. Canada Day 1975, prepared by preliminary conferences, discussions and study groups, which we designed to exchange ideas and remove illusions between regions, is being held at Mohawk College in Hamilton.

Of course, Canada Day could not have happened without the writers and publishers who have not only shown that Canada has a literature of its own, but have also been responsible for the breakdown of old traditions and the crumbling of elitism through new ideas and new insights into Canadian lifestyles. Literature has at last been given its true place in Canadian Studies curricula, but the Port Colborne experiment still continues, for much remains to be done in heightening general standards of criticism and broadening recognition of the achievements of Canadian writers.

J. FOLEY

A. M. KLEIN'S LETTERS

SOME OF YOUR READERS may have known and corresponded with my father, A. M. Klein. A group of scholars is now engaged in searching for copies of my father's letters, so that they can be made available to researchers. It is also possible that a selection of letters will one day be published. Anyone who has letters and is willing to provide us with copies should contact me at 4205 Madison Avenue, Montreal. I would also be interested in hearing from people who have other sorts of memorabilia, especially photographs or manuscripts.

SANDOR J. KLEIN

ON THE VERGE

***** *Dictionary of Canadian Biography.* Volume III, 1741 to 1770. General Editor, Francess G. Halpenny. University of Toronto Press, $20.00. It is often harder to celebrate consistent excellence than to comment on the falls and rises of an uneven progress. Thus, the sustained quality of the *Dictionary of Canadian Biography* tends to leave its commentators, who have already given notice of its virtues, with little new to say in that direction. The standard of editorship has not diminished now that Frances Halpenny has replaced David Hayne; the entries remain apt and concisely sufficient; the two introductory essays on the French forces and the British forces in North America during the Seven Years' War, by W. J. Eccles and C. P. Stacey respectively, give a needed setting for a great number of the biographies; the Glossary of Indian Names is more than its title suggests, being in fact an excellent short guide to the peoples with whom the British and French were in contact in the mid-eighteenth century. Some 550 Canadians and men and women closely associated with Canada who died during the thirty years under review find their places in the volume. Most are still French, for the change in rulers was too recent in 1770 for many of the British occupiers to have joined the ranks of the eligible. But Wolfe and Pepperel are there and a number of lesser officers and officials and of fur traders including Henday and Isham, while there is a fair company of Indians who had caught the attention of the yet barely dominant white peoples, including powerful chiefs like Pontiac and others less formidable but in their own way equally intriguing, like the Cree hunter known as Robinson Crusoe who, with his son Friday, was noted as a killer of whales on Hudson's Bay. Clearly, it is no patrician mode of selection that the editors have used. Any contribution to history has rightly invited their attention.

Noticing the time that has passed between this and the last volume, one welcomes the news that in future, thanks to a generous grant from the Canada Council, the work on the Dictionary will be able to proceed more rapidly, and the volumes will follow each other at shorter intervals.