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NATIONALISM

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Opinions and Notes

BY MERRITT CLIFTON, REYNOLD SIEMENS

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editorial

THE LOSS OF ZED

TAKE CANADIAN CHILDREN to a parade these days and watch to see which clowns delight them: the cheers go up when Ronald McDonald and the Great Root Bear pass by. Or Big Bird and Oscar. The children, of course, are showing their customary discernment, however much we might deplore this further evidence of the Americanization of their imaginations. For the simple fact is that Big Bird and Ronald McDonald, through television and corporate industrial expansion, have become part of their daily Canadian lives, culture symbols — and some of the liveliest culture symbols at that — by which they gauge some of the subtler values of their society: what's funny, what's friendly, what's just.

There have been some *adaptations* of American television material to the Canadian scene, of course, and Canadian writers are the verbal wits behind much American television comedy. But there is little point in asserting as a kind of cultural talisman that Walt Disney's father was Canadian-born; and it can only be perceived as ironic that *Superman* and The Hardy Boys books were begun by Canadians. Transformed, particularly by television, they and Disney Enterprises have become voices of United States values. The myth of the perfect society, the cult of the hero, confrontative sports metaphors, and the implicit assumption that crises are resolved by violence are the stuff of American pop culture. *Star Wars* is nothing so much as an interstellar Western in which Good is preserved by a galactic Marine Corps. Hence these images are tangible evidence of American ways of thinking about America. They fascinate Canadians. Mordecai Richler makes the point in *Hunting Tigers Under Glass* that the flamboyance of 1940's American comic books sustained the romantic imaginations of Canadian youths of a quite different generation. But there is a difference between reading for the vicarious thrills that heroic mythologies provide, and accepting another culture's rituals as local truth. A Canadian businessman, trying in a CBC radio inter-

view recently to speak of *one-to-one* relationships, spoke of *one-on-one* relationships instead. The difference between egalitarian and confrontative tactics couldn't be clearer. It is a sign of a particularly virulent cultural malaise, all the more insidious when it alters the way we speak. The moment American pop culture's *zee* replaces several generations' worth of Canadian *zeds*, things have gone too far.

The problem lies not with the children. It lies with the curious way that Canadian children have been either ignored or patronized by Canadian media. The recent surge of interest in children's writing is, therefore, despite the unevenness of the writing itself, welcome. Magazines with the vigour of *Owl* and *Canadian Children's Magazine*, publications with the quality of design that May Cutler's Tundra Books have, lyrics with the sprightliness of *Alligator Pie* and stories with common sense and complex syntax: these are signs of intelligent concern for children. And in order to gauge further the merits and implications of these works, *Canadian Literature* will devote a future issue to more extended commentary on writing for children. For the moment, there are other ramifications of the concern for children's publishing and cultural survival which warrant attention.

We evaluate works designed for a children's market in various ways: seeking the quality of imagination, the quality of mind, the quality of design that appears in the work — but always quality. That works of quality have intrinsic merit ought to be axiomatic. We appreciate *Peter Pan*, *Huckleberry Finn*, *Le Petit Prince*, *Pinocchio*, and *Midnite*, whatever their cultural background. But we cannot, while making this assertion, lose sight of the twentieth century. Children's classics are no longer presented solely in book form, and film — the chief optional form — has a singular force. We underestimate its impact at our own cost. We cannot afford, therefore, to ignore the degree to which film exposes children, intentionally or not, to cultural propaganda, or the extent to which the presence of such "propaganda" is actually intensified by the absence of a cultural alternative. Here we come to a key issue: it is by relaxing in the global "alternative" which we represent by the very fact that we exist, that we communicate to another generation the kinetic values which as Canadians we have come to share. We are our own model, and we are still building it. To stop now, and to accept American, French, English or any other systems as our model, is both culturally suicidal and plain downright unimaginative. There is plenty of imagination in Canada, but the curious fact is that it takes a lot of effort to relax.

Television programming is a case in point. Faced with a dearth of money, a dearth of inventiveness, or a combination of the two, both major networks — CBC and CTV — have bought programmes from United States networks rather than exercise the constant effort to develop sprightly programmes themselves. "Popular" programming is somehow equated with bad taste, with offensive results. And Canadian *children's* programming has too often suffered from an absence of personality, an absence of narrative, an absence of movement. It's talky, static,

and — in contrast to documentary programming — seems to strive to be bland; its struggle to avoid offending offends even more. Often when efforts are made to be dynamic, problems still ensue, for in these cases it is an imitation American programme that has been designed. Even many of the Glowing Tributes to Canada to which the CBC annually gives birth are cast in the American mould — ad agency hoopla, which celebrates Canada in the same way as Americans celebrate *their* world — thereby implicitly apologizing for the fact that Canadian society is different, transforming it by media methodology into a second-rate State. Why should we wonder then that the Great Root Bear is becoming a culture symbol for the young? If we don't care enough to represent ourselves *in our own terms* — which are neither provincial nor restrictive, just ours: capable of producing an "international" classic as much as anyone else's terms are — then we will get the colonial mediocrity we invite. Other Canadian generations had radio experiences to share with each other; today's Canadian children, unless there are changes soon in the direction of programming, will as adults be more likely to be sharing a vision of McDonaldland, to have learned their dialect from *Sesame*'s New York *Street*, to have lost at least for a generation the fundamental ability to recognize themselves.

The issue is not one of *defining* identity — that's (in the way Canadians use the term) "American." It's one of resisting definition. It's not therefore a matter of denying children access to *Sesame Street* or any other American programme; it's one of ensuring that the culture represented by American programmes does not replace everything else in order to become Canadian children's sole model of private behaviour and social possibility.

Two recent books provide an indirect commentary on this dichotomy. The first is Dennis Lee's new collection of verses, called *Garbage Delight* (M & S, $6.95); the title poem particularly, and a squib called "The Big Molice Pan and the Bertie Dumb," are delightful, a welcome addition to the inventive maze of literary nonsense. But it is disappointing to find Lee imitating "received" children's verses (whether Dr. Seuss' or A. A. Milne's) so often. The echoes sound hollow. The second book, designed to entertain more adults than children, is Eric Nicol's latest, called *Canada Cancelled Because of Lack of Interest* (Hurtig, $8.95). It is a set of characteristically ironic reflections on Canadian life, sometimes trenchant and sometimes unhappily self-indulgent; but under all its flippancy it is troubled by this same concern for cultural drift. One of Peter Whalley's illustrations, in a chapter on The Arts, suggests one of the reasons why this drift exists. It shows, simply, a figure contemplating its own navel; the navel, however, is creased in the shape of the CBC's current logo. The cartoon epitomizes the self-preoccupation which inhibits relaxed self-expression, whether in television programming or in literature, and which provides a fertile environment for imitation to flourish in.

Self-assurance does not spring full-blown in minds assailed by self-doubt; it grows when people recognize that they don't have to imitate others in order to be good at being themselves. They have instead to develop the strengths that they themselves value. If we ensure that every generation has the chance to appreciate Canadian local truths, to have ready access to books and magazines and television programmes, *both in English and in French* — works that let their Canadian perspectives come naturally and don't artificially force them — then we are setting about actually encouraging the future in which tacitly we have been placing our faith. Apologies inhibit the imagination. We have to turn the imagination on again, in our children and in ourselves, if we want to reinherit our own home.

W.H.N.

AMONG WOMEN ONLY

Alexandre L. Amprimoz

The star stings your memory
and her step caresses
the gravel road again.

The wind decides
where the seeds fall
and if the nests
are to go
before the leaves.

The star might already be dead;
what pollen can give birth
to an alternative past?

Could poetry put a fence
around a Provençal garden
and marry the olive tree
to the unreal woman?

NATIONALISM AND LITERATURE IN QUEBEC

Gilles Marcotte

I DO NOT LIKE the word nationalism. And I suspect that no one likes it, really. I have friends in Quebec who are in favour of independence for Quebec, but at the same time contend that they are not nationalists. Or, if they agree to a certain amount of nationalism in their separatism, they say that they want to see Quebec become independent so that the nationalist question will, at last, be settled, dead, and then Quebec will be free to talk about and deal with more interesting, more crucial problems. An example of this dichotomy is to be found in Réjean Ducharme's latest novel, *Les Enfantômes* (*The Ghostchildren*), where the main character, Vincent Falardeau, says that he is "against every kind of nationalist sentimentality, but at the same time for the strong common sense of independence for Quebecois." So, nationalism is a dirty word. And it is even dirtier when it is applied to literature. Every intellectual knows that the association of literature and nationalism, at least in its traditional form, has never produced a single good book, and that it is, for the writer, a sort of straitjacket, an insistence on esthetic conformity, a sacrifice of the creative self to the laws of the group. Every programme of literary nationalism, during the last two centuries, has been, of course, oriented towards preservation, rather than innovation. Let's see, for instance, what an important critic, Ferdinand Brunetière, had to say about the nationalization of French literature, at the end of the nineteenth century. A literature, he said, becomes national when it frees itself from foreign influences, and develops in itself those internal qualities which a stranger does not see, or feel. It must submit itself, to achieve this, to didactic and moral purposes, "in the highest and the widest sense of these two words." This is not a very exciting programme, and I must add that in France, in French literature, it didn't have any lasting success. But it is significant that it became, in French Canada, the dominant literary theory for at least half a century.

Why is this so? Is it because French Canadians didn't go to school long enough, because they were, as we said in English Canada, an ignorant, priest-ridden people? That is too simple an explanation. The same phenomenon has appeared in every new-born literature — in North or South America, or in Australia — which has to use the same language as an already great European literature, in

answer to a very practical problem: how to distinguish itself from the mother-country, to assert its own individuality. In a letter to his friend l'abbé Casgrain, in 1867, Octave Crémazie, the most intelligent and widely read man of letters of French Canada at the time, stated the problem very clearly:

> The more I think about the fortunes of Canadian literature, the less I think that it will have any chance of leaving its imprint on history. What Canada is lacking, is a language of its own. If we spoke Iroquois or Huron, our literature would live. Unfortunately, we speak and write, rather badly, to tell the truth, the language of Bossuet and Racine. Whatever we may say and do, we will never be anything more, in literature, than a simple colony; and even if Canada became independent and had its own flag shining under the sun of nations, we would still be simple literary pioneers. Think about Belgium, which uses the same language as we do. Is there a Belgian literature? Unable to compete with France in the perfection of form, Canada might have won a place among Old World literatures, if one of its children, a writer, had been able to initiate Europe, before Fenimore Cooper did, to the grandiose scenery of our forests, to the legendary deeds of our trappers and voyageurs. Today, even if a writer as gifted as the author of *The Last of the Mohicans* appeared among us, his works would not produce any sensation in Europe, because his irretrievable fault would be to have arrived second, that is to say too late.

Octave Crémazie was a realist: not only did he write poems, he also sold books, he was a bookseller by trade. Besides that, he was a connoisseur of the literature of the day, and of its ideological foundations. He knew that since the end of the eighteenth century, the literatures of Europe had become national (French, English, German), which was not the case before, at the time of Voltaire for example. He knew that the Romantics — and he felt himself to be a Romantic — strove to recapture the very roots of their national cultures: Victor Hugo reviving the Middle Ages, the Age of Cathedrals, in *Notre-Dame de Paris*; the German romantics returning to the traditional tales of their folklore. Of course, there are two levels of reality here, which must be separated clearly, even if they both refer to some kind of nationalism: at the first level, people are preoccupied with the problem of creating a new literature, which has to be distinguishable from the existing ones, and at this level literature is linked with the politics and the economics of nationalism; at the second level, I hesitate to use the word nationalism, because one is not concerned with frontiers and things like that, or even with cultural frontiers, but with an active force which works within literature itself. As a bookseller, as a man who wanted to see the birth of a distinctive Canadian literature, recognized "under the sun of nations," Octave Crémazie spoke about the former; as a writer, a poet, he referred to the latter.

Let's examine these two interpretations a little further: first, the implications of the bookseller's point of view. And by bookseller, here, I mean, not only the man who sells books, but the whole complex of the literary establishment: publisher,

critic, and even the poet or novelist, inasmuch as he feels himself to be a part of a common, a national literature. Every respectable, well-functioning nation needs a literature, just as it needs a banking system and a railway network. It is said that the first major work of French-Canadian literature, the *History of Canada* by François-Xavier Garneau, was written in answer to the famous judgment of Lord Durham defining the French Canadians as a people without a history and without a literature. I am not sure that the anecdote is true, but it serves as a good illustration of the motivation which lies at the root of all the new literatures that were created — some of them in name only — during the nineteenth century. When a need like that is felt, you cannot escape a certain amount of nationalism. In the great European literatures, during the same period, nothing really important was said about literary nationalism, because literary traditions were strongly established before the national concept evolved. To speak about a "national literature," or the "nationalization of the literature," is to admit that your literature hasn't really begun to exist, or that it is a minor one — a chip off the block of the Great literature from which it has not yet gained its autonomy. A "national" literature is a project, much more than an object; and we might even say, going to the limit, that a literature of that kind could exist without poems or novels (but not without criticism), by the virtue of the emotions and hopes that are invested in it. In French Canada, of course, the concept of a "national literature" was propounded much earlier, and with greater passion and consistency, than in English Canada. Why was this? The most obvious reason is that, among the industries that a nation needs to be respectable, or to survive, or to keep itself occupied, none, or almost none, was within the grasp of French Canadians. Industrial and economic development was entirely due to English Canadians — with a little help from their fellow Americans, later on. I will not try to say who was responsible; it is a very complex question. The fact is that we were left out, or that we didn't want to participate. Instead of industrialists, of entrepreneurs, of merchants, we had lawyers, notaries, politicians and priests: all kinds of people who had to rely on the powers of speech to do their job. We became experts in politics, in religion — and in literature. That is not to say that we produced better politics, better religion, or better literature than English Canada or other colonies, but that we put a stronger stress on speech, on the expression of ourselves, thereby establishing an essential link between our collective existence and the expression of that existence and the expression of that existence through speech — and primarily by the written speech of literature. We were — and still are, up to a point — nominalists: we believed that by naming things we possessed them. It is not an entirely false assumption. There is a good case to be made for nominalism. English Canadians are beginning to understand that; Margaret Atwood's book, *Survival*, and the acclaim it received, are signs that they, too, are coming to see their literature as a collective mirror and as a means of securing a collective consciousness.

I WILL NOT TRY to give a detailed history of the Great Nationalist Debate about literature which occupied Quebec intellectual life from Octave Crémazie and his friend l'abbé Casgrain, to its latest manifestations in, let's say for example, Victor-Lévy Beaulieu's articles for the newspaper *Le Devoir*. The programme goes, roughly, like this. We need a national literature — a literature that would represent, foster and impose our national identity. What subjects should such a literature deal with? Does it have to portray our day-to-day life, as Louis Hémon did in *Maria Chapdelaine*, or is it free to deal with any of the subjects which are the common bread of the writers of a given period? Must it be open to the various influences of Western Literature — primarily, French? Or, should it try to attain originality by rejecting those influences? What kind of language will it use: international French (or Parisian French, as they say cutely in Toronto), "joual" or that new brand of French that some writers call "le Québécois"? There are a number of possible variations to be played on these themes, but the basic structure of the music remains the same throughout our history. And I insist, again, that you don't hear that music in French Canada alone. It has been played very loudly, at certain times, by the various bands of our Southern neighbours. And, as I said before, Margaret Atwood's harmonica and a few other instruments are being heard, these days, playing some of these tunes across our land. In many ways — and not only in the literary field — Quebec books and life reproduce the various aspects of the evolution of the modern world with a particular vividness, and this vividness is perhaps due to the fact that we, French Canadians, are entering the global village or the electronics age, as Marshall McLuhan would say, without having first to divest ourselves of a strong industrial tradition.

But there is a paradox in the association of nationalism and literature, which I alluded to briefly earlier. While it is quite easy to discover a lot of critical essays advocating a national literature, or pretending to discover national or nationalist aspects of an existing literature, it is much more difficult to find writers, novelists, poets, to whom the epithet "national" could be applied. From the middle of the nineteenth century to, say, 1950, during the period which was dominated by the pretensions of literary nationalism in our criticism, there is only one major work in French-Canadian literature which could be interpreted safely as an expression of the nationalist emotions and struggles of Quebec, and that is Monseigneur Savard's novel, *Menaud maître-draveur*. It is not a novel in the conventional sense; it is more like an epic, with its roughly drawn characters, bearing uncommon names, engaged in heroic actions and neatly divided between black and white, bad and good, treachery and patriotism. Epics as a genre — I mean epics like *The Odyssey*, *La Chanson de Roland* — are made precisely for the exaltation and confirmation of the existence of a certain collectivity. They prove the value of a specific lan-

guage as a bond between the members of the nation. More than that, epics are the birth certificates of nations. It is quite evident that the novel, the modern novel, does not play the same role. It is interested in the individual, in his struggle within and almost always against society, including the nation. Epics are collectivist; novels are liberal. The best novels of the period, those of Albert Laberge and Claude-Henri Grignon, have nothing to do with the nationalist sentiment which inspires Monseigneur Savard's book. Claude-Henri Grignon himself was a nationalist; but, because he wanted to be a novelist in the tradition of Balzac and Zola, he wrote the story of a very particular character, Séraphin Poudrier, the miser, who could in no way become the symbol of the national aspirations of French Canada. Poetry, on the other hand, could lend itself very well to the expression of the national sentiment, and it is easy to find, during the same period, dozens of patriotic poems — including some by the above mentioned Octave Crémazie — all bad of course, all heavy with that kind of leaden rhetoric which is the trademark of patriotism in literature. The first important poet of French Canada, and the only one of that period who is still widely read today, Emile Nelligan, didn't speak about anything national — except perhaps snow, but it snows too in Russia, Poland, Germany and even in France. His subjects, his images, were drawn from the stock of images and subjects which belonged to the French poets of his time. His friend Louis Dantin reproached him, at first, for his lack of interest in national subjects; but he had to admit, later on, that it would have been impossible for Nelligan, with the kind of poetic genius he had, to impose on himself any kind of national pretext. There is again a paradox here: Emile Nelligan has become a national symbol, or legend, in Quebec literature, and I would tend to think that it is precisely because he didn't write about national subjects. He built a house of words, of symbols, large enough, rich enough, to accommodate the dreams, individual or collective, of many generations of French Canadians.

Now, WHAT DO WE SEE, at the beginning of the modern era of French Canadian literature — say, from 1935 or 1940 to the fifties? First, a complete black-out of the nationalist intent in the works of the major writers, novelists and poets, of that period — and they still count as the major writers of our literature. Ringuet's *30 arpents*, Gabrielle Roy's *Bonheur d'occasion*, Roger Lemelin's *Les Plouffe*, Germaine Guèvremont's *Le Survenant*, are novels in the full sense of the word, and that means, among other things, that they are completely devoid of any kind of preaching, unlike what we find in *Menaud maître-draveur*. It is possible to read them in the light of the nationalist struggle of French Canada, and they have quite often been read this way, but then you can

read anything that has been written anywhere this way, if you are determined enough. The intent of these novels — I do not bother with the intents of the novelists themselves — is to depict life in its complexity, without trying to impose on the reader any particular point of view. What you read in these novels is the Human Comedy in French-Canadian attire. In poetry, the movement away from nationalist inspiration is even clearer, inasmuch as poetry is not expected to depict ordinary life, as the realistic novel must do. Alain Grandbois, Saint-Denys-Garneau, Rina Lasnier, Anne Hébert deal with the most general subjects; they are read as poets of the human drama, not the French-Canadian drama; they are recognized as poets of universal interest, rather than as loudspeakers for some particular, regionalist or nationalist movement. And, again, these poets — like the novelists of their time — undoubtedly reveal something, and something essential, about French Canada's mentality or spiritual history, but they do that at a level which cannot be that of nationalism. There were nationalist crises during the same period — I have only to mention conscription, which a majority of Quebecois opposed fiercely — but they didn't find their way into the major works of prose or poetry. French Canada was entering the modern era, and the new problems it faced, social and literary problems, urbanization, industrialization, proletarization, intellectual and spiritual renewal, could not be contained in a strictly national perspective.

Of course, this separation between social, spiritual and national problems didn't last very long. We see that clearly these days. Yet, I hesitate to use the word nationalism in defining the new directions which Quebec literature has taken from the beginning of the fifties to this day. In the introduction to his anthology, *The Poetry of French Canada in Translation*, John Glassco wrote a few years ago about the new Quebec poets: "Brilliant, eloquent, impassioned and exploiting all the resources of new and exciting techniques, they seem too often preoccupied by political and national ideas, by the incandescent ideal of a beleaguered Quebec — and it is a truism that politics and nationalism have somehow never managed to make really good poetry." I am ready to recognize some kind of truth in that statement. It is true that "le thème du pays" — the theme of homeland — has played an important role in Quebec poetry from the middle of the fifties to the middle of the sixties. But, then, as is almost always the case with nationalism and literature, it was more consistently and explicitly stated by critics, than by the poets themselves in their poems. Among the principal poets of that period, I can see only a few who may truly be called "poètes du pays", poets of the homeland: Gaston Miron, Paul Chamberland, Gatien Lapointe, Pierre Perrault, Yves Préfontaine. Others have touched upon the subject occasionally; and, more significantly, some of the most important poets of the period, like Paul-Marie Lapointe, Fernand Ouellette, Roland Giguère, Jacques Brualt, were counted among the poetic liberation Army of Quebec, not because they wrote about "le pays," but

because the whole of the poetry of that period was read, willy-nilly, in the light of the national aspirations of French Canada. I confess to have contributed, personally, to that kind of conscription — with the attenuating circumstances that it is extremely difficult to write about a body of poetry without taking into account its immediate social context. Besides, a most important question must be asked: are we right in assuming that "le thème du pays" is equivalent with politics and nationalism, as John Glassco seems to suggest? At least, we will have to give a new meaning to the word nationalism, and to distinguish it from the meaning it had in Ferdinand Brunetière's theory. Traditionally, nationalism or patriotism is founded upon a given reality, geographical and spiritual, to be seen and felt by all; it thinks about frontiers, defence, exclusions. It is firmly assertive. It doesn't bother with differences between individuals. On the contrary, "la poésie du pays" — which might better be called "la recherche du pays" — is interrogative, hopeful, and thinks essentially about what is coming, the future. The homeland, in that perspective, is what is to be done, rather than what is simply to be defended; it is seen not in isolation, but as a part of the world where the most general forces of the world are asked to play their role. A good example of that attitude is found in Gaston Miron's poem, "Héritage de la tristesse." At the end of the poem, after having described the sad state of "le pays," the poet asks the winds of the world, the "universal winds," to regenerate the country and give it new movement. I will quote the poem in French first, and then a translation by Fred Cogswell:

> les vents changez les sorts de place la nuit
> vents de rendez-vous, vents aux prunelles solaires
> vents telluriques, vents de l'âme, vents universels
> vents ameutez-nous, et de vos bras de fleuve ensemble
> enserrez son visage de peuple abîmé, redonnez-lui
> la chaleur
> et la profuse lumière des sillages d'hirondelles

Now, the translation:

> winds that shuffle the lots of precedence by night
> winds of concourse, winds with solar eyes
> telluric winds, winds of the soul, universal winds
> come couple, o winds, and with your river arms
> embrace this face of a ruined people, give it the
> warmth
> and the abundant light that rings the wake of swallows

You see that in these verses Quebec's cause is not isolated, it is universal in its appeal; it joins voices with countries as diverse as Aimé Césaire's Martinique, Senghor's Senegal, Pablo Neruda's Chile and many others. If this is nationalist poetry, I would disagree completely with John Glassco's assertion that "politics and nationalism have somehow never managed to make really good poetry." But

I prefer to say that this is not nationalist poetry. In Miron's poem, as in many Quebec poems similarly oriented, pity and love for the homeland transcend the narrow limits of nationalism.

I have noted earlier that the novel does not lend itself to that kind of passionate expression of the homeland, because it is more preoccupied with the individual than with the group, or society, or nation. But Quebec's contemporary novel, on the whole, is not any more a novel in the classical sense, and we may hear in it, from time to time, echoes of Gaston Miron's voice: in Hubert Aquin's *Prochain épisode*, for example, in which there is a merger, as well as a clash, between the theme of homeland, borrowed from poetry, and the form of the novel; in Antonine Maillet's work, which is nearer to the folktale and the epic (her novels deal with Acadia, but the problem is the same as in Quebec); in a few of Victor-Lévy Beaulieu's books, which equally veer towards the epic — an epic of misery of doom, implying a renaissance from the depths it describes; and, finally, in all of the tales, novels, plays and various tidbits of writing by Jacques Ferron, who stands today as one of the most important, and certainly the most abundant prose writer in Quebec during the last quarter of the century. Jacques Ferron's work is sometimes limited by nationalism, by his almost exclusive interest in the hopes and drama of Quebec; and this limitation reveals itself in the fact that it seems difficult for a non-Quebecker to read his books — his *Tales of the Uncertain Country* has met with only mild success in English Canada, and the only one of his novels published in France has passed almost unnoticed. But, still, I am convinced that he is — almost — a great writer. And I propose to end this paper by taking an example from one of his best novels, *Le Saint-Elias*, an example which shows how the "winds of concourse," as Miron said, can blow through traditional nationalism and open it to the reality of the vast world. "Le Saint-Elias" is the name of a vessel, a beautiful vessel, which was built in Batiscan, near Trois-Rivières, on the St. Lawrence. To his bishop, who asks why the villagers of Batiscan have built such a beautiful, such a big vessel as le Saint-Elias, the curate replies:

> I will answer you that it was to break the nut of the Gulf. It was all right to keep ourselves secluded as long as we were not a people. But we have become a people: let the nut of the Gulf be broken! let the impediments of childhood disappear! We have built the Saint-Elias to go beyond Newfoundland, on the big ocean, towards Bermuda and the West Indies, and if necessary the old countries.... Who are we, people of Batiscan? We are the equals of the discoverers from Saint-Malo, able to discover Europe, and to set the Cross there.

This is a good trick: reversing the course of history, colonizing the colonizer. The Americans have had some success with it. But for us, Canadians, English or French, it is easier said than done. The striking fact about le Saint-Elias, the beautiful vessel, is that the only collectivity, the only people with whom its sailors will establish a real contact, is an African tribe, and they will come back

from their voyage with an idol to be put up in the cemetery of their country parish. Thus le Saint-Elias succeeds in linking Batiscan to the world, but the link is between villages, skipping the great capitals of culture; not a vertical link, but horizontal. I see there a symbol of a new state of affairs in the relations between cultures and literatures, whereby the smaller ones, like ours, will perhaps be able to escape the nationalist obsession without being engulfed, to the point of disappearance, in the main currents of international literature. Nationalism, as I said before, is bred by an inferiority complex; you are forced to be a nationalist when, to exist in your own eyes, you have to compare yourself, explicitly or implicitly, to some father image. I think that we live in a world, now, where regional differences, regional cultures, regional literatures, are beginning to see themselves as legitimate expressions of humanity, and not only as subproducts of two or three dominating powers.

FROM THERE TO HERE

Alexandre L. Amprimoz

Decoration of narrow streets:
cats and torn papers.

From the brittle night
the sun roots out
the espresso echo
of coffee cantatas.

These are rare dreams,
lonely ladies
hiding in the ruins.

But I walk along wider streets
carved in ice and snow
and my fountainless piazzas
leave me thirsty.

THE CANADIAN IDENTITY & AFRICAN NATIONALISM

Deane E. D. Downey

A MODEST BUT NONETHELESS NOTEWORTHY tributary flowing into the mainstream of recent Canadian fiction is composed of several novels set in Africa. These novels examine some of the conflicts almost inevitably present in a newly independent nation — conflicts emanating from the inordinate enticements of power inherent in a fledgling nationalism, or from disruptive but deeply ingrained tribal allegiances, or from the difficulty of capitalizing upon opportunities for economic growth without capitulating to the forces that would attempt to exact ideological or political remuneration in return.

Surely the tendency for some Canadian writers to be drawn to this sort of conflict is much more than a conspiracy to prove that Canadian fiction can go beyond the limits of solely Canadian experience. In my view a very plausible explanation for Canadian fascination with African nationalism can be found in the fact that many of the conflicts present in a newly independent African country have their clearly identifiable counterparts in recent Canadian experience. The threat to a firm conception of national identity posed by conflicting tribal, racial, or regional loyalties; the continual onslaught on national self-confidence that emanates from forces that have capitulated to the assumptions of colonial inferiority; the need for perpetual resistance against economic, ideological and political domination by larger powers — all of these consequences of being caught between two worlds are familiar components of Canadian national life. Perhaps Canadian writers are attracted by the prospect of greater dispassion in the examining of these very Canadian concerns in a non-Canadian context. Dave Godfrey indicated his awareness of this opportunity for greater objectivity in an interview with Graeme Gibson:

> I think the best thing I do is get outside myself, or at least split off some segment of myself that's close to someone else, and expand it into their life and ... write about them, write about other people. In *The New Ancestors*, that kind of big structure forced me to do that.[1]

The best-known Canadian explorer of African nationalism through fiction is surely Margaret Laurence. In her first novel, *This Side Jordan* (1960), as well as her volume of short stories, *The Tomorrow-Tamer and Other Stories* (1963), Laurence shows how deeply ingrained assumptions about the superiority of the

white man and the childlike inadequacy of the African have to be abandoned by both the colonizer and the colonized as the process of "Africanization" proliferates. Nathaniel Amegbe, the sensitive central figure in *This Side Jordan*, is most conscious of the opposing forces within him — the difficulty of espousing a sense of values that is anything but European while simultaneously recognizing that he must move beyond the sense of identity that he has acquired because of his African background. Nathaniel feels guilty about forgetting, or avoiding, his past origins, but he also recognizes that Ghana will have to move ahead into the future, taking advantage of educational and economic opportunities, if it is to resist the onslaughts of neo-colonialism.

Most of Laurence's writing about Africa's response to independence is optimistic — or at the worst, provisionally hopeful. Such is not the case with three Canadian novels about Africa published during the last five years: Dave Godfrey's *The New Ancestors*, David Knight's *Farquharson's Physique and What It Did to His Mind*, and Hugh Hood's *You Can't Get There From Here*. While these authors' handling of the difficulties arising from African independence is, like Laurence's, compassionate, all three novels are very pessimistic indeed about the prospect for resolving these difficulties.[2] I would suggest that this refusal to minimize the threats to a strong assertion of national identity by ethnic or regional loyalties on the one hand and threats of economic and cultural if not outright political domination on the other is influenced by these writers' awareness of analogous difficulties in our own country.

The New Ancestors is an intricate but impressive work that focuses upon the disillusionment gripping the fictional African country of Lost Coast (a thinly disguised Ghana, where Godfrey spent some time as a CUSO volunteer) several years after it has been granted its independence. The collapse of ancient loyalties, the persistence of tribalism, and the intrusion of neo-colonialism have all contributed to the collapse of aspirations embodied in the once-popular slogans of "Free-dom" and "Work and Happiness."

Godfrey demonstrates how independence produces uncertainty about one's own identity. The ancient securities of family ancestry and tribal loyalty are urged into insignificance by new ancestors — national rather than tribal leaders, governed by presumably national rather than regional aspirations. When these new ancestors fail, identity recedes, requiring re-definition by compromise and realignment of loyalties. First Samuels, an important official in Kruman's government, is the prime focus of Godfrey's analysis in this respect. He maintains a public image as the most visible supporter of Kruman's Freedom People's Party, but secretly joins forces with Core, a counter-revolutionary movement committed to demonstrations against the government, blackmail, sabotage, and even murder. It is as a member of this group that First Samuels, in the most suspenseful scene in the novel, murders Gamaliel Harding as he is being attacked by a mob of market

women who have recognized that the achievement of peace and plenty that Gamaliel has promised may be forever delayed. It is ironic that Gamaliel loses his life because of his inflexibility in refusing to change ancestors; to First Samuels, Gamaliel had become "a mere bourgeois reactionary who had adapted the papery words of the revolution, had eaten its idealism raw, had lived off its silver of betrayal — without ever changing his inner being." The revolutionary Marxist rhetoric in which he thinks of Gamaliel leaves no doubt as to who First Samuels' new ancestors are now.

The immense difficulty of reducing inter-tribal intolerance in the interests of national solidarity is another aspect of African nationalism portrayed in this novel. A proper awareness of tribal identity is a legitimate component in one's sense of selfhood, but when that awareness is assumed to be the basis not just for uniqueness but for superiority, the achievement of the degree of co-operation required to realize the goals of as tribally diverse an entity as a nation becomes virtually impossible. Canadian writers cannot help but be acutely aware of the problems emanating from an inordinate preoccupation by any segment in this country with either its racial or regional identity, which, I would argue, makes their handling of similar situations elsewhere that much more astute and sympathetic. Margaret Laurence has demonstrated her understanding of the dangers of tribalism, particularly the problems that ensue when it becomes exclusivist, as follows:

> I feel we can't say *them* of Africans. What one has come to see, in the last decade, is that tribalism is an inheritance of us all. Tribalism is not such a bad thing, if seen as the bond which an individual feels with his roots, his ancestors, his background. . . . Where tribalism becomes . . . frighteningly dangerous is where the tribe — whatever it is, the Hausa, the Ibo, the Scots Presbyterians, the Daughters of the American Revolution, the in-group — is seen as "the people," the human beings, and the others, the un-tribe, are seen as sub-human. This is not Africa's problem alone; it is everyone's.

During the euphoria ensuing from the granting of independence to Lost Coast, expectations had been high that such abuse of tribalism was a thing of the past. The main exponent of this hope was Mr. Pobee-Biney, a government minister who had devoted much of his energy to trying to reconcile two feuding tribes, the Akante and the Akras. He was convinced that tribalism was "A feudal remnant. A crumb beneath the new broom. The nation would sweep such feudal jealousies into the dust." His optimism gains a substantial following at first, but soon, underestimating the potency of human jealously and hatred, he becomes the object of animosity from not only the feuding tribes he was attempting to reconcile, but also the Redeemer, Kruman, who construes Pobee-Biney's popularity to be a threat to his own. He is first stripped of his membership in the party, then denied access to party funds, and shortly thereafter, jailed.

In the Georgetown prison where Pobee-Biney is confined, further demonstra-

tions of the persistence of tribalism become evident. No prisoner ever has a guard from his own tribe. Not surprisingly, this leads to all kinds of abuses, especially when the guards are bushmen who take out their inferiority complex on their victims.

Pobee-Biney is finally released, a wiser but greatly embittered man. In a scene portraying First Samuels supervising the burning of the huts of some rebellious fishermen on the Silla outskirts, Pobee-Biney laughs to scorn several demonstrating students who display a sign, "End Tribalism Now." For him, the very suggestion is nothing more than an exercise in futility.

In the same scene, First Samuels reveals that he too underestimates the durability of inter-tribal intolerance. In an attempt to arouse the spectators he castigates the demonstrators as follows:

> End Racism, they say. Fine, I say. Let them wipe out their obruni methods, their obruni slogans begged from their foreign obruni masters. Lost Coast *is* our tribe, let us hear them admit that, this nation *is* our tribe, *this* nation — not the ones who buy them with confusion and disorder and shame.

It takes the minister of Roads and Energy, Mr. Eban, a hard-headed realist whose political survival has been due to his adeptness at compromise and accommodation, to reveal to First Samuels the folly of assuming tribal prejudices could be abandoned so gracefully:

> You still believe, do you, after all these years of ... counter-evidence, Samuels, your old theory that the governing group can toss three leopards, twelve baboons, a flock of vultures and what? Some pigs? — into the correct ... theoretical structure, and come out with a peaceful collection of, of what, Mr. Samuels? Of something sane, similar, loving, non-greedy, hard-working? Cows? There are no cows in Africa, Samuels. Termites perhaps. A society of termites?

THE THIRD CRITICAL THREAT to a newly independent nation's self-determination is that posed by neo-colonialism, defined rather succinctly on one of First Samuels' propaganda tapes:

> The essence of neo-colonialism is that the state which is subject to it is, in theory, independent and has all the trappings of sovereignty. In reality its economic system and thus its political policy is directed from the outside.

Here is another problem which Canadian writers are likely to understand more fully than their British or American counterparts at least. In a country whose very constitution can be altered only by the action of the British parliament, and at the same time whose culture and economy is dominated by American interests, such a sensitivity to pseudo-sovereignty is not unexpected.

In *The New Ancestors* Godfrey examines this problem of neo-colonialist inter-

ference in some depth. Occasionally his animosity towards such outside influences is so consistently intense as to impair the credibility of his analysis. The only outsider in the novel with any redeeming virtues is Michael Burdener, the English biology professor, whose sympathy with African causes has been confirmed by his marriage to Ama Harding, sister to Gamaliel, the Lost Coastian patriot eventually murdered by First Samuels. Burdener devotes a great deal of his pedagogical energy to exposing for the benefit of his students the *modus operandi* of imperialists and neo-colonialists. The following remark is representative of such disclosures:

> You must seek questions. You were taught to seek answers because with answers you could be beaten. Stress their inferiority old chap, or you'll get nowhere. And if you run across a bright one, fill him so full of the encyclopaedia he'll not have time to think. That's what the school bosses say to us.

All other foreigners are neo-colonialists to a greater or lesser extent; their prime and consistent distinguishing characteristic is a repulsive superiority complex. Geoffrey Firebanks is a good example. A representative of the British Council in Lost Coast, we are informed that he "considered his position in dependent Africa as somewhat analogous to that of a first century Greek expatriate, spreading his ideas and wisdom not in Rome but in some distant province."

In "The London Notebook" section a cricket game at Bishop Adisa School acts as a recurrent motif that further develops this uncomplimentary depiction of neo-colonialism. The representatives of two countries wishing to influence Lost Coast, Ling Huo, the Chinese ambassador, and Clarence Hathaway, his British counterpart, have mistakenly shown up to watch the proceedings — "Caught, the pair of them, by WAWA and forced to break a mutually stainless rule: never the twain shall meet." They proceed to sit as far apart as possible on the spectator's stage, but the ironic similarity of their motives brings them in fact very close together.

Godfrey reserves his most venomous anti-neo-colonialist sentiments, however, for the Americans. Anyone even casually familiar with Godfrey's writings both fictional and otherwise knows that he makes no secret of his disenchantment with the American dream. Godfrey wastes very little time in revealing his attitude towards American do-gooders. Geoffrey Firebanks passes a couple of Peace Corps Volunteers, the male member of whom nasally refuses the offer of a lift to Silla. "One of those American PCV's," Firebanks thinks. "Down in the dirt getting the job done. And pulling others down in the dirt with them."

Shortly thereafter, Godfrey makes clear that this is more than the expression of jealousy on the part of one imperialistically-minded intruder towards another. Switching to the omniscient narrative mode, he reveals the arrogance of this young American, Ricky Goldman by name. While on the make in Silla for a black woman, Goldman thinks to himself:

> This government was 100 per cent botch . . . Boy, if this was socialism in operation no wonder the old man [Goldman's father] ran from redness and became a psychiatrist. No brains anywhere. Name a ministry with a brain? . . . Boy, if they wouldn't let Ricky G., a Red-diaper baby if the Birchers ever labeled one, teach these miserable kinkheads English nor History, he'd show them American ingenuity. He'd get the message across. Even in Maths or French they'd learn it . . . Who cared if Ricky the Tricky flunked French and Maths at ole NYC?

His misapprehension of his total lack of discretion is capitalized upon by First Samuels and Burdener, who surprise him in the midst of a coupling session with a local prostitute. Even then, his naive chauvinism refuses to desert him as he screams, "Stop it, you guys. I'm an American. Americans are the most powerful good people in the world."

A rather more important role in the novel is played by the American lieutenant, Richard Rusk. A powerful symbol of unthinking imperialistic interference in Lost Coastian affairs, Rusk remains throughout the novel a hollow caricature. The reader is in perpetual doubt as to whether the man is capable of thought; his forte is action — most of which is in response to orders from his anonymous superiors. Michael Burdener records the audacious quality of this tendency when he first meets Rusk at Gamaliel's Grog Shop. Deciding he would like to play some chess, Rusk marches over to borrow a board and a set of men from some Russian players nearby. Michael is not certain whether Rusk is simply unaware of the social conventions that should govern relationships with one's enemies, or merely choosing to ignore such niceties. Burdener cannot help but secretly admire "such brashness. The Americans would ask God for a cigarette and the devil for a light."

Rusk drops out of sight until the complex surrealistic section of the novel entitled "In the Fifth City." This segment of the novel has no clear relationship to the rest, for it is set in the actual region of sub-Saharan Mali rather than the fictional Lost Coast, and with the exception of Lieutenant Rusk, a whole new set of characters is introduced. Godfrey makes explicit the typicality of this American as follows:

> there is something truthfully if indefinably American about him: an assurance, a willingness to smile, a lust after quantification, a competitive strength, a simple purity, a repetition of certain key phrases and ideas in all situations, a limited understanding of the ignobly tragic, a solidness to the body, a taste for steak, a shallowness of comprehension of other modes of social interaction than his own.

The author then proceeds to describe, in impressionistic prose that is nothing short of a nightmare to follow, several imaginative modes in which Rusk is murdered. He is shot by a Daga slave on the order of three Tuareg tribesmen and summarily buried in the sand, poisoned by a beautiful woman, killed, along with four others, by an exploding pineapple in a bar, and destroyed by a booby-trapped basketball.

The simplest response one could make to this section is to propose that it is

redundant and should be excised. It advances the central action of the novel not one jot, and in style it departs almost disruptively from the Lost Coast material. A more useful response, however, is to see this section as the culmination of this theme that is of such central concern in Godfrey's art — the intolerable interference of one country in the affairs of another. At this stage in the novel we have not yet been informed of the damage Rusk has initiated in Lost Coast; we only know that here in Mali he is attempting to "stir up trouble in the army and prepare for a rightist coup by the Bamako colonels." Burdener does reveal in the final section of the novel that Rusk has been responsible for the deaths of fifteen members of Core, the militant counter-revolutionary organization with which First Samuels was associated. Godfrey's assumption about the inherent insensitivity to violence historically evident in the American psyche is altogether evident:

> And how did he [Rusk] think? Was it simple for him. The actual death of those fifteen young men. It must have been. An algebraic nothing. Fifteen Lost Coastians. Nothing more than fifteen Mohawks. Fifteen Pasquemoddys. Fifteen Crows. Fifteen Floridas. That doesn't enter it; that's foreordained. The blood and slaughter causes of his raciality.

Burdener concludes that there is no possible justification for the man being allowed to stay alive.

The style of the "In the Fifth City" section, then, underscores the profound pointlessness and frequent lack of direction of imperialistic interference in the affairs of Africa. The inordinate risks of such an undertaking are emphasized; it is not clear whether Rusk is actually killed, but at the very least the multiplicity of potential threats to his life is conveyed. And for what cause does he engage in such activities? Not only is the wealth of this part of Africa highly suspect, but its entire history is one of constant tribal warfare, so what does another military coup matter?[4] The foreigners to a man are ill at ease, dissatisfied, and out of place. That the whole undertaking is an exercise in madness this section by both its style and its content makes abundantly clear.

A RATHER MORE CONVENTIONAL and yet similarly absorbing treatment of the difficulties attendant on the acquisition of national independence is to be found in David Knight's novel with the unwieldy title of *Farquharson's Physique and What It Did to His Mind.* Godfrey's novel provides evidence of its Canadian origin primarily in terms of its themes, although Knight supplements this relationship by making his central character a Canadian university professor, Henry John Farquharson, who with his wife and small son has come to the University of Ibadan in Nigeria to teach English literature for one year. With the exception of the Introduction, to which the author adds the anomalous designa-

tion "Prologue or Epilogue," the narrative line is carefully chronological; indeed, the chapter titles consist exclusively of dates, giving the novel very much of a documentary quality. The period covered, September 14, 1965, to July 29, 1966, is approximately the same as that of Godfrey's novel — February 1965 to February 1966. Most of the political events and the political figures in Knight's novel are factual, however, adding an additional element of authenticity to the narrative.

Farquharson's wife Joan joins a long line of wives in the Canadian fictional tradition who are unwillingly constrained to participate in their husbands' expeditions into the unknown. Joan seems resolved to dislike Africa right from the start — its dirt, its cheating, its absence of conveniences, its domestic servants, its perpetual atmosphere of insecurity. Farquharson comes to see her as "a prying, miserable woman who should have stayed in Canada." Refusing to disbelieve in his ability to not only adapt to Africa but also to contribute something to its development, he establishes a vigorous sexual liaison with Gail Johnston, a former student of his from Toronto now teaching drama at the University of Ibadan, in order to compensate for the progressively deteriorating relationship with his wife. This relationship with Gail acts as a useful index of the degree of his adaptation to African cultural mores, for it symbolizes the elimination of inhibition that is an important component of *his* concept of acculturation.

One striking characteristic shared by all three of the novels under discussion here is their unusual preoccupation with violence. Farquharson's increasing recognition of the common heritage of savagery he shares with the Africans is the key discovery he makes during his voyage from innocence to experience. As in Godfrey's novel, tribal intolerance provides the motive for the expression of violence. Political parties capitalize upon tribal affinities; as History professor Edward Eayrs tells Farquharson, "There didn't use to be this kind of hatred and organization. God damn it, the tribal organizations were cultural." Once in power, a party freely resorts to intimidation, election-fixing, and even murder to perpetuate its existence.

Farquharson persists in attempting to preserve a stance of patient neutrality. He is rudely awakened to the fact that fence-sitting is impossible in Africa when, returning from observing a student anti-government demonstration, he kills two partisan thugs who are ransacking his house, and later that night discards their bodies into a ditch.

At first, Farquharson does not recognize that in trying to become more immune to the violent consequences of tribalism, he is becoming less human. He tries to convince himself that "Sympathy . . . was a useless, interfering, and degrading privileged tourist's quality." He even goes so far as to admit that he had enjoyed committing murder. Then just a couple of weeks before the Farquharsons are to leave Nigeria, Henry is suddenly awakened to the inhumanity of tribal hatred when several Ibos are pointlessly slaughtered during a trip he and his son Jamie

take to Akure. He finally admits that he can hardly wait to return to Canada. His relationship with Gail, which up to that point had symbolized his rejection of the former inhibitions of his Canadian lifestyle, now begins to decline into emptiness.

In the meantime Joan, having discovered that Henry was a murderer and deciding that he was no longer a fit father for her son, secretly flees to Lagos with Jamie. Farquharson goes in pursuit courtesy of Oscar Nwonkwo, the Nigerian patriotic poet who lived next door. Oscar tries to convince him that the violence he had witnessed was about to end:

> that what he had seen was one of the death spasms of the First Republic, inevitable perhaps, but essentially meaningless, and something which had already ceased to happen in the North. "We have turned the corner," he said. "We have put our Time of Trouble behind us. Now it is in truth 'One Nigeria'."

Oscar does not realize it, but the current hostilities were just the beginning of what was to lead eventually to that bloody attempt at tribal genocide known as the Biafran War.

Airport authorities refuse to allow Joan and Jamie to leave Lagos without Henry. On the way to an anticipated reunion with his son, Farquharson is asked by Oscar, "Do you want to leave our country so very much?" He replies:

> I can't think of that. I want Jamie safe in my hands, and to know what to do with his mother. What's Nigeria? I want to get out before anything else happens here. I'm tired of bodies. The next body I want is my own, thank you very much.

That wish is tragically granted. Just as he is about to be reunited with his family, soldiers appear, bent on commandeering the airport. When Farquharson intervenes as an Ibo clerk is being bayoneted, he is wounded in the stomach, and then, to avoid the embarrassment of an investigation, a soldier blows Farquharson's brains out.

The compelling portrayal of the potentially destructive consequences of bigoted tribalism is the chief success of this novel. My thesis is that the Canadian writer is particularly sensitive to such issues because of similar threats in his own country.

THE LEAST SUCCESSFUL of these three novels about Africa is Hugh Hood's *You Can't Get There From Here.* Although it is hampered by a marked preference for narration in lieu of dramatization, and by characters who are far too representative to engage our sympathies, the novel still manages to examine rather closely the issues of tribalism and neo-colonialism in the newly independent fictional African state of Leofrica. It opens in the office of the new prime minister designate, Mr. Anthony Jedeb, as he makes preparations for the

first cabinet meeting. He clearly is the most suitable Leofrican for this office; not only does he possess the highest educational qualifications of anyone in the country, but his background of having been born in the Ugeti highlands and yet having lived most of his life among the Pineal lowlanders qualifies him as the one most likely to succeed in bringing about a resolution of the smoldering atmosphere of mutual hostility that governs relationships between the two groups. Like a pedantic school-teacher, the narrator reveals that there is no rational basis for the Ugeti hatred of the Pineals, for the latter have a long history of being agreeable and unwarlike:

> The foreign anthropologists who have made studies of the Leofrican peoples have always been puzzled by the fear felt by the Ugeti of their placid neighbours. It is one of the most striking instances in cultural anthropology of a mass delusion without any historical base. Yet this delusive, almost hallucinatory terror felt by one tribe for the other is a real social fact in Leofrica, and has to be dealt with as such, not as a childish fancy.

In his inaugural address, Jedeb faces squarely this social fact, but he also believes that sweetness and light will prevail in helping them to surmount it:

> In our country a man is first of all a herdsman of the highlands or a planter of the lowlands. That is the first fact we have to recognize in the founding of our united state. There are two peoples here.
>
> But I tell you, fellow Leofricans, from this day onward these two peoples can, must and will grow toward union and mature statehood.

He goes on to promise full representation of all tribal, local, economic and ideological interests in his government. In order to do this he appoints four Ugetis, four Pineals, and three non-indigenous Leofricans to his cabinet. The inadequacy of Jedeb's idealism is shortly thereafter revealed, for bickering along tribal lines breaks out almost immediately at the first cabinet meeting, and the appointees demonstrate an almost universal unwillingness to rise above a preoccupation with their own selfish interests of salary or personal aggrandizement.

Like Dave Godfrey, though, Hood reserves his most caustic satirical talents for his depiction of those imperialistic forces that seek to manipulate and exploit Leofrica in keeping with their particular ideological goals. Ralph MacSweyn is the head of Interfoods, an American company devoted to the shameless exploitation of Leofrica's sole exportable commodity — nut oil. Fatuous and myopic, he is completely incapable of assessing matters from any value system other than his own. The narrator ironically describes his simplistic approach to life as follows:

> He was one of a new kind of man who can envisage real social institutions deriving from American models, extended on a global scale. He was among the first true world-citizens, without affection for any particular place or set of local customs. He thought mostly about technical matters, usually related to communica-

tions, in a new kind of language as close to pictures as possible. His logic and his function alike dictated his characteristic contempt for complex syntax and peculiarity of expression.

The ostensible head of the Soviet presence in Leofrica, the uxorious Mr. Leontiev, is presented somewhat more sympathetically than either MacSweyn or the American ambassador, Fenton Ruggles. Genuinely committed to aiding in Leofrica's technical development, Leontiev hopes to attract the country into the Russian sphere of influence by diplomacy rather than intrigue.

The insidious nature of power politics is soon revealed, however, for it turns out that the real motive of both Soviet and American foreign policy is to drive Leofrica into the unwilling arms of the opposite major power. This plan is revealed to Leontiev by the beautiful spy Amelie de Caulaincourt, who by means of her abundant charms has been successful in worming her way not only into the good graces of the power-mongers in the country, but into a portfolio of the Leofrican cabinet itself. It is Amelie, Leontiev discovers, who has engineered the destruction of the expedition of Soviet scientists and technicians which had journeyed to the Ugetiland interior for the purpose of building a road. This inhuman deed was deemed to be a justifiable means of providing the Soviets with a basis for withdrawing from Leofrica.

The Americans naturally have their secret agent in Leofrica also; he is Clive Maharaj, Prime Minister Jedeb's naive confidential secretary, whose CIA superiors have equipped him with a sophisticated electronic device for sending six five-minute messages on Leofrican activities to a mysteriously omnipresent receiving station. That station turns out to be a U.S. submarine that has been completely immobilized for ten weeks in order to receive Clive's innocuous messages. In what is obviously meant to be an example of typical Yankee overkill, the submarine captain triggers a self-destruct device in Clive's set right after the last message, which blows to pieces not only Clive but also his Pineal landlord, nine other lodgers in the tenement house, and two whole families living adjacent to the ill-fated establishment. This does not occur before Clive has single-handedly sabotaged the Interfoods complex and blown it sky-high to provide the Americans with a good alibi for withdrawing from the country.

Not to be outdone, the Albanian trade commissioner Zogliu gets one up on both his capitalist and revisionist counterparts by engineering the secession of Ugetiland from Leofrica. He accomplishes this with the aid of Lance-Major Abdelazar, a Ugeti official attached to the Defence ministry, who in the process murders the Cultural Affairs minister for refusing to go along with the plot.

It hardly needs to be added that against these odds, Leofrica of course does not survive. Prime Minister Jedeb manages to escape to the Ugeti River in the ensuing revolution, but when partisans on both sides start shooting at him he does what

any self-respecting defeated mediator would do and dives to permanent refuge at the bottom of the river.

Cynicism and anger occasionally pervert the artist's intention in these novels. The credibility of the American neo-colonialists in both the latter novels, for example, is certainly reduced because of this tone of outrage. Margaret Laurence, in a recent conversation with Robert Kroetsch, made a comment about her African writing that has an important bearing here. She recognized that as a Canadian in Africa she remained the perpetual detached outsider:

> You were in a sense, even though you were involved with the experience, cared about it, and all the rest of it . . . in some way you were a tourist. You could quit. You could get out. But with your own experience, your own background, your own roots, you have to come to terms.[5]

As I see it, coming to terms involves not only the sensitive delineation of problems, which these writers certainly do; it also requires the working out of some sort of synthesis (solution is too facile a word). Anger is understandable but ultimately unproductive. As Canadian writers, in spite of their recognition of the similarity of these African situations to the Canadian experience, these novelists can avoid the demands of resolution — can get out, as Laurence puts it. That is exactly what they do, and this, if anything, is their shortcoming.

NOTES

[1] *Eleven Canadian Novelists* (Toronto: Anansi, 1973), pp. 161-62.

[2] Laurence herself has recognized how inappropriate her earlier spirit of hope was. See "Ten Years' Sentences," *Canadian Literature*, No. 41 (Summer 1969), p. 12.

[3] "Ten Years' Sentences," p. 13.

[4] See Donald Cameron, "The Three People Inside Dave Godfrey," *Saturday Night*, 86 (September 1971), 22.

[5] Robert Kroetsch, ed., *Creation* (Toronto: New Press, 1970), p. 61.

GODFREY'S PROGRESS

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DESPITE THE INTEREST and praise generated by its publication in 1970, Dave Godfrey's novel *The New Ancestors* has received limited critical attention. W. H. New has presented some perceptive comments in his essay "Equatorial Zones and Polar Opposites,"[1] but no one has attempted to suggest a comprehensive approach to its complex thematic and technical problems. The novel is so richly textured, so far-reaching in its reference and, in part, so obscure in its meaning that anyone wishing to understand it fully could be easily confused or discouraged. For this reason, the short stories written by Godfrey prior to his novel are particularly useful as guides to the themes which interest him and the literary means he uses to explore these subjects. Because Godfrey's stories are much more stylistically conventional than his novel, one can more easily discover in them the thematic problems and fictional techniques which re-appear in *The New Ancestors.*

Godfrey's short stories, fourteen of which are collected in *Death Goes Better with Coca-Cola*, concentrate on social and cultural issues rather than problems of individual physchology. The theories of such behavioural scientists as Konrad Lorenz seem to exert considerable influence on Godfrey as he examines the conditioning effects of culture on the responses of an individual. He explores most thoroughly the relationship between an individual and his social context, the roots of human violence and the role of the family in creating and sustaining culture. Much of Godfrey's commentary on these issues is embodied in the predominantly ironic tone he establishes in each of his stories. Intersecting prose styles, narrative perspectives and time settings are the characteristic devices used by Godfrey to control the reader's response to the events depicted.

Armed with this knowledge of Godfrey's thematic interests and literary techniques, one can more successfully come to grips with *The New Ancestors.* Not only can one discover these same characteristics in the novel but one can also gain some insight into Dave Godfrey's development as a writer of fiction. Most of his stories appear to be constructed out of personal experiences re-shaped to exhibit

his thematic concerns. He adopts a pronounced reportorial distance from his material, and he frequently employs a narrator easily identified with the author's viewpoint. *The New Ancestors*, on the other hand, is less concerned with a life-like plot than with an imaginative re-creation of essential human experiences. Irony is still the major stylistic feature, but the language is now rich and evocative rather than stark and precise. By overcoming his tendency to re-shape his own experience into fictional form, Dave Godfrey has shown a greater confidence in his imaginative potential and his artistic capacity.

For Godfrey, man is very much the product of the social group in which he lives, and an individual's instincts and actions can be explained and understood only by reference to this larger context. Culture is firmly rooted in social conditioning — an historical process in which each generation transmits its attitudes to the next and consequently creates an apparently inevitable cultural evolution. One major influence on Godfrey appears to be Konrad Lorenz. In an essay on CUSO entitled "Doomsday Idealism" Godfrey refers favourably to Lorenz's theories:

> Rather than reason, he finds it is instinctive behaviour mechanisms which provide the dynamic source of friendship and love, warmth of feeling, appreciation of beauty and the curiosity that strives toward scientific enlightenment. Our danger lies not in failing to defeat our "animal nature" but rather in denying causality, denying the effects of race history on our behaviour, in favour of an unproven, idealistic free will.[2]

In rejecting explanations of man's actions which rely on concepts of universal rationality Godfrey in turn emphasizes the uniqueness of individual cultures which have each developed a distinct set of behaviour characteristics. For this reason, the interaction between two cultures is an especially important problem for Godfrey, as he indicates in the quotation from Lorenz used as an epigraph for *Death Goes Better with Coca-Cola*:

> The balanced interaction between all the single norms of social behaviour characteristics of a culture accounts for the fact that it usually proves highly dangerous to mix cultures. To kill a culture, it is often sufficient to bring it into contact with another, particularly if the latter is higher, or is at least regarded as higher, as the culture of a conquering nation usually is. The people of the subdued side then tend to look down upon everything they previously held sacred and to ape customs which they regard as superior.

The meeting of two persons from different cultural groups or the introduction of an outsider into a foreign society is thus more than a meeting of individuals: each person brings with him the essence of his whole cultural group, its history and prejudices, character and instincts.

The influence of these theories can be seen throughout Godfrey's stories. In "It's Going to be a Good Summer There's a Wedding Every Night and Mostly's

Two" Godfrey re-creates the internal functions and relationships of a Manitoba railway gang. The interloping narrator (a teacher with Frontier College) describes the characters' pleasures, desires and ambitions so as to suggest the completeness and consistency of their social and cultural group. In fact, the narrator is primarily concerned with the possibility that he may destroy their society by educating them in the values of the larger Canadian society. "The Generation of Hunters" examines the relationship between a father and a son through which values and attitudes are transmitted from one generation to the next. The father instructs his son, the future soldier, in the morality of hunting by means of aphorisms: "Heart or head for hellshots; legs for the lazy; stomachs for sadists." This process of moral instruction serves to rigidify behavioural patterns within the society to such an extent that, as the narrator states at the end, "there are times when you seem conscious of observing inevitability." "The Hard-Headed Collector," Godfrey's most anthologized story, is a very clear illustration of the Lorenz theory cited in the epigraph to Godfrey's collection of stories. A self-sufficient group of men from one culture gradually distintegrates as the group passes through the land of a more technically advanced people. A fruitful mingling of the two cultures is impossible. The artisans from the Queen Charlotte Islands are destroyed before they can employ their skills on the giant tree, Egsdrull, belonging to the other civilization in order to create a totem, the symbol of a cultural identity.[3]

One of the most important aspects of these cultural theories is their implication for the relationship between an individual and his society, between the "I" and the "we." In an early story entitled "Fragment" Godfrey re-creates fictionally the day of Thomas Scott's execution by Louis Riel. Scott is shown to be a person, not just an historical figure, but Godfrey preserves the episode's wider social significance by embodying in Scott the prejudices of a culture which views Riel's people as "savages."[4] "Gossip: The Birds that Flew, the Birds that Fell" examines more closely the forces which limit and control the response of the individual. Mrs. Wagwood, the small town gossip, personifies the vigilance of social expectations as she watches over Mr. Courtney, predicts his reactions to the apartment development and interprets all of his actions in the light of her own suppositions about him. The destruction of the bush, the political machinations of the Reeve, the wife swapping games of his son and daughter-in-law and his daughter's plan to marry a Jew all coincide to bring the pressures of society to bear on Mr. Courtney. He cannot defeat or escape from these forces, and he can only respond by shooting the two pheasants in order to save them from a lingering death at the hands of an encroaching civilization.[5]

Hunting, violence, death and slaughter are central to many of Godfrey's stories. He seems to find in these images some key to the specific nature of the conditioned mentality of his time. Because he traces an individual's instinct for

violence to the society from which he comes, his treatment of these subjects appears extremely cold and analytical. The title of his collection of stories, *Death Goes Better with Coca-Cola*, reworks an advertising jingle to juxtapose ironically two aspects of modern culture: killing and big business. This seemingly flippant attitude toward death appears in such stories as "Mud Lake: If Any":

> It is one of the strangenesses of youth that you can treat a specific chance of death with no more care than you'd give to your old Dinky Toy, that one-inch, green-camouflaged British Army troop lorry.

In addition, Godfrey shows how individual acts of violence may be sanctioned by a society. "Up in the Rainforest" illustrates this point by drawing a parallel between the assassination attempt on the "Redeemer" and the white hunter beating his African wife. In "A Python of the Gaspé" Godfrey uses a small fishing party as a miniature society to show how guilt feelings can be alleviated. Having failed to catch any large fish, the men decide to kill some ducks which eat fish eggs. Instead, they kill fourteen of another type. Old Alex, the guide soothes their pangs of conscience by placing the ducks in a fishing net and telling them that there is no reason to be excited: " 'Now if we were to see a python or an elephant, that might be something unusual.' "

It is by such means that cultural characteristics are re-inforced, and Godfrey views the relationship between generations as a key to their transmission. In "River Two Blind Jacks" a "tall tale" told by the narrator's grandfather to a group of children serves to teach them about their land and to make them a part of a continuing tradition. Likewise, in "Newfoundland Night" a teacher comments on the futility of teaching children who are "only temporarily students, permanently the shadows and rebirths of their fathers." Because the family serves this function, Godfrey treats parents in his stories with special concern. To some extent, they can control what qualities of their culture will be communicated to the next generation. Godfrey, however, usually shows parents acting in an unfortunate manner. Mr. Courtney, in "Gossip," tries to communicate anti-Semitism to his daughter, and the soldier's father in "The Generation of Hunters" only passes on bits of folk wisdom on hunting. Thus, the one hope for change Godfrey holds out is being abused in this generation. Effective change can occur only by altering the conditioned behaviour of a society, and Godfrey can see no one attempting to do this through the only means possible — the creation within the family of a new system of values.

GODFREY most effectively conveys his attitude to these patterns of social behaviour through an ironic tone. A story such as "Fulfilling our Foray" abounds in ironies: the white hunter in modern Africa; the "pure

socialist" who brings back "an object of worth and beauty"; and the preference of young Africans for a musical group that plays electric guitars bought by the Minister of Defence. Frequently, he uses irony to undercut the reader's reaction to an earlier part of a story. In "The Winter Stiffs" the frankness and vulgarity of Finn's story may lead the reader to a harsh judgment of his character, but the narrator, back in the ostensibly more civilized Toronto, points out the hypocrisy which exists in the language of cultured people:

> You know that gentle tone with which we in Toronto can say lady, when we mean, really, something entirely different.

Many of his ironic comments arise from similar juxtapositions. In "Fragment" Scott's story is interspersed with selections (ironic in their optimism) from the journal he is writing. Mr. Courtney in "Gossip" is reading from a history of the persecution of the Jews in fourteenth century Strasbourg while he himself is being persecuted. "The Hard-Headed Collector" is interspersed with selections from a newspaper story about a more practical man of arts. Sometimes the intersection is achieved by having a character tell another story, as Mrs. Mier does in "On the River," or by framing the story with separate pieces at the beginning and end, such as Godfrey does in "Two Smiths," "Mud Lake: If Any" and "The Generation of Hunters." Godfrey does not dwell on these contrasts or comparisons; he does not pedantically explain them. Rather, he allows the reader to search out their significance.

The fact that many of these stories were written for the "Outdoors" column of *Saturday Night* may help to account in part for the degree to which they draw on personal experience.[6] In reviewing *Death Goes Better with Coca-Cola* George Woodcock said that the stories were on the "borderland between the factual and the imagined," and he referred to Godfrey's "illuminated realism" and "lapidary craftsmanship."[7] Robert Cockburn called them "short stories in name only."[8] Not only does Godfrey make use of personal experience, but the reader usually becomes aware of this and, not surprisingly, identifies Godfrey with one of the characters, usually the narrator. "It's Going to be a Good Summer" draws on Godfrey's experiences with Frontier College,[9] and the cynical narrator probably contains some self-portraiture. The narrator of the framing sections of "Two Smiths" reminds one of Godfrey's own assistance to draft evaders.[10] The narrator of "The Way We do it Here"[11] helps to organize a lumber camp strike in much the same manner as Godfrey did.[12] This is not to say that such associations are always accurate or even productive. But the fact that they arise so readily indicates the extent to which Godfrey has reworked his own experience into fictional form. Whether or not he has avoided all the pitfalls of such a method is another matter.

In a sense, one might consider Dave Godfrey's short stories to be the equivalent of another writer's first novel: the fictionalization of personal experience in an

intriguing but basically unsatisfying manner. Phyllis Grosskurth approaches this view when she comments on Godfrey's stories:

> Technically very competent, they all seemed written to a formula, the sort of writing which seems to emerge from creative writing courses.[13]

One senses an artificial manner in many of the stories when the cool tone becomes frigid and the patterned structure turns stiff and unwieldly. In part this may be due to some difficulties with language, especially an uncertainty in the use of images. As Alden Nowlan says, there are "bits of bad Hemingway," and "many almost embarrassingly bad similes and metaphors."[14] Such phrasing as, "I felt like I lived in a house with a stopped-up toilet,"[15] or "It changed as quickly as the sun-glints off a Finnish girl shaking out her hair after pulling off a hat of fox fur,"[16] is more confusing than enlightening. Imagery can be startling, but one wonders if in these instances it was fully understood or if all of its implications were considered. Godfrey simply seems too self-conscious in many of his stories. His use of personal experience, his constant concern for the moral position of the narrator (especially in "The Winter Stiffs" and "It's Going to be a Good Summer") and his highly idiosyncratic use of images prevent him from stepping outside his stories and achieving the distanced perspective he seems to desire. Only in "The Hard-Headed Collector" does he begin to gain this distance. By creating an imaginative world of parable and allegory, he permits the reader to accept the story as an objective literary entity, open to investigation and discussion. The unsolved problem in many of his short stories, however, is to gain this perspective while still employing materials gathered from personal experience: to unite the immediacy of experience with the objectivity of the literary artifact.

Dave Godfrey accomplishes this, and much more, in *The New Ancestors*. The same general thematic concerns found in the short stories are present in the novel, but Godfrey greatly expands and clarifies them. Moreover, he displays a technical mastery of the large-scale, complex patterns of the longer novel form. In part, Godfrey accomplishes this by employing a wider imaginative scope and richer, more expressive language. Both the reportorial attitude to experience and the stark, Hemingway-like language of the short stories are almost entirely eliminated. Instead, Godfrey has written a totally imaginative work based on a confident, evocative prose style.

The influence of the cultural theories of Konrad Lorenz can again be found in Godfrey's work. The importance of instinctive behaviour, the conditioning power of history and the weaknesses of reason and idealism are illustrated in the conflicting political philosophies propounded by the politicians of Lost Coast. Both Michael Burdener and First Samuels believe that the road to the ideal Lost

Coast state lies in rational analysis and empirical action. Burdener, as a scientist, tells his students not to act according to myth:

> 'But if *you* probe, if you question and act according to discoveries not according to myths, you can construct a civilisation which will make theirs look like the mask it is.'

Being an idealist, he, along with First Samuels, is not satisfied with the slow progress of historical forces. First Samuels, impatient with the government, longs for the continuation of the revolutionary struggle:

> 'Our brothers have become too tame, too comfortable, too quickly. . . . What we need, it seems to me . . . is a new series of direct confrontations, direct actions, to rekindle the struggle.'

In the long run, he wishes to sever the country's historical roots, as he indicates when he speaks of the students who oppose him:

> 'If they lived in this town for twenty years — if they have lived for twenty years free of their ancestors — they would be more serious, you know,'

and then to establish new ancestral lines:

> 'Perhaps the thing to do is to start many families, Biney. Start many families. I am serious.'

On the other hand, Kofi Kruman, the Redeemer, has attempted to associate himself with the myths and religion of ancient Africa, and even First Samuels experiences the effectiveness of the technique:

> it was the attack upon the old man which went somehow — no matter how easily his mind accepted the necessity — went against some fear and restraint which had been cored into his very being, as though they would be breaking creation itself by breaking Kasepreko. . . . It was only a trick of dialectics, this trick by which Kruman had linked himself up with that sense of deification for the past.

By the end of the novel it is evident that only through the acceptance and utilization of these cultural forces will the lives of the people be altered. As the cabinet minister Obatala states, the real threat to Kruman comes from the tribal chiefs and their sons who " 'trace their ancestors back as far as any Englishman.' " Myth and religion will prove more powerful than reason and idealism.

The implications of these theories are again embodied in the relationship between individuals and their society. The novel is designed to explore both the personal agony of an Ama Burdener and the political situation of a newly independent country. In fact, Godfrey implies that the personal and social levels are indivisible: Ama's suffering stems directly from her associations with the major political figures.

In this regard, the concept of synergy is very important for Dave Godfrey. He

has described a high synergy society as one in which "the individual by the same act and at the same time serves his own advantage and that of the group."[17] Such a society is non-aggressive, as opposed to a low synergy society (like the United States) which is obsessed with winners and losers and in which one man succeeds only at the expense of another's failure. Furthermore, Godfrey holds that "any colonial situation ... represents the imposition of low-synergy conditions upon the colonized."[18] Lost Coast, therefore, is a society attempting to shift from low to high synergy, to create a state in which an individual acts for the benefit of the whole. Gamaliel Harding, as spokesman for the movement, tells the market women about what "we must" do, but they see it only in terms of their historic individualism:

> History went far back for them and it was always the same. 'We must' meaning *you must.* Chiefs declaring war for sport, war for slaves. White-frocks explaining slavery in terms of the expansion of civilisation.

The Redeemer cult and the plan for African union indicate the government's desire to bring the "I" into an ever closer relationship with the "we." But the key opposition figures continue to respond as individuals. Michael Burdener is a foreign parasite who lives off the energy of Africa:

> And so I will return to Africa, because there is something there I can say yes to.... And I need to say yes to something at this moment. I need to say yes. After all, now, finally, I know myself.

More importantly, First Samuels leads a counter-revolution based ultimately on personal greed, not social consciousness:

> This time he would not be left behind by the Gamaliels and the Azaccas. The past would not hold him back again....
>
> He hated all this luxury. But why should fate hand it out to Eban and not to him?

Even Ama Burdener, who is opposed to both political groups, places her hope in an individualistic solution, personal love, rather than social salvation.

A low-synergy society, based on aggression, is especially conducive to violence. Godfrey no longer works through the hunting metaphor found in his stories. Instead, he presents directly the conflicts between human beings which arise from their instinct for violence. The primary source of violence in the novel is not the government but the low-synergy group led by First Samuels. They use assassination and bombing to gain their ends, and the government only responds to their actions. The fundamental tendency to violence in the society appears in the three mob scenes in which someone is beaten: Burdener, Frantz and Gamaliel. In each instance, the mob, conditioned by life in a low-synergy, colonial society, attacks in order to defend the individual interests that it feels are being endangered.

Thus, violent action always emerges from the depths of an individual's being, not from rational intent. First Samuels and Burdener seem to abandon their political shrewdness as they enter into plans for direct action. For Samuels, his relations with Norah, which parallel his plans for violence, indicate his surrender to blind, instinctive passions:

> he made love to her violently . . . so that he could slide back into the past and be overcome by her again, so that he could sing into the blindness.

Likewise, Burdener says, "Let perception flee — it had fled before — and simply act." Phyllis Grosskurth has described the effect of the novel as being "sucked into a maelstrom":

> into the inner volcano of man's darker being to a level where sunlight never penetrates; where we are forced to acknowledge that hell bears a startling resemblance to commonplace reality.[19]

The manner in which Godfrey links violence to man's inner drives and passions is in large part responsible for this effect. Unlike the world of his short stories, where violence is cold and dispassionate, violence in Godfrey's novel is deeply emotional, at times almost hypnotically ritualized. In the section entitled "In the Fifth City," for example, the repeated killing of Rusk becomes an act detached from physical, historical reality and transformed into imaginative, mythic ritual. The reader cannot even be certain that any of the acts of violence described in this section actually occurred, because the possibility that Rusk left the country by plane is never discounted.

As in his stort stories, Godfrey shows how the family operates to transmit social instincts. He has stated that he brought back from Africa a sense of "the determinism that is built up in a family from generation to generation,"[20] and his novel contains a complex web of family relationships, a web drawn even tighter by the late revelation that Samuels may be Gamaliel's and Ama's half-brother. The very title of the book, *The New Ancestors*, indicates the centrality of the problem of ancestry of Godfrey. None of the main characters can trace his ancestry very far back. In fact, no one can get beyond his own parents. Michael Burdener has only an insane father (called Mr. Buxton) for a family, and Ama points out the consequences:

> One man, his whole family only one man; no wonder he's mad. . . . What is a man without elders, without ancestors? . . . where is the man, where is the society he has ever respected?

But Ama herself is cut off from her ancestors because she "adopted" Mr. Awotchwi as her father and because she is unable to see beyond her mother:

> what did she know of herself, of her ancestors, of her inner trickeries? Nothing. . . .

> She couldn't get beyond her own mother. Delicacy was time. Delicacy was a long, high, thick wall against time.

First Samuels cannot even be sure of his father's identity, and Gamaliel Harding became an outcast from his family when he ran away to America.

Even more importantly, these characters are cut off from the future generations. Burdener's first son, Cricket, dies young, and he appears to abandon Ama with his other children who never seem to register on his consciousness. Gamaliel disowns his son, Kwame Bird, who later runs away in a manner reminiscent of his father. This latter case is made especially pointed by Gamaliel's earlier regard for his son as the fulfilment of ancestral hopes:

> Gamaliel smiles at this display of memory, as though Delicacy has been made whole again, recreated in the image of her grandson, her long years of deprivation and struggle rewarded with gold and flesh rather than madness.

THE TITLE, *The New Ancestors*, is, therefore, open to a dual interpretation. It refers both to the new ancestry the characters create for themselves and to the fact that they will become ancestors for future generations. The people of Lost Coast have broken from their colonial past through a revolution, and now they seek to re-establish their cultural identity in the ideals of African union, the Redeemer cult, political action or personal love. For them, "new ancestors" must remain a paradox because they attempt to use something "new" to replace something which only time can create. But while searching for their own ancestors they are at the same time becoming the ancestors of future generations. After their break from a colonial past, they have the opportunity to establish new ancestral lines, but the opportunity is largely ignored or abused. Both Burdener and Gamaliel place hope in the sons they eventually destroy; even the Redeemer is insistent that Ama not bear any children by him. At the end of the novel, we have no hope for the future of Lost Coast and its people: they are all trapped within paradoxes. Those representing the forces of individualism, who seek immediate, ideal solutions (Burdener, Samuels), are defeated by the forces of ancestral and social cohesion (e.g., the Kruba dam workers). Those who are attempting to create a high-synergy society through association with ancient Africa (Gamaliel, Kruman) are confronted by the strong instinct for individualism and social pluralism still present in the people (e.g., the market women and the tribal chiefs). Nor can the problems simply be ignored, as Ama Burdener discovers when political affairs destroy the safety island of personal love she has created. The people of Lost Coast, therefore, are both destroying their old ancestors and failing to create new ones.

An ironic tone continues to be Godfrey's primary technique for commenting on his material. The theme of ancestry is put in this perspective by passages such as Burdener's description of Peggy Neal's room:

> Three wigs sitting on plastic heads about the silent room. Like statues of her ancestors. But faceless, mysteryless. One black. One silvery. One lank and asiatic. . . . Is that her past? Where is his.

Similarly, the "new ancestors" of the people of Lost Coast are plastic and sterile in their newness, despite the devotion given to them. Lesser ironies appear as a recurring motif throughout the novel: the strident nationalism of politicians, but their dependence and pride in "Pepsi", "Carnation" and light standards "Imported from Germany"; Kofi Kruman, the Redeemer, acting the role of an African slave dealer; Gamaliel Harding, the spokesman of the new Africa, acting the role of General Stanley; and Ama's description of Michael as "the David Livingston of the Liberation movement". Godfrey's concept of the entire political situation is fundamentally ironic. First Samuels states his belief that it is through action, not words, that the revolution will succeed:

> He had learned and Gamaliel hadn't; it was that simple. . . . He knew the people now would respond only to actions; all you could set up against Kasepreko's lying, greedy actions were your own unlying, ungreedy actions.

The irony here is that both rhetoric and action fail: Gamaliel's words are rejected by the market women and Samuels' act of bombing is opposed by the workers. It is also evident that Samuels' potential revolution would not have made any substantial change in Lost Coast, that he was motivated by a "counter-greed" and not a "counter-pride." Godfrey wishes to emphasize the complexities of the situation, the difficulty of ever believing entirely what any one character states. He does not want to present Lost Coast as an ideal revolutionary state; he emphasizes instead its inner contradictions and imperfections. While teaching in Ghana, Godfrey says that he felt "driven to encourage cynicism as well as understanding, the sardonic as well as the interpretative remark."[21] The ironies of *The New Ancestors* bring the reader to much the same attitude.

Just as in his short stories, Godfrey achieves many of these ironic effects through the use of intersection. For example, the presentation of Ama's point of view in "A Child of Delicacy" put Michael Burdener into a sharper focus than he appeared in "The London Notebook." The frequent use of epigraphs also serves to clarify some events and make others more complex. The whole purpose of the opening section, "A Prologue," is summarized in the epigraph from David Levy, *"Dullness, after all, is the garment of nightmare,"* which indicates that there is turmoil and anguish under the calm exterior witnessed by the British expatriate community. The use of untranslated African language in the epigraphs and the text may at first seem rather arrogant and unfair. But it does suggest the integrity

of the culture being described and the deeper levels of mystery in the society which the outsider cannot penetrate. These texts are effective even if they are not enlightening.

One section of the novel which may also appear to be more effective than enlightening is "In the Fifth City." Its hallucinatory, surrealistic quality is highly suggestive of a dream or a drugged experience (the graphic symbol attached to the section appears to be a poppy). Time and event are warped and multilayered:

> think only of the voyage which awaits you, which searches for you, which lusts for you, and yet which possesses you tomorrow as it possesses you yesterday as it possesses you today.

The section is given no date, and a number of events, most notably the killing of Rusk, are presented in terms of a series of possibilities rather than a definite statement. The recurring camera images help to create the sense in which events can be run backward or forward, or, as in a movie, restaged and filmed in a different manner. This is particularly emphasized with Rusk watching "the delayed sequence television screen" and the earlier description of Rusk's mind in cinematic terms:

> Rusk's thoughts as the throng moves toward him remain caught where they were; the reel will not turn forward and the film begins to burn.

When placed in the context of the novel as a whole, the region of the Fifth City appears to be some form of parallel, imaginative reality to the reality of Lost Coast. It is located in Mali, the historically significant area of " 'the old kingdoms of this continent,' " containing " 'the knowledge depositories of Timbuctoo.' " In fact, a rather curious set of parallels is drawn between the major characters of the novel and the characters in the Fifth City. The Englishman Burr obviously relates to Michael Burdener; Donalda has some parallels with Ama; El Amaliel possesses some of the characteristics of Gamaliel Harding; and Effez parallels First Samuels. "In the Fifth City", therefore, offers the reader a totally imaginative commentary on the "realistic" actions of the characters in the main body of the novel. It possesses an allegorical power similar to that of "The Hard-Headed Collector", in which the imagined experiences of the artists comment upon the factual material in the newspaper story.

Thus, Dave Godfrey makes different use of his personal experiences in this novel than he did in most of his short stories. In 1968 he wrote in an introduction to three of his stories:

> I'm bored with plots in stories. . . . I dream a lot of language now, just language, not character or background or narrative flow, just language. And experience doesn't really teach you anything, I can see that now. . . . And so I try and grab hold of language.[22]

The New Ancestors is not an example of "completely invented fiction,"[23] but it does reveal a more imaginative use of experience. One cannot identify Godfrey with any of the novel's characters because he establishes a considerable ironic distance between himself and all of them, especially Michael Burdener. Godfrey also takes the considerable risk of attempting to portray African minds, to present a perspective which he cannot have experienced personally. Shifting time sequences and the appearance of the conclusion as a prologue effectively undercut the plot with a sense of the inevitable. "In the Fifth City", in fact, makes a mockery of conventional plot structures by presenting one character dying in five different ways.

But it is the quality of the language in the novel which truly sets it apart from the short stories. Godfrey abandons cold, terse, unadorned prose for an impassioned, richly textured, expressive means of communication. A keener sense of prose rhythms, a delight in the accumulation of detail, an invocation of meaning through repetition and a linking of incident through the association of words all serve to create Godfrey's personal style. He uses words much more freely, without imposing some foreign standard of starkness on his active imagination. He now gives us a series of phrases rather than one or two coldly analytical words:

> The justified, justified, justified, final, fear-ending, awe-ending, hatred-ending, love-ending, betrayal-ending, life-ending, shame-ending blow is struck with the sphere a dead weight in his hand, up into the air and then hard down upon the neck-joining-head flesh and gristle and Gamaliel's flesh joined in the death-blow that sends soothing pain from his bruised knuckles, his torn palm, shuddering through his shoulder backward, inward against the empoisoning to his dissolving fury, his dissolving heart.

Godfrey has gained control over his images; they are no longer embarrassing or confusing. Even such an "embarrassing" image as Ricky Goldman's description of the girl's legs as "the colour of melted Hershey bars", reflects the character of the speaker rather than of the author. The imaginative power of Dave Godfrey's language in this novel is the surest indicator of his escape from the confines of personal experience and introspection. Stark, reportorial prose would be incapable of embodying the possibilities Godfrey has imagined.

The New Ancestors, therefore, marks an important point in Dave Godfrey's career as a writer. His earlier short stories show us his concern for man's position within his culture and Godfrey's technique of ironic commentary, but these stories also reveal the limited scope of his imagination and the restricted quality of his prose. *The New Ancestors* picks up the same fundamental cultural and social themes and employs many similar ironic devices, but the range of Godfrey's imagination beyond his personal experiences and the power of the language he uses to express himself indicate the considerable achievement this novel represents.

NOTES

[1] *Articulating West* (Toronto: new press, 1972), pp. 216-33.

[2] In Bill McWhinney and Dave Godfrey, eds., *Man Deserves Man: CUSO in Developing Countries* (Toronto: Ryerson Press, 1968), p. 423.

[3] Dave Godfrey has commented extensively on this story in two recent interviews. See, "Dave Godfrey: Myths and Gardens," in Donald Cameron, *Conversations with Canadian Novelists: Part Two* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1973), pp. 34-47; and Graeme Gibson, *Eleven Canadian Novelists* (Toronto: Anansi, n.d.), pp. 151-79. See also, W. H. New, "Godfrey's Uncollected Artist," *Ariel*, 4, No. 3 (July 1973), 5-15.

[4] *Canadian Forum*, No. 39 (January 1960), pp. 228-30.

[5] *Tamarack Review*, No. 30 (Winter 1964), pp. 3-22.

[6] Eight such stories appeared between November 1966 and November 1967. All but two were reprinted in *Death Goes Better with Coca-Cola.*

[7] *Canadian Literature*, No. 38 (Autumn 1968), pp. 91-93.

[8] Robert Cockburn, rev. of *Death Goes Better with Coca-Cola, Fiddlehead*, No. 76 (Spring 1968), pp. 78-79.

[9] See Graeme Gibson, *Eleven Canadian Novelists*, p. 164.

[10] See Donald Cameron, "The Three People Inside Dave Godfrey," *Saturday Night*, September 1971, p. 22.

[11] In *Death Goes Better*, pp. 93-102.

[12] See Cameron, "The Three People Inside Dave Godfrey," p. 22.

[13] *Canadian Forum*, No. 51 (April-May 1971), p. 16.

[14] Rev. of *Death Goes Better with Coca-Cola, Canadian Forum*, No. 47 (March 1968), p. 282.

[15] "The Generation of Hunters," p. 13.

[16] "An Opening Day," in *Death Goes Better*, p. 17.

[17] "Doomsday Idealism," p. 424. See also his comments in Donald Cameron, *Conversations with Canadian Novelists: Part Two*, pp. 40-42.

[18] "Doomsday Idealism," p. 425.

[19] Grosskurth, p. 16.

[20] Cited by Robert Weaver, rev. of *The New Ancestors, Macleans*, February 1971, p. 57.

[21] Dave Godfrey, "Letter from Africa to an American Negro," *Man Deserves Man*, p. 212. Ths article originally appeared in *Tamarack Review*, No. 38 (Winter 1966), pp. 57-80.

[22] *New Canadian Writing 1968* (Toronto: Clarke Irwin, 1968), p. 140.

[23] Weaver, p. 59.

LE JOUAL COMME LANGUE LITTERAIRE

Robert Major

AVANT MÊME QUE n'existe une littérature québecoise, les écrivains d'ici mettaient en question la langue de nos futurs écrits. Nous avons, en effet, toute une tradition d'interrogations angoissées sur la langue littéraire à employer au Canada français. Puisque nous ne parlions ni iroquois ni huron et puisqu'il était impossible d'avoir une langue bien à nous, le problème s'est toujours ramené aux difficultés d'incorporer des particularismes d'ici à une norme venue d'ailleurs. Les classes instruites canadiennes-françaises ayant toujours pratiqué le nationalisme comme une vertu et ce nationalisme s'étant pendant longtemps manifesté, en littérature, par le souci de maintenir ou de ressusciter des traditions, ou de raconter les us et coutumes de la classes populaire (la paysannerie), on s'est continuellement heurté au dilemme du réalisme littéraire: comment faire parler ces gens d'une façon vraisemblable.

Jusqu'à un certain point, la querelle du joual n'est que la continuation de ce vieux débat de la langue littéraire à employer au Québec. Mais cette querelle a ceci de particulier qu'en changeant de classe sociale, en quittant la paysannerie pour intégrer la prolétariat, la langue populaire a perdu l'appui des classes dirigeantes. Le noble parler du paysan a cédé la place au jargon méprisable des ouvriers qui s'attire la persécution des milieux d'enseignement, des libraires, des divers organismes d'état. C'est donc dire que l'utilisation du joual comme langue littéraire est plus qu'un problème littéraire ou linguistique. Jasmin dira que les "francophilimaniaques sont gênés, non par la langue de certains livres de *Parti pris*, mais par les thèmes, les sujets, le paysage de la pauvreté. 'Cachez donc ce sein . . .' "[1] Cette opinion a le mérite d'insister sur la dimension socio-politique de la querelle du joual (les beaux mots sont après tout une façon d'exorciser une réalité déplaisante), mais elle oublie trop facilement que la langue que nous parlons a été et est toujours un véritable complexe national.

Definition du joual

LE TERME a été inventé par André Laurendeau dans un éditorial du *Devoir* du 21 octobre 1959, et vraiment lancé par le frère Untel dans ses *Insolences*. Pour

celui-ci, "joual" est un terme de mépris pour désigner la pauvreté du parler français au Canada. Le joual, c'est une langue de primitifs qui manifeste, de façon éclatante, notre inaptitude à nous affirmer, notre refus de l'avenir, notre obsession du passé, la faiblesse de notre culture. Grâce au frère Untel, le mot a connu une fortune extraordinaire, mais aussi une extension qui l'a presque vidé de tout contenu. Le joual est devenu tout ce qui n'est pas du "bon" français. Et même sur une définition aussi vague et aussi vaste on ne s'entend pas, car Victor-Lévy Beaulieu affirme que, pour lui, "le joual, c'est toute, y compris le français."[2] Cette confusion regrettable est à la source de bien des malentendus. Les linguistes ont bien raison d'éviter ce terme. Comment une métonymie pourrait-elle fonder un discours scientifique?

Dans cette étude, le joual désignera l'utilisation littéraire du parler populaire des classes ouvrières du Quebec mais surtout de la ville de Montréal, parler qui a certes des racines paysannes et qui manifeste les caractéristiques de tout parler populaire, mais qui a aussi subi la forte influence de l'adstrat américain.

Grandeurs et misères du joual

LA 6E RENCONTRE des Ecrivains, en mais 1968, fut l'occasion pour un certain nombre d'écrivains et de critiques de réfléchir ensemble sur la phénomène du joual. L'intérêt de cet échange est qu'il s'est fait entre ceux qui sont à l'origine du mouvement du joual et qui en sont, encore aujourd'hui, les meilleurs théoriciens. Les rédacteurs de *Parti pris*, après avoir lancé le mouvement, ont pu expliquer clairement sa nature idéologique et ne se sont pas fait d'idées sur sa portée littéraire. La surestimation du joual sera surtout le fait d'une autre génération d'écrivains et de toute une série de badauds de la littérature. Il est à noter également que cette réflexion n'avait rien de définitif, bien que la plupart des participants à cette rencontre aient parlé du joual comme d'un phénomène déjà au passé. Cette même année, Michel Tremblay devait relancer le débat avec *Les Belles Soeurs*.

La littérature pour le groupe *Parti pris* avait un "rôle éminent à jouer": "éclairer la situation réelle: d'une part les gens du peuple québécois et deuxièmement la langue qu'ils parlaient. (...) Il s'agissait de montrer les choses telles qu'elles étaient, d'utiliser la langue telle qu'elle se parlait."[3] Le joual avait donc un double but. Tout d'abord d'essayer de faire le lien entre l'homme d'ici, son milieu et la langue qu'il parle, et ensuite de provoquer une réflexion socio-politique. C'est ainsi que Gaston Miron, réfléchissant sur sa propre expérience dans le milieu ambivalent de Sainte-Agathe, décrit le divorce aliénant qui existe, au niveau de la langue et de la culture québecoises, entre le "dedans", la vie intime et familiale en français, et le "dehors", le monde extérieur et anglais.

Ou bien on continue de former des hommes comme ça, dissociés, séparés, divisés en

> eux-mêmes, ou bien on les rend adéquats à la réalité. Le joual a été justement cette espèce de solution de désespoir et aussi de compassion, d'amour, pour rendre adéquat un homme à son milieu et à sa réalité ... on a essayé d'objectiver, de faire voir, de montrer aux gens ce qu'ils étaient. Ils étaient vus: ou ils s'acceptaient ou ils devaient changer et on en est toujours à se demander si on doit s'accepter ou changer.[4]

Mais Miron estime que le Québec n'a pas la masse linguistique pour pousser dans le sens du joual. C'est aussi l'opinion du sociologue Jean-Charles Falardeau qui estime qu'il doit y avoir, au Québec, dialectique du joual et du français.

> Nous sommes dans une aventure de recherche d'une identité. Le phénomène joual représente un effort ultime de possession du fond de nous-mêmes, ce qui nous exprime de façon viscérale, de façon très spontanée. (...) Et je vois le phénomène de l'utilisation et de la civilisation du joual comme une sorte de thérapie collective, d'une psychanalyse que nous avons faite de nous-mêmes, qui nous a fait voir, à partir du fond de nous-mêmes, notre fond d'où il faut surgir, qu'il faut assumer mais qui n'est pas une fin en soi, qui est un cul de sac si l'on s'y complaît, si l'on y demeure.[5]

Ainsi le joual serait une espèce de catharsis entreprise par un groupe de jeunes écrivains. Il y aurait, toutefois, le danger de surestimer le joual, ainsi que le fait Michèle Lalonde lorsqu'elle dit que le joual "est ce qu'on a de plus précieux comme matériau en tant qu'écrivain du point de vue de l'invention et du langage"[6] et qui cite à l'appui la merveilleuse invention verbale que peut faire Hubert Aquin à partir du juron. Les écrivains de *Parti pris* ne s'étaient jamais livrés à une telle surestimation. Ils avaient conscience qu'écrire en joual, cétait poser un geste politique, c'était avant tout dresser le poing. Le joual était politique avant d'être littéraire. *Parti pris* affirmait avec force que vouloir changer la langue sans changer la société ou sauver la langue sans le peuple était une fumisterie.[7] Le problème était politique avant tout et l'aliénation québecoise exigeait une réponse radicale: socialisme, indépendance, laïcisme.

Réalisme littéraire, catharsis, recherche et mise à nu, en blasphémant, d'une identité douloureuse et d'une existence malheureuse, geste politique: c'est à Gérald Godin qu'il revient d'exprimer cela de la façon la plus lapidaire:

> cette langue était en positif et est encore en positif le décalque de notre originalité en terre d'Amérique. Et en négatif le reflet de notre situation de colonisés.[8]

Jacques Renaud

CELUI QUI ÉTAIT en grande partie responsable de toute la querelle du joual avant que Tremblay ne devienne le plus illustre Joualonais était Jacques Renaud. En 1964, avec son petit livre *Le Cassé*, il avait non seulement fait sensation, il avait aussi créé une oeuvre d'une réelle valeur littéraire. On sait peu de choses de Renaud lui-même. Dans une interview avec Jean Bouthillette, toutefois, il s'est

expliqué sur l'époque du *Cassé* et son état d'esprit au moment de sa composition. C'était avant tout, pour lui, une période tragique, chargée d'angoisse. Bien qu'il n'ait pas participé comme tel aux événements de ce temps, il avait une conscience aiguë des heures troubles et des déchirements pénibles de la société québecoise: chômage, bombes du FLQ, aliénation de la jeunesse.

> Et pendant trois jours et trois nuits, j'ai écrit, ne m'arrêtant que pour manger. Et ça sorti d'un jet, comme dans le livre: mon horreur de la société, ma solitude, ma misère physique et morale, ma révolte contre le fait qu'il y ait des riches et des pauvres, contre la femme et l'amour irréalisable. J'ai tout craché. J'étais le Cassé et je frappais. Si je n'avais pas écrit ce livre, le vrai Bouboule je l'aurais tué. Et d'autres ... [...] J'étais au bout de mon rouleau. J'avais tout mis dans le *Cassé*, qui fut comme l'expérience de l'enfer.[9]

André Major a donc raison d'insister sur le fait que *Le Cassé* soit en grande partie une catharsis qui a valeur de document social.

> Renaud, lui, voulait non pas renouveler la langue française, ce qu'il n'eût osé faire, mais témoigner d'une réalité sociale qui l'écoeurait. Qu'on fasse de son livre une oeuvre de styliste l'agacerait beaucoup. Il a produit un document social, comme Lemelin, mais à cette différence près qu'il écrit comme parlent ses personnages.[10]

Laurent Girouard l'affirme aussi, d'une façon un peu plus brutale: "La marde dépouillée de son exotisme dans la face des bourgeois. Sans distinction."[11] Renaud lui-même, d'ailleurs, n'a guère insisté sur la langue ou le style du *Cassé*:

> Avec le recul, je dirais que *Le Cassé* est une oeuvre maudite. C'est de l'art, mais à rebours, si je puis dire. C'est de l'art parce qu'il y a création, récupération de la réalité par l'imaginaire. Mais en même temps ça nie l'art. *Le Cassé* est nihiliste. C'est un moment de ma vie. Et quant au joual, sur lequel on a beaucoup glosé, ce n'est surtout pas un style mais un mode de penser, un mode d'être. Le joual, c'est plus que le seul langage du Cassé, c'est sa condition de paria. Le joual est le langage à la fois de la révolte et de la soumission, de la colère et de l'impuissance. C'est un non-langage et une dénonciation.[12]

Mais il ne faut pas toujours se fier révélations des écrivains, surtout lorsqu'-ils parlent d'eux-mêmes. Car d'un côté, Renaud voudrait nous faire croire qu'il n'a guère réfléchi à la langue de son récit qui s'est imposée d'elle-même, tout naturellement:

> On a pensé que j'avais prémédité un livre en joual. Je ne m'étais même pas aperçu que c'était en joual. C'était un livre en plusieurs langues.[13]

Mais par ailleurs, il admet que l'élaboration de la langue du *Cassé* fut un labeur conscient, une recherche de styliste qui essayait d'atteindre un objectif, d'obéir à des impératifs de réalisme psychologique et littéraire et d'honnêteté intellectuelle.

> J'ai commencé à écrire par réaction à tout ce qui était étranger ici. (...) Le lien se faisait mal entre ce que j'entendais tous les jours, dans la rue et au restaurant, et ce que j'écoutais à la radio ou lisais. Alors je me suis mis à transcrire phonétiquement les conversations, à traduire du français au québecois. (...) Et lentement, ce qui était volontaire est devenu naturel. A cette époque, je n'aurais pas pu écrire en bon français.[14]

> Des fois je m'avance voluptueusement dans une phrase bien tournée, tout ce qu'il y a de bien français, avec des mots beaux comme le ciel, beaux comme un clair de lune en Gaspésie, beaux comme une fille de seize ans. Puis je me rétracte. Je la triture, je la brise, je la concasse la phrase, je ne sais pas pourquoi. C'est peut-être la peur que j'ai de plonger dans le crachoir du faux. Parce que les beaux mots, on s'en sert surtout pour amadouer ses futures victimes. Vous connaissez le truc. Et si c'était de l'hypocrisie, les beaux mots, les belles phrases, l'esthétisme, les catins?[15]

Délibérément, Renaud a donc essayé de trouver le mot juste, le style précis qui ferait le mieux vivre ses personnages, les exprimerait avec le plus de vigueur et forcerait le lecteur à vivre de l'intérieur leur révolte, leur soumission, leur douleur. S'identifiant à eux, il réclame d'ailleurs pour lui le droit à la même langue qu'eux, puisque lui aussi est montréalais et que sa révolte ne s'exprime pas naturellement dans la "langue de Camus".[16] Dans cette recherche d'un langage authentique, Renaud reconnaît certains devanciers, Laberge surtout, mais aussi Gauvreau et Richard qui ont produit des oeuvres fortes et valables. Ces écrivains ont transché le pseudo-dilemme de la langue littéraire à employer au Québec en faisant confiance à leur poussée créatrice et en se disant que le talent précède toujours la correction jusqu'à ce qu'un grand écrivain vienne résoudre la question.

Les trois jours et trois nuits de la rédaction du *Cassé* furent donc un moment de cristallisation: sous l'effet d'une crise profonde, l'oeuvre est sortie "comme un jet", mais pendant assez longtemps Renaud avait muri et préparé son outil, un outil qui devait répondre à certains impératifs. Cette langue devait exprimer viscéralement des parias; elle devait mettre à nu leur pauvreté, leur aliénation, leur misère. Elle devait être aussi brutale mais aussi expressive qu'un juron, et provoquer les mêmes réactions. Elle devait, en somme, répondre à trois critères que Renaud prend soin d'annoncer dans l'introduction du *Cassé*: la concision, la vérité, la vitalité. D'ailleurs le seul fait qu-il fasse précéder son récit d'un bref exposé sur les difficultés d'écrire vrai et juste et sur l'impossibilité de cerner la vie avec les mots nous indique jusqu'à quel point il avait hautement conscience de faire oeuvre d'écrivain, de travailler un texte avant tout, de faire face à un problème d'écriture.

Il convient donc d'analyser de près l'écriture de Renaud pour voir comment il a fait l'utilisation littéraire de la langue qu'il a trouvée dans la rue et qui colle à la peau de tout Québecois. Un court extrait de quelques pages[17] nous permet de voir l'essentiel de la langue de Renaud.

La langue de Ti-Jean

IL Y A, dans cet extrait comme tout au long de la nouvelle, deux niveaux de langue: celui des personnages, et les interventions du narrateur. Le monologue de Ti-Jean d'abord.

A la lumière de cet extrait, le joual littéraire obtiendrait ses effets de vérisme en jouant sur deux plans surtout: le vocabulaire et la prononciation. L'utilisation des diminutifs ou des sobriquets (Ti-Jean, Bouboule, Mémène) crée un climat de familiarité qui est propre à tous les parlers populaires; cette familiarité, toutefois, ne va pas sans une certaine volonté d'hermétisme (les sobriquets ne sont connus que des initiés), et a aussi son côté de vulgarité gouailleuse. A certains moments, Ti-Jean s'appelle lui-même "Ti-Cul Ti-Jean" (p. 76). De plus, au Canada français, il faut noter que la passion des diminutifs est un véritable reflexe conditionné, qui obéit à des lois mystérieuses, surtout dans le cas des prénoms masculins. On ajoute habituellement "Ti-" devant ces prénoms, mais quelquefois la transformation est plus subtile: ainsi tous les Jacques au Canada français portent le nom Coco à un moment donné. Il n'est pas surprenant non plus que Philomène devienne spontanément Mémène, même pour Berthe qui ne la connaît pas et qui est instruite: "Philomène . . . c'est rare . . . Mémène . . . Oui, c'est ça . . . Mémène . . . C'est beaucoup plus joli . . ." (p. 20.)

Puisque le Cassé est un paria, il n'est pas étonnant qu'il fasse un usage judicieux de grossièretés et d'obscénités. Plus que tout autre trait linguistique, l'obscénité marque à la fois la pauvreté de la langue d'un personnage et la vigueur d'un comportement rebelle et iconoclaste. Dans ce texte de deux pages on compte environ 14 jurons, surtout d'origine religieuse (7), dont "crisse" 3 fois et "hostie" 2 fois, mais aussi d'origine animale, avec prédilection pour "chien" ou "chienne" (3 fois). Quelquefois il s'agit tout simplement de vulgarités ("morviat") et, ailleurs dans l'oeuvre, de termes scatologiques ("gorgotons", "pisser", "chier") ou reliés aux parties génitales ("plote", "poche", "botte", "boîte", "pelotes", "gosses" . . .). Ce vocabulaire particulier accomplit, à volonté, toutes les fonctions grammaticales dans la phrase: en apostrophe ("L'hostie, j'lai pitchée dehors . . .", "La chienne"), comme épitèthe ("un petit crisse de morviat"), exclamation ("C'est ça, calvaire . . ."), attribut ("Pis est cochonne . . ."). Le sacre dans le parler de Ti-Jean est dynamique, éclatant et bien senti, mais il n'est pas particulièrement original et n'a pas tellement de verdeur. Bouboule dans *La Bagarre* de Bessette manifest plus de vitalité linguistique à cet égard.[18]

Le joual de Renaud fait aussi appel aux anglicismes et aux canadianismes, mais en nombre plutôt limité. Les anglicismes dans ce texte sont "pitchée" (2 fois), "bomme", "dôpe" et les canadianismes: "maquereau" au sens de coureur de jupons plutôt que de proxénète, "prélart", "regardable", et peut-être "morviat". Mais il est intéressant de noter que les mots anglais trouvent une orthographe plus

ou moins française ("bomme", "dôpe") et même se plient à la syntaxe française ("j'lai pitchée . . ."). Il y a donc effort pour incorporer des éléments étrangers à un ensemble qui est essentiellement français.

Mais si l'orthographe sert ainsi à donner un visage français à quelques mots anglais, il faut dire que l'orthographe plus ou moins phonétique qu'emploie Renaud vise davantage à une désarticulation de la prononciation française. Cela est normal: toute orthographe phonétique dans une oeuvre littéraire signale la volonté de recréer le parlé par opposition à l'écrit, donc choix niveau "inférieur" de langue. Par l'orthographe, Renaud insiste sur un relâchement articulatoire, une paresse verbale qui est peut-être le signe le plus distinctif du joual (c'est ainsi que cheval est devenu joual, d'ailleurs). Les procédés ici sont assez simples et quelques-uns même ne sont pas particuliers au joual mais se retrouvent dans tout français parlé. Ainsi pour l'élision du *e* en position interconsonantique ("ça m'fait du bien", "on dirait qu'ça vide", "j'lai", "ça fait pas d'bruit" . . .). L'élision du *l* dans "plus" et dans les articles "la" et "les" ("casser a yeule", "péter a face", "tous é deux"), l'élimination d'un certain nombre de diphtongues ("pis" pour "puis", "ben" pour "bien"), la compression des pronoms "il" et "lui" en "y" et du pronom "elle" en "a", le *oi* qui se prononce toujours *wé* ("vouéyons", "moé", "toé"), le *un* qui se prononce *in*, plus nasal et plus mou, et surtout les fausses liaisons ("chus-t'in maquereau"), les interrogations avec un "tu" abusif ("chus-tu jaloux?") et des compressions articulatoires particulières (je vais lui > "m'as d'y") semblent plus caractéristiques du joual. Mais aucun de ces procédés n'est révolutionnaire, ni même propre au joual. Ils se retrouvent tous dans *Trente arpents* sauf l'emploi abusif du pronom deuxième personne en inversion lorsqu'il s'agit d'interrogations à la première ou à la troisième personne. Mais est-ce là vraiment un canadianisme ou quelque chose de particulier au joual. Dans le français populaire il y a la particule interrogative *ti*, tirée du *t* de la troisième personne verbale combiné avec le pronom *il* (vient-il) qui est employée à la première personne (J'y va-ti). Au Canada, selon les différences régionales, ce *ti* se prononcerait *tu* ou *ti*, sans plus: plutôt *tu* selon Renaud, plutôt *ti* selon Ringuet ("C'est-y toé, Charis?"[19]). Il y a évidemment dans *Le Cassé* une accumulation qu'on ne retrouve pas dans des oeuvres antérieures, mais pour comprendre les violentes controverses qui ont entouré cette oeuvre, il faut sans doute regarder au-delà de sa langue vers la réalité qu'elle décrit. Elle charrie, certes, un certain nombre de grossièretés, mais la représentation qu'elle donne de la prononciation n'est pas absolument nouvelle.

Au niveau de la syntaxe, il n'y a presque rien. Laurent Girouard a parlé d'une "désarticulation des structures grammaticales",[20] mais de fait, dans cet extrait, il n'y a que l'élision du "ne" négatif comme dans le français parlé ailleurs et les interrogations avec ce *tu* abusif. Ces "erreurs" sont causées par le relâchement de la prononciation plus que par les pourrissement total de la langue des personnages.

Il y a, ailleurs dans la nouvelle, un certain nombre de calques comme "cassé" "faire du pouce", "casser avec lui", mais le plus grand nombre d'anglicismes se situent au niveau du lexique: des mots simples qui sont incorporés à la langue et francisés, tant dans leur prononciation que dans leur orthographe (trenche, mâchemallo, djobbe, roffe, spîtche, bomme, tchesteurfilde, sprigne, pitché . . .). Les phrases dans cet extrait comme ailleurs dans le texte sont simples, dépouillées et s'accumulent par simple juxtaposition. L'absence de charnières et de complexité grammaticale crée l'effet d'une pauvreté navrante au niveau de la conceptualisation et de l'articulation mais on ne peut guère reprocher à ces phrases d'obéir à une syntaxe qui ne soit pas fondamentalement française. Ces phrases obéissent à l'art d'écrire de Renaud: un style collé à la vie, concis et vrai, dépouillé de tout embellissement, un style appauvri volontairement pour décrire avec vérité des personnages qui sont de pauvres êtres.

En somme, le joual de Renaud, quand il fait parler ses personnages, se situerait au niveau du vocabulaire et de l'orthographe qui vise à la transcription la plus phonétique possible d'une langue parlée. Cette langue parlée n'est pas absolument différente de celle qu'on retrouve dans les meilleurs romans du terroir écrits trente ans auparavant et consacrés depuis. La valeur de choc du joual résiderait donc avant tout dans l'emploi judicieux d'un vocabulaire vulgaire et scandaleux: jurons, grossièretés, "sacres".

Il faut noter, en terminant cet aperçu de la langue des personnages, que ce joual n'est pas toujours opératoire. Renaud francise un bon nombre de mots anglais et habituellement cela ne cause pas de problèmes particuliers au lecteur. Toutefois, à cause de l'identité du son et du signe dans un mot, quelquefois cette francisation produit une confusion qui n'existerait pas si le mot était écrit en anglais. C'est le cas pour "gagne" (p. 27) qui déroute un peu, d'autant plus qu'on trouvait "gang" à la page 9. Le meilleur exemple se trouve à la page 29, avec le mot "bonneseur": "une espèce de bonneseur a défoncé la porte de l'appartement". Cette francisation est trop près de "bonne soeur" et le lecteur se demande bien ce qu'une religieuse vient faire dans cette histoire. La confusion est d'autant plus aisée qu'auparavant Bouboule pense de Ti-Jean: "il y en a pour qui le cul remplace l'hostie. Il n'y en a qu'un qui a le droit d'y toucher. Ce sont des curés manqués." (p. 27). Est-ce que Ti-Jean qui était comparé à un curé serait maintenant comparé à une religieuse? Non, car il s'agit de "bouncer", fier-à-bras.

La langue de narrateur

N'EN DÉPLAISE à M. Bessette, la langue du narrateur ne saurait se confondre avec celle des personnages.[21] C'est une langue, sinon châtiée, du moins correcte et assez évocatrice dans cet extrait: "le froissement tiède d'une auto qui monte la

côte"; "petite grêle de tabac, petite grêle imperceptible, bruine de tabac blond sur le prélart". Ailleurs, dans la nouvelle, son choix de mots n'est pas du tout à la portée de ses personnages: "on récidive" (p. 9), "bruine" (p. 14), "porte-persienne" (p. 14), "plancher concave", "strapontin" (p. 16), "glapir" (p. 22), "craquelures" (p. 37), et même on pourrait le dire recherché dans un contexte québecois: "stoppé" (p. 17, 23) et "parking" (p. 27), par exemple, sont d'un usage beaucoup plus français que québecois. Renaud réclame pour lui le droit d'employer la même langue que ses personnages mais de fait sa langue se maintient à un autre palier. On y retrouve sensiblement les mêmes qualités de style: rythme haché, vivace, dépouillé, et phrases procédant par simple juxtaposition, mais les seules véritables concessions au joual sont quelques mots anglais ici et là, la transcription phonétique de quelques autres mots, quelques canadianismes et l'élision presque constante du "ne" négatif. Le text d'introduction, qui se situe à l'extérieur de la nouvelle, va un peu plus loin avec la contraction de "il n'y a pas" en "y a pas". Si l'on examine, par exemple, le début de la nouvelle, dans trois pages de texte narratif il n'y a que deux mots obscènes ("cul", "crisser"), un mot anglais ("plywood"), quelques canadianismes ("piasses", "coquerelle", "bébite"), l'élision d'un *e* ("d'partir") et l'élimination d'une diphtongue ("pis"). Mais le "ne" négatif n'est élidé que deux fois alors qu'il est conservé cinq fois. De plus, un certain nombre de mots choisis situent ce texte à un niveau d'articulation que ne peuvent atteindre les personnages: "literie", "repue", "porte-persienne" (4 fois), "bruine", "partance", "encastré", "délayer", "bruineuse", "concave" ...

Renaud maintient donc volontairement une distance entre le narrateur et les personnages. Cette distance n'est pas créée seulement par une réelle différence de niveau de style. Elle se crée aussi et se renforce par les interventions du narrateur dans le récit. Au nombre de cinq, ces interventions sont soit une interpellation du lecteur (4 fois), soit une interpellation du narrateur lui-même.

> Vous pouvez-vous les procurer dans les restaurants, les cigares à Philomène. (p. 25.)
>
> Le lecteur s'attend sans doute à une description cochonne. Qu'il se réfère à ses expériences personnelles ou à défaut de celles-ci, qu'il sacre. (p. 25.)
>
> Le lecteur s'attend sans doute à une conversation lascive et perverse suivie d'une orgie lesbienne dans un appartement. Qu'il sacre. (p. 26.)
>
> Le lecteur s'attend sans doute à ce que je lui dise que Ti-Jean a la nostalgie d'une certaine sécurité matérielle. Ou plus exactement d'une certaine stabilité. Ca lui est impossible. (p. 30.)
>
> Mais Ti-Jean n'est pas le genre à raconter sa vie à tout le monde. Le narrateur devrait se mêler de ses affaires. C'est ce qu'il va faire. Il est écrivain. (p. 31.)

Ces intrusions brisent l'atmosphère du récit. Elles sont d'autant plus habiles à le faire qu'elles sont groupées ensemble, au début du récit, ce qui le départ ferme

cet univers au lecteur, installe celui-ci comme extérieur au monde décrit et brise toute velléité d'insertion psychologique. Le lecteur est défini comme témoin.

L'utilisation que fait Renaud du joual est d'un grand intérêt et marque réellement un moment important dans l'histoire de la littérature québecoise. Non seulement parce que sa tentative s'appuie sur un fondement idéologique précis (le mouvement *Parti pris*, qui à la fois fonde, justifie, et explicite ce qu'il y a de révolutionnaire et de valable dans ces oeuvres en joual), mais aussi parce que son oeuvre est d'une grande authenticité. Ayant choisi d'aller jusqu'au bout de son parti pris de vérité et de réalisme dans la description de ses personnages — tant dans leur parler que dans leur vécu — il n'accepte aucun compromis et jamais on ne sent, dans cette oeuvre, une tentative d'édulcorer cette réalité accablante.

Malheureusement, le décalage entre le narrateur et les personnages, entre les deux niveaux de style, et les hiatus du récit causés par les intrusions du narrateur brisent l'unité de l'oeuvre et réduisent sensiblement son impact. Le narrateur ne s'identifie pas aux personnages: ils sont des cas, il est le clinicien. Le joual pour eux est une condition d'existence, mais pour lui une arme, un étendard qu'il peut brandir à volonté, la défroque qu'il peut choisir de revêtir ou non. Il y a donc une alternative pour le critique. Voir *Le Cassé* comme un pamphlet qui s'adresse aux intellectuels et bourgeois pour les "faire ch . . ."[22], les écoeurer: à ce moment, l'entreprise littéraire n'est pas primordiale et on ne saurait reprocher à Renaud de prendre tous les moyens pour aiguillonner ses lecteurs et les faire réagir. Mais il est évident que *Le Cassé* est plus que cela, qu'il y a ici "création, récupération de la réalité par l'imaginaire", oeuvre littéraire. Le décalage entre les deux styles et les interprellations du narrateur sont donc de graves défauts d'écriture. Ils empêchent le lecteur de vivre pleinement de l'intérieur ce monde de misère, et tendent à ramener le joual à ce qu'était le parler populaire dans les oeuvres antérieures à *Parti pris*: une technique d'écriture qui cherche non plus des effets de pittoresque ou de vérité romanesque, mais plutôt des effets de scandale assez faciles.

En effet, c'est ce que nous avons pu constater en examinant l'écriture du *Cassé*. Le joual ici, malgré valeurs de choc, n'est pas absolument différent de ce que l'on trouve dans des oeuvres qui précèdent de trente ans *Le Cassé*. Il y a simplement beaucoup plus de sacres, et il y est beaucoup question de sexe en termes crus et violents. Il semble donc que le joual, dans l'esprit du public qui a si mal reçu *Le Cassé*,[23] soit davantage une question de réalité décrite que d'habitudes linguistiques.

NOTES

[1] Claude Jasmin, *Jasmin*, Montréal, C. Langevin, 1970, p. 97.

[2] Martial Dassylva, *Victor-Lévy Beaulieu aux prises avec le théâtre et le joual*, *La Presse*, 26-1-1974, D4.

[3] Gérald Godin, dans *Liberté*, mai-juin 1968, X, 3, p. 92.

[4] Gaston Miron, dans *Liberté*, *op. cit.*, p. 101.

[5] *op. cit.*, p. 98.

[6] *op. cit.*, p. 95.

[7] Cf. surtout G. Godin, *Le joual politique*, *Parti pris*, vol. 2, no. 7, mars 1965, p. 57-59, et André Brochu, *D'un faux dilemne*, *Parti pris*, vol. 2, no. 8, avril 1965, p. 58-59. On a toujours cherché à ignorer ce truisme. Il ne se passe pas un congrès regroupant des Canadiens français sans que l'on fasse appel à la "purification" de la langue. Le rapport de la Commission no. 23: Le milieu ouvrier, au 13e congrès de l'ACELF (1960), est, à ce sujet, exemplaire. Dirigée par Jean Marchand et Fernand Jolicoeur, cette commission note que toute la vie économique au Québec est anglaise mais invite les congressistes à y infuser du français avec ce pieux souhait: "il faut croire au miracle".

[8] G. Godin, *Liberté*, *op. cit.*, p. 94.

[9] Jean Bouthillette, *Le Cassé, c'était l'enfer*, *Perspectives*, *La Presse*, 11 nov. 1967.

[10] André Major, *Le Petit Journal*, 8 août 1965.

[11] Laurent Girouard, *En lisant le Cassé*, *Parti pris*, vol. 2, no. 4, déc. 1964, p. 62.

[12] Jean Bouthillette, *op. cit.*

[13] Luc Latour, *Quoi et Jacques Renaud*, *Le Quartier Latin*, 23 fév. 1967.

[14] Jean Bouthillette, *op. cit.*

[15] Jacques Renaud, *Comme tout le monde ou le postscriptum*, *Parti pris*, vol. 2, no. 5, janv. 1965, p. 21-22.

[16] *loc. cit.*

[17] Jacques Renaud, *Le Cassé*, Montréal, *Parti pris*, 1964 et 1968, (3e édition), p. 42-45. Quand il sera nécessaire, pour éclaircir un point ou compléter un aperçu, de sortir des cadres de cet extrait, la page de référence suivra immédiatement la citation entre parenthèses.

[18] "R'marque ben c'que j'te dzis, Bill: si ça contsinue, ils vont les remplir de marde, nos chârs, pis ils vont nous faire netteyer ça avec not'e langue. Du goudron, ça entre dans l'bois, ça enfonce creux, t'a pas d'idée, sarpent! . . . Pis v'là-t-y pas que c'maudit râleux de liche-cul de Levesque, v'là-t-y pas qu'il vient me dire que c'est pas assez net. Il faudrait, mon cher, passer un mal chié comme ça dans l'omulin à viande! . . ."
Gérard Bessette, *La Bagarre*, Montréal, Le cercle du livre de France, 1958, p. 44-45.

[19] Ringuet, *Trente arpents*, Montréal, Fides, Coll. du Nénuphar, 1966, p. 23.

[20] *op. cit.*

[21] G. Bessette dit de V.-L. Beaulieu qu'il est "moins audacieux que Jacques Renaud qui, dans *Le Cassé*, joualise autant dans la partie narrative (à la 3e personne) que dans les dialogues." (*Trois romanciers québécois*, Montréal, Ed. du Jour, 1973, p. 110). M. Bessette a manifestement oublié *Le Cassé*.

[22] Normand Cloutier, *Le scandale du joual*, *Le Magazine Maclean*, vol. 6, no. 2, fév. 1966, p. 30.

[23] Il y a même une "affaire" *Le Cassé*. Cf. Robert Barberis, *De la clique des Simard à Paul Desrochers . . . en passant par le joual*, Montréal, Ed. québécoises, 1973, 159 p.

AFTER THE INCAS

J. A. Wainwright

The *hatunruna*'s* still-life
is silent jungle-deep
and just around the mountain-side
from this articulated railway
that slowly climbs to Machu Pichu
bearing its inveterate load
of *touristes imperialismos*
who have always climbed mountains
because they're there

and when they read you had
no horses, cows, or pigs
they are surprised
and think you vegetarian
no wheels to travel over
no glass through which to view
the absent arch they frown
and hope you not uncivilized
but when they learn you tied
your ropes in knots
to keep the score
and could not write your names
they smile relieved and point
to Machu Pichu where
three thousand Indians once died
beneath a single rock

and sagely nod
at this deciphered rune
the length of rope involved
and ultimate X
(forged face of gods)
true signature in stone

* the common people

A NEGLECTED THEME IN *Two Solitudes*

Warren Stevenson

IT HAS BECOME almost a commonplace of criticism of Hugh MacLennan's *Two Solitudes* to say that the novel succeeds brilliantly up to the end of the twenty-ninth chapter, portraying the death of Athanase Tallard, but is less convincing in the last twenty-three chapters portraying the symbolic resolution of the theme in the education and maturation of the members of the second generation, Paul Tallard and Heather Methuen, and their eventual marriage. The following quotation from critic George Woodcock is in this respect typical: "If *Two Solitudes* had ended with Tallard's death, it would have been a moving and cohesive book. But up to this point it merely presents the problem of racial relations; it does not have the logical completeness of presenting a solution, and this MacLennan seeks, at the expense of his novel, in its later chapters."[1] I think the time has come for a reassessment of this position. To my knowledge, the only critic who has dissented from the majority view of the concluding chapters of *Two Solitudes* is Robert D. Chambers, who observes:

> The second half of *Two Solitudes* has been criticized as over-written and unconvincing, and it is interesting to note that MacLennan has allowed some pruning for the paperback and school editions. Nevertheless, the latter parts of the novel carry through his vigorous assault on the pillars of Canadian respectability, and his closing picture of intelligent Canadian youth facing with tolerance and humanity the problems of their generation seems made of stuff that will adhere.[2]

It has also become a commonplace of criticism of *Two Solitudes* that "the idea of Canadian unity becomes the main symbolic theme,"[3] which MacLennan attempts to embody in the lives of his characters. Without pretending to deny the primacy of the theme of Canadian self-awareness and unity, I would like to suggest that the novel contains an important subsidiary theme which most critics have overlooked and which helps to unify the novel. I refer to the theme of individual self-awareness, worked out in terms of a contrast between two types of persons, those who learn to come to terms with what MacLennan calls "the ultimate soli-

tude" and those who don't. The title thus has another dimension than the French-English dichotomy to which it is usually applied. The quotation from Rilke which constitutes the novel's epigraph is an important clue to its meaning: "Love consists in this, that two solitudes protect, and touch, and greet each other." Rilke was almost certainly referring to individuals, not societies, though it would be pedantry to attempt to limit the range of applicability of the quotation; and the novel's dedication which precedes the epigraph, "To Dorothy Duncan with admiration and love," suggests that MacLennan was also thinking of individuals and their personal relationships.

To anticipate my argument briefly: those characters in the novel who learn to come to terms with "the ultimate solitude" are most notably Captain Yardley, Paul Tallard, and Heather Methuen, who becomes Paul's wife. The characters who most dramatically fail to come to terms with the ultimate solitude are Athanase Tallard, his second wife Kathleen, his son by his first marriage Marius, such satiric figures as Huntly McQueen, General Methuen, et al, and Janet Methuen. Of Captain Yardley MacLennan writes:

> Though Yardley had never had an academic education, he had slowly learned how to read books and how to think. As a sailor, and then as a ship's master, he had known solitude in strange places. He was persuaded that all knowledge is like a painted curtain hung across the door of the mind to conceal from it a mystery so darkly suggestive that no one can face it alone for long. Of ultimate solitude he had no fear, for he never let himself think about it. But he knew that if he once started, fear would be there.

With its overtones of T. S. Eliot's concept that most people cannot bear very much reality, this passage may seem to contradict rather than confirm my argument. But clearly, Yardley has learned how to handle solitude and the fear which lurks within the recesses of the human mind surrounding the "mystery."

The passage I have quoted is followed by a longer one in which Yardley reminisces about an experience in the tropics, when he spent an afternoon leaning over the taffrail and watching sharks and barracuda "gliding through ten fathoms of sunlit water below. . . . Self-centred, beautiful, dangerous and aimless: that was how they had been, and he could never forget it." In this symbolically important passage, the sharks and barracuda represent the undirected passions. One is reminded of the beautiful, dangerous (for Athanase), and fundamentally self-centred and aimless Kathleen, gliding about the Tallard seignory house. Like Athanase, she is basically lacking in self-knowledge. One is also reminded of Marius Tallard, who is described as follows addressing an anti-conscription meeting:

> Marius Tallard was drunk with a new knowledge of himself. He stood in the big hall before the meeting with his feet apart, swaying from the hips, his arms folded across his chest. Now and then his right arm shot out and the long fingers of his hand wove gestures in the air. His white teeth flashed rare and bitter smiles in his white face. His black hair was loose on his long, narrow skull. He pulled emotion out of the crowd and threw it back at them.

Marius' white teeth and "long, narrow skull" remind one of the sharks and barracuda. His "new knowledge of himself" is spurious, a dangerous and deceptive substitute for the true self-knowledge of a Captain Yardley. Like the *anglais* capitalist Huntly McQueen, Marius remains fixated on the memory of his dead mother. His Oedipus complex leads him into conflict with his father and the social authority his father represents.

Marius' opposite number is of course his half brother Paul, who in the latter part of the novel reaches a truer understanding of himself as a result of his travels and writing. Yardley's words to Paul on the occasion of his father's death pick up the theme of solitude and the failure of Athanase to come to terms with it: "I tell you how it is, Paul. Your father being a Catholic again — if that's what it means, the candles and the things by the bed — well it means he got lonely and wanted to be what he'd been all his life, I guess. Or maybe it means something else so big I can't understand it." The only hint of self-knowledge on the part of Athanase is the extent to which he seems to have consciously brought Paul up as a synthesis of the two cultures.

Following the death of his father, Paul makes a symbolic ascent of Mount Royal which represents by anticipation his quest for true knowledge, including self-knowledge. The attainment of vision (in the deepest sense of the term) is portrayed symbolically in the panoramic view of Montreal which greets Paul from the summit, in the paragraph beginning: "He was breathless from his climb, but now he was on top of the mountain and could see the whole city spread out beneath him." This passage anticipates Paul's attainment of a comprehensive overview of Canadian society as it is to be expressed in his as-yet-unwritten second novel. At the end of the chapter in which this passage occurs, MacLennan indicates that an important ingredient in Paul's continuing maturation is the "loneliness" which "struck right through him." In this respect he is contrasted to his mother: "And he knew now that although her smile was as sincere as possible, it was still somehow automatic, a gesture as natural and unconscious as the sway of her hips when she walked, and that behind it her mind was a stranger."

Parallel to Paul's development is that of Heather, who impulsively leaves Huntly McQueen's pretentious dinner party and the company of the predatory Fletchers (cf. the sharks and barracuda) to make her own ascent of Mount Royal, which is contrasted to Paul's climb by being made in an automobile at night and taking her to a lower eminence of the mountain. The beneficent effects of solitude

are again suggested: "It was wonderful to be alone." At twenty-three Heather feels she has reached a crisis in her life. So far she has followed the Methuen pattern, attending school in Lausanne for two years and studying French as a social accomplishment rather than as a help to her in the province of Quebec. She has also had her debut and picked up a college degree. Unlike her sister Daphne, she has not rushed into a prestigious marriage, and her mother is beginning to consider her a social liability. Her painting, paralleling Paul's interest in writing, is her only asset other than the Methuen money, which she has not helped to earn. Unwilling to become a St. James Street wife, she finds that Canadian discrimination against women stands in the way of any career she might choose for herself except the most conventional. Her vision from the Westmount summit of the mountain, from which "only a portion of the city could be seen," parallels Paul's more comprehensive vision in its symbolic connotations and is really different rather than inferior to his, as her exclamation "Oh, lovely!" and the delicate description of the moon-coloured scene suggest.

When KATHLEEN MARRIES the American Henry Clayton, thus merging her identity in the American melting pot, Paul experiences the most intense loneliness of his life thus far: "If loneliness is a man's inability to share his feelings with another, Paul had never been as lonely in his life as he was now. The whole ceremony seemed shocking to him." As for Kathleen, whose possession represents "the only real purpose Henry Clayton had ever known," her fading physical charms are portrayed as a surrogate, a sweet substitute for a sense of inner purpose which Clayton lacks and Paul is in the process of acquiring. As MacLennan remarked earlier apropos of Athanase: "Incredible, that for most of a lifetime a man could imagine that beauty was enough, or that women could satisfy the ultimate solitude."

In contrast to Athanase, to whom women were "necessary," Paul undergoes a lengthy period of relative sexual abstinence during his European venture. Heather similarly sees through the "cold surface beauty" and "mechanical sensuality" of Daphne and Noel Fletcher. The intellectual pursuits of Paul and Heather (she is reading the post-war novelists as well as painting; he wants to be a writer) are paralleled by those of their spiritual mentor, Captain Yardley, who is interested in astronomy and, with Paul's help, begins studying Greek at seventy-six. MacLennan suggests that both Yardley and Paul are learning to come to terms with the ultimate solitude, and that for Paul the process involves physical as well as mental effort (he is a graduate of the University of Montreal and has had a brief career as a hockey player):

> For a long time now it had been growing, all through his teens, and getting steadily tighter. It woke him nearly every morning, except when he was physically exhausted after a hard game. It was more than a physical state of nerves; it was a quality of mind, breeding a kind of solitude of its own.

This may be compared with a passage earlier in the novel in which MacLennan remarks of the Canadian soldiers returning home from the First World War: "Some had learned peace through an ultimate knowledge of themselves."

The loneliness within Paul the acceptance of which leads to self-knowledge finds its objective correlative in the sense of desolation in the northern forests as he recalls a trip to Lake Superior on a lake boat:

> A sunset burned through Fort William and Port Arthur and hurled gigantic shadows of the grain elevators forward on to the trembling waters of Thunder Bay.... As night closed over the ship the colour had died, and nothing was left but the sounds of millions of shallow waves turning over in the darkness, an astringent wind keening blindly out of the empty forest to the north, the quick spatterings of lifeless fresh water whipped by the wind over the waist of the ship and wetting the deck. It was only a few days later, away from this sense of desolation in the heart of a continent, that they were passing so close to shore in eastern Ontario he could look into the windows of houses when the lights were on after dark. He had seen men reading in arm chairs and children going to bed, and once a naked woman thoughtfully combed her hair before a window, her lips open as though she were singing to herself. The ship had passed and left her there, strangely transfigured.

Here the description of the landscape reminds one of certain Group of Seven paintings, such as J. E. H. MacDonald's "The Lonely North," and the naked woman combing her hair before the window and singing like a mermaid or a wood-nymph symbolizes the spirit of the land. The result is what Robertson Davies has somewhere called a kind of northern mysticism In coming to terms with the inner loneliness, Paul is also coming to terms with the outer loneliness, and the growth of MacLennan's protagonist towards self-knowledge parallels a similar development in the young nation.

In *The Watch That Ends The Night* George Stewart makes a canoe trip to Lake Superior and likewise confronts the spirit of the lonely land, which MacLennan explicitly compares to Group of Seven paintings. This spirit finds its individual parallel in that of Catherine, who was "strangely solitary in her core," and in that of Jerome Martell, who as a boy confronted the loneliness of the New Brunswick forests. The repetition of the quotation from Rilke in the later novel, and George Stewart's statement that "She [Catherine] and I had protected and touched and greeted each other reasonably well in the past nine years, but Jerome was a part of her core," show that each of the three protagonists is invested with a measure of the solitude that characterizes the theme of the earlier novel. And when Jerome tells George that Catherine "must be enabled to live her own death"

and makes it possible for George "to live her death with her," the concept of losing one's life in order to gain it is given a radically Christian emphasis which contrasts with the more existential treatment of the theme in *Two Solitudes*.

WHEN PAUL SHIPS OUT of Halifax harbour aboard a merchantman, he seems to be trying to emulate Captain Yardley, his spiritual father. But Paul's travels are also a kind of preparation for his vocation as a writer, a self-chosen period of solitude. They are also a way of testing his love for Heather. In a hotel bar in Athens Paul witnesses a scene involving a German seducing a French woman which seems symbolic of the changing face of European society, and may be contrasted to the nude Canadian woman singing to herself. Following this scene, MacLennan describes Paul's recurring feeling of loneliness: "the city surrounded him like a giant presence of loneliness. It was no new feeling; most of his life he had known it, and now it was recurring again like a periodic disease. . . . He wondered if Heather had ever felt as he did now. Two solitudes in the infinite waste of loneliness under the sun." This is the only occurrence in the novel other than the title and the epigraph of the phrase "two solitudes"; and it is significant that, in its context, it refers not primarily to the fact that Paul is of French and Heather of English extraction, but to the existential and individual aloneness which both characters are learning independently to face as part of maturation. The passage from which I have just quoted ends with Paul rejecting the opportunity to have a casual affair with a woman sitting at a nearby table, and the statement: "He wasn't equal to that kind of loneliness today." Again, there is the solitude of those who learn to come to terms with their existential loneliness, and the solitude of those who don't. MacLennan suggests that the latter kind of solitude is potentially dangerous, causing wars and other social upheavals:

> Athens could be London, Rome, New York, Paris, Berlin or any other great city. This was where it had started. In the city. Any city. . . . the new city-hatred (contempt for all things but cleverness) of the slum man for the Jew, the owner for the worker, the worker for his fear of himself, the bourgeois for his own thoughts in the dark, the hatred of them all for the old men washing their hands.

These thoughts are directly related to the novel Paul is trying to write, "Young man of 1933." The chapter ends with the theme of solitude taking on overtones portentous of the coming catastrophe:

> Below in the Hodos Stadiou isolated figures still prowled with the furtive urgency of single men alone in a city after dark. In the far distance, somewhere in the streets beyond the Place de la Constitution, the horn of a taxi with a short circuit in its ignition system howled like a wolf in the darkness.

When Paul returns to Canada and marries Heather, MacLennan emphasizes the solitude of the lovers in a way that reminds one of a line from Kahlil Gibran: "Let there be spaces between your togetherness." A good example of this is when Paul spends an hour talking with some French-Canadian fishermen, and Heather feels temporarily bereft. The description of the gulls and gannets at Percé Rock parallels that of the sharks and barracuda earlier:

> The gulls must be diving like mad down the line of the cliffs. She remembered them as she had seen them yesterday wheeling out over the water about the rock; beautiful, aloof, cruelly competent, and farther out were the gannets with wing-spread wider than a swan's and rusty eyes. When the gannets dipped their wings they plunged to the water like bombs.

Again there is a symbolic suggestion of the destructive course of the undirected passions and a hint of the impending war.

Brooding about his book "Young man of 1933" and the as-yet-unrealized subject of his next novel — the changing shape of Canadian society — Paul contrasts the state of affairs in Canada with that in Europe: " 'The same brand of patriotism is never likely to exist all over Canada. Each race so violently disapproves of the tribal gods of the other. I can't see how any single Canadian politician can ever imitate Hitler — at least, not over the whole country.' " Rabid nationalism of the Hitleresque variety finds its Canadian counterpart in Paul's half brother Marius, who claims he is not a fascist, but is obsessed by thoughts of "a pure race, a pure language," and seems to Paul to be binding himself in a strait-jacket.

Opposed to the failure of self-knowledge leading to disaster is the sense of wonder and ability to grow which Captain Yardley retains until his death — an event which leaves his daughter Janet "prostrate with grief, not knowing that grief is always for the self." Now Janet feels things falling away from her, "leaving her solitary in the way of life to which she had bound herself." Hers is the loneliness of those who have not learned to come to terms with their solitude. This failure of self-knowledge manifests itself objectively in her opposition to the love of Paul and Heather. The same is true of Janet's sole remaining prop, Huntly McQueen, who attempts to separate Paul from Heather by shunting him off to an obscure teaching job in British Columbia.

The conflict between the older and younger generations is integrated with the wider theme by the suggestion that the generation of Janet Methuen and Huntly McQueen and Sir Rupert Irons is responsible for permitting the rise of Hitler, and hence for the coming war. "Had there ever been a time in human history like the present, when the older generation was blind to nearly every vital issue for which their children were prepared to fight and die?" Another anticipation of *The Watch That Ends The Night.* When Janet fakes a heart-attack upon learning that Heather is married to Paul, the old bridge-playing doctor who attends her and

gives equivocal answers to Heather's questions also seems to represent the older generation and its failures. When Paul confronts the doctor, demanding the truth about Janet's health, it is as though the younger generation is confronting the older generation with its mistakes which have led up to Munich. And when Paul confronts Janet with the news that he is going to enlist, it's as though he is emphasizing the need for the generations to stand together in this time of crisis: " 'I don't want to do it. Everything that's in me cries out against the waste of the only talent I've ever had. But I've got to go. And when I'm gone, I'd like to know that you and Heather are together.' " The impending war emits sparks which are jumping the gap between the two different kinds of solitude. But Paul's kind of solitude is also protecting and touching and greeting Janet's.

The concluding chapter departs from the private lives of the novel's human characters to emphasize the coming together of the nation's energies to meet the wartime crisis. The portrayal of the autumnal face of the Canadian landscape reminds us that the country both human and natural is the real hero of this novel. The theme of solitude — what MacLennan previously described as "race memories lonely in great spaces" — is also evident, along with its counterpart, the theme of self-awareness:

> Then, even as the two race-legends woke again remembering ancient enmities, there woke within them also the felt knowledge that together they had fought and survived one great war they had never made and that now they had entered another ... And almost grudgingly, out of the instinct to do what was necessary, the country took the first irrevocable steps towards becoming herself, knowing against her will that she was not unique but like all the others, alone with history, with science, with the future.

Canada in relation to the European countries is like Paul and Heather in relation to the older generation: neither has made this war, but both recognize the importance of seeing it through. And like Paul and Heather, Canada is approaching self-knowledge and the self-sufficiency that comes from an acceptance of the ultimate solitude.

NOTES

[1] "A Nation's Odyssey: The Novels of Hugh MacLennan," *Odysseus Ever Returning* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1970), p. 17. Cf. Peter Buitenhuis, *Canadian Writers & Their Works: Hugh MacLennan* (Toronto: Forum House, 1969), p. 30.

[2] "The Novels of Hugh MacLennan," in *Hugh MacLennan*, ed. Paul Goetsch (Toronto: McGraw-Hill Ryerson, 1973), p. 65; reprinted from the *Journal of Canadian Studies*, 2 (August 1967), pp. 3-11.

[3] George Woodcock, "Hugh MacLennan," in *Hugh MacLennan*, ed. Goetsch, p. 17; reprinted from *Northern Review*, 3 (April-May 1950), pp. 2-10.

THE EXPLORER AS HERO

Mackenzie and Fraser

T. D. MacLulich

ALEXANDER MACKENZIE and Simon Fraser are the Canadian examples, *par excellence*, of the kind of explorer who knows where he wants to go and eventually gets there after overcoming innumerable obstacles. Once they begin their narratives, Mackenzie and Fraser are almost as single-minded in their literary pursuits as they are in their actual voyages. They seldom allow digressions on Indian habits or on scenery or animals to divert their tales from being unremitting accounts of the hardships and difficulties they faced, and their modes of overcoming those obstacles. They rarely allow a hint of personal emotion to colour their accounts: especially they allow no suggestion of fear, doubt or discouragement to sully the pages of their narratives. Yet, for all their utilitarian single-mindedness — and often because of this quality — their stories have a grandeur and inevitability that approaches the massive sweep of a heroic tale or romance.

Mackenzie's accounts of his journeys are cast in the form of journal entries; they have not been reworked into a full-scale narrative in the manner of Samuel Hearne's book. Instead, the original journals have been edited by the eighteenth-century literary figure, William Combe. Roy Daniells asserts that "Combe's distortions of Mackenzie's meaning are so few and so slight they have to be searched for."[1] True, if one understands "distortions" in the sense of gross alterations in meaning, emphasis, and the order of ideas, and not simply as changes in the text. Combe's task was considerable, although for the most part quite simple.

His changes can be assessed by comparing a manuscript version of Mackenzie's journals of his first voyage, a copy of which is preserved in the British Museum, with the final published version. Combe has expanded Mackenzie's numerous abbreviations and turned his frequent sentence fragments, often written in the compressed style of a diary or a log book, into readable English prose. For example, Mackenzie wrote:

> Rain'd hard since early afternoon last Night till this Morning. We embarked at 4 oClk A.M. at 8 we landed, at 3 lodges of Indians.[2]

Combe rendered this as:

> It rained from the preceeding evening to this morning, when we embarked at four o'clock. At eight we landed at three large Indian lodges.[3]

As well as removing errors and expanding contractions, Combe often contributes subordinations which smooth out Mackenzie's style, as he does in the above passage. He makes some alterations in sentence structure, usually in the direction of increased euphony and variety; and he is responsible for quite a few changes in vocabulary, which tend to give the narrative a less colloquial, more latinate and educated flavour. Mackenzie wrote:

> Close by the land is high and covered with short Grass and many plants, which are in Blossom, and has a beautiful appearance, tho' an odd contrast, the Hills covered with Flowers and Verdure, and Vallies full of Ice and Snow. The Earth is not thawed above 4 Inches from the Surface, below is a solid Body of Ice. The Soil is a Yellow Clay mixed with Stones. (*J* 199)

Combe gave this passage a slight elevation in tone by a change or two in vocabulary and by introducing new constructions based on Mackenzie's original phrases:

> The adjacent land is high and covered with short grass and flowers, though the earth was not thawed above four inches from the surface; beneath which was a solid body of ice. This beautiful appearance, however, was strangely contrasted with the ice and snow that are seen in the valleys. The soil, where there is any, is a yellow clay mixed with stones. (*V* 185-86)

Ideas are shifted here more than is usual in Combe's work; and one qualifying phrase, which adds an air of literate deliberation to the last sentence, is entirely his own contribution. Nonetheless, the observations and the attitudes are true to Mackenzie's. And, since the effect of the *Voyages* depends chiefly on the step-by-step unfolding of the story, both in large and small details, we can fairly assign most of the credit for the final result to Mackenzie rather than to Combe. Without a good basic story, well told, Combe's talents for polishing the prose would have been wasted. But the final literary finish he gave to Mackenzie's journal entries, although preserving the day-by-day entry form, gives the book a smoother, more appealing, flow of language.

That Mackenzie was not devoid of a literary sense of his own is proved by his "Preface," which must be presumed to represent his own ideas, if not entirely his own exact words. His apology for the lack of detailed scientific observations in his narrative shows that he is aware of the expectation, fostered by the Royal Society since its inception in 1660, that a travel account should contain scientific notes, or at least exact observations of specific details about the things the traveller has seen. His description of the peculiar qualities of his own narrative shows that he is aware of the general reader's usual motive for reading books of travel and exploration — namely a thirst for the exotic, the extreme, and the unusual. His own narrative, he admits, does not provide these fabulous elements; nor does it provide the pleasant,

pastoral scenes, or the descriptions of highly cultivated native peoples that narratives like Cook's had led readers to expect. Nonetheless, he insists that his story has its own particular virtues, which will not disappoint the open-minded reader:

> The events which compose my journals may have little in themselves to strike the imagination of those who love to be astonished, or to gratify the curiosity of such as are enamoured of romantic adventures; nevertheless, when it is considered that I explored those waters which had never before borne any other vessel than the canoe of the savage; and traversed those deserts where an European had never before presented himself to the eye of its swarthy native; when to these considerations are added the important objects which were pursued, with the dangers that were encountered, and the difficulties that were surmounted to attain them, this work will, I flatter myself, be found to excite an interest, and conciliate regard, in the minds of those who peruse it. (*J* 59)

The chief purpose of Mackenzie's book was in fact commercial. The accounts of the two voyages, which comprise the heart of the book, are preceded by a description of the fur trade and followed by a brief concluding statement in which Mackenzie interprets the significance of his voyages, and urges the utility to British commerce of his favourite project, a union of the Hudson's Bay Company with the Northwest Company. But for the modern reader, these considerations no longer matter. For literary purposes, the important parts of Mackenzie's book are the "Preface," which makes some revealing statements about his conception of his journeys and his conception of authorship, and his accounts of the two voyages themselves. Moreover, although Mackenzie's historical significance may be equally divided between his roles as the first explorer of the Mackenzie River and the first man to cross the continent north of Mexico, his literary reputation must rest primarily on the account of his second voyage, which is a much longer and more substantial piece of writing than the story of the first voyage.

THE VOYAGE DOWN THE MACKENZIE RIVER was, everything considered, a remarkably uneventful journey. The chief problem was the finding of the river, hitherto known only by Indian report. Once launched on the new waterway, Mackenzie and his voyageurs were borne swiftly along with the current to their eventual stopping point on Garry Island in the Mackenzie Delta. The journey upriver, although longer and more laborious than the descent, involved few of the difficulties and uncertainties which lend so much interest to Mackenzie's second voyage. The second voyage, in contrast to the first, was one continual succession of difficulties. Mackenzie met and overcame almost all the obstacles which could confront a canoe voyageur in the northern wilderness, from raging rivers to nearly impassable terrain to reluctant and timorous companions,

insufficiency of supplies and lack of game in the countryside, hostile Indians and failures of his own equipment. Given this intrinsically suspenseful story and a variety of exciting incidents, Mackenzie's talents were well suited to recounting in a clear, simple manner how he persevered and overcame every obstacle to his progress.

Fortunately, from a literary point of view, the events of Mackenzie's second expedition form a pattern which gives an effective dramatic shape to his narrative. The story begins slowly but satisfactorily, with Mackenzie's departure from Fort Chipewyan and his journey to the place where he built the establishment he called Fort Fork, his winter headquarters and staging-point for his spring departure. The winter is quickly passed over, so that the narrative impetus is not lost in a mass of day-to-day detail. Such incidents as are given help to give the reader the minimum of knowledge about the Indians and the wilderness necessary to an appreciation of the events of the later narrative. When the journey is begun next spring the difficulties seem to occur in ascending order, so that Mackenzie surmounts one impossible obstacle only to be faced with an even more impassable barrier. The worst crisis comes when Mackenzie and his men find it necessary to retrace their steps partway back up the Fraser River (as it came to be known) in search of an Indian route through the coastal mountains. At the same time, Mackenzie faces a potential rebellion among his men, who have grown increasingly tired and discouraged in the face of apparently endless obstacles, and are now frightened by the apparent hostility of the natives in the area through which they are passing.

This crisis is surmounted by a combination of Mackenzie's determination to continue and his forceful eloquence, both of which he uses to persuade his people to continue to support him, and by the discovery that the difficulty with the natives is all a misunderstanding which quickly resolves itself. After a further series of difficulties and adventures, the climax of the story comes when Mackenzie and his men reach an arm of the Pacific and, despite the incipient hostility of the natives of the area, succeed in taking an astronomical observation for position and in making their mark (in vermillion and grease) on the rock where they are encamped. The return journey is much more briefly described than the outward trek. It is an easier trip, but nonetheless has its own difficulties, chiefly uncertainty over the food supply, which keep it from being an anti-climax. Not until Mackenzie is almost all the way back to his starting point is the reader certain that he will keep his heroic posture to the end, and not suffer an absurd and ignominious humiliation on the return journey.

Incidents of extreme hardship, discouragement, or resourcefulness make up a good part of the *Voyages*, and are linked together by many other incidents which are only relatively less dramatic. Here is how Mackenzie describes one of the mishaps which were an almost daily occurrence:

> Here the river narrows between steep rocks, and a rapid succeeded, which was so violent that we did not venture to run it. I therefore ordered the loading to be taken out of the canoe, but she was now become so heavy that the men preferred running the rapid to carrying her overland. Though I did not altogether approve of their proposition, I was unwilling to oppose it. Four of them undertook this hazardous expedition, and I hastened to the foot of the rapid with great anxiety, to wait the event, which turned out as I expected. The water was so strong, that although they kept clear of the rocks, the canoe filled, and in this state drove half way down the rapid, but fortunately she did not overset; and having got her into an eddy, they emptied her, and in a half-drowned condition arrived safe on shore. (*J* 311)

The prose here is clear and readable. Mackenzie's doubt about the safety of this undertaking, yet his unwillingness to forbid it for fear of discouraging his men by imposing a too heavy task on them, is well portrayed. The reader is reminded, without being told directly, that Mackenzie's desire to forward the journey is far keener than that of his men. Mackenzie's anxiety over the outcome is suggestively brought out by the report that he "hastened to the foot of the rapid with great anxiety" to observe the outcome.

One of the most vivid adventures in the entire narrative occurs at a rapids on a tributary of the Fraser. The clearness with which Mackenzie can recall and enumerate the successive stages of the peril through which he and his men passed gives his circumstantial account an impact usually associated with a much more deliberately evocative kind of writing:

> We . . . had proceeded but a very short way when the canoe struck, and notwithstanding all our exertions, the violence of the current was so great as to drive her sideways down the river, and break her by the first bar, when I instantly jumped into the water, and the men followed my example; but before we could set her straight, or stop her, we came to deeper water, so that we were obliged to re-embark with the utmost precipitation. One of the men was not sufficiently active, and was left to get on shore in the best manner in his power. We had hardly regained our situations when we drove against a rock which shattered the stern of the canoe in such a manner, that it held only by the gunwales, so that the steersman could no longer keep his place. The violence of this stroke drove us to the opposite side of the river, which is but narrow, when the bow met the same fate as the stern. At this moment the foreman seized on some branches of a small tree in the hope of bringing up the canoe, but such was their elasticity that, in a manner not easily described, he was jerked on shore in an instant, and with a degree of violence that threatened his destruction. But we had no time to turn from our own situation to inquire what had befallen him; for, in a few moments, we came across a cascade which broke several large holes in the bottom of the canoe, and started all the bars, except one behind the scooping seat. If this accident, however, had not happened, the vessel must have been irretrievably overset. (*J* 297)

The wreck, now almost flat on the water, finally came to rest "from the weight of the canoe resting on the stones, rather than from any exertions of our exhausted

strength" (*J* 298). Despite the somewhat abstract vocabulary and typically eighteenth-century use of generalized expressions, the passage succeeds in conveying the danger and violent action the men passed through.

THE CHIEF CHARACTER of Mackenzie's narrative is, of course, the author himself. His self-portrait is not a rounded characterization but is instead a highly selective picture of the explorer as hero. He depicts himself as the originator of and leading participant in the expedition. His determination inspires the men to emulation; his resourcefulness finds a way around each difficulty and discovers the best route to follow whenever choices present themselves; his bravery and quick-wittedness overcome the hostility of the Indians and secure their co-operation. Mackenzie presents himself almost totally in this public role. Glimpses of his private thoughts and feelings are rare. It comes as a mild shock when he reports his sorrow at losing the dog they had brought with them for almost the entire journey. The surprise is increased because Mackenzie, unlike almost any other writer, has resisted any temptation to include amusing anecdotes of the dog's behaviour on the trip. The dog's presence is not even announced when the expedition sets off on the journey; he is never mentioned until Mackenzie tells us, "we had lost our dog, a circumstance of no small regret to me" (*J* 372). Yet this is more emotion than he has shown over any of the sufferings of his men.

Mackenzie casts himself almost exclusively as the man of single-minded vision and determination. Yet there is a self-effacing quality to Mackenzie's depiction of his own efforts, for he never seems to act purely from self-interest but always in the best interest of the expedition, the completion of which assumes all the urgency of a mission. During the crisis on the Fraser River, when it is feared the Indians have turned hostile, Mackenzie tells his readers:

> These perplexing circumstances made a deep impression on my mind, not as to our immediate safety, for I entertained not the least apprehension of the Indians I had hitherto seen, even if their whole force should have been combined to attack us, but these outward events seemed to threaten the prosecution of my journey; and I could not reflect on the possibility of such a disappointment but with sensations little short of agony. (*J* 326)

The completion of the journey has become a moral imperative. When his men begin to waver, Mackenzie seems to try to win them back to his cause by attempting to imbue them with a desire to do what he feels is no less than their duty:

> I brought to their recollection, that I did not deceive them, and that they were made acquainted with the difficulties and dangers they must expect to encounter,

> before they engaged to accompany me. I also urged the honour of conquering disasters, and the disgrace that would attend them on their return home, without having attained the object of the expedition. Nor did I fail to mention the courage and resolution that was the peculiar boast of the North men: and that I depended on them, at that moment, for the maintenance of their character. (*J* 299)

In this speech, as elsewhere, Mackenzie's shrewd handling of his own men is made evident; simply by giving a paraphrase of his speeches he is able to convey the way he manipulates the men, without offering an intrusive explanation of his state of mind or of the reasoning behind his arguments. Sometimes, as above, he appeals to their pride. At other times it is plain that he exploits their sense of being inferiors on a fixed social scale, and comes close to intimidating them by the sheer force of his avowal of the desire to continue:

> I informed him that I was not altogether a stranger to their late conversations, from whence I drew the conclusion that they wished to put an end to the voyage. If that were so, I expressed my wish that they would be explicit, and tell me at once of their determination to follow me no longer. I concluded, however, by assuring him, that whatever plan they had meditated to pursue, it was my fixed and unalterable determination to proceed, in spite of every difficulty that might oppose, or danger that should threaten me. The man was very much mortified at my addressing this remonstrance particularly to him; and replied, that he did not deserve my displeasure any more than the rest of them. My object being answered, the conversation dropped, and the work went on. (*J* 333)

He is also able to confront the Indians when necessary, or to conciliate them and win them over to serving his purposes. Near the coast, for example, as they approach a village on the Bella Coola River, they see that the Indians are running about "as if in a state of very great alarm."

> This very unpleasant and unexpected circumstance, I attributed to our sudden arrival, and the very short notice of it which had been given them. At all events, I had but one line of conduct to pursue, which was to walk resolutely up to them, without manifesting any signs of apprehension at their hostile appearance. This resolution produced the desired effect, for as we approached the houses, the greater part of the people laid down their weapons, and came forward to meet us. (*J* 364)

His manipulation of the Indians by more subtle means is often also well described. At one point an Indian chief wishes to borrow Mackenzie's canoe to transport his family across a river, a circumstance which would delay the expedition and might expose the canoe to the danger of accident or theft. However, Mackenzie knows it would be impolitic to refuse outright, without offering an explanation the Indians can understand. "Several plausible reasons," Mackenzie says,

> suggested themselves for resisting his proposition; but when I stated to him, that, as the canoe was intended for a voyage of such consequence, no woman could be permitted to be embarked in it, he acquiesced in the refusal. (*J* 260)

At other times Mackenzie must allow his European sense of delicacy, surprisingly strong for a man of his profession, to take a back seat to the need for retaining a reluctant Indian as their guide and sponsor to the next village. On several occasions, the expedient he uses is to share the sleeping robes of the refractory Indian, thus ensuring his presence on the morrow:

> These people have no covering but their beaver garments, and that of my companion was a nest of vermin. I, however, spread it under us, and having laid down upon it, we covered ourselves with my camblet cloak. My companion's hair being greased with fish-oil, and his body smeared with red earth, my sense of smelling, as well as that of feeling, threatened to interrupt my rest; but these inconveniences yielded to my fatigue, and I passed a night of sound repose. (*J*342)

Mackenzie's single-minded determination to succeed, his subordination of all other considerations to that end, becomes the repeated theme of the narrative. He contrasts his purposeful way of thinking with the less disciplined outlook of the members of his crew and with the chaotic behaviour of the Indians. In the end the crooked is made smooth, and Mackenzie achieves his goal. In the process, the modern reader may think, opportunities for valuable insights into himself or the people he passed among have been lost. But whatever the ultimate judgment may be, it is difficult to deny that the spectacle of the powerful Scotsman, Alexander Mackenzie, prevailing single-handed (or so it seems) over raging rivers and precipitous mountains is an impressive and exciting one. The climax of his labours, the moment when he "mixed up some vermillion in melted grease, and inscribed, in large characters . . . this brief memorial — 'Alexander Mackenzie, from Canada, by land, the twenty-second of July, one thousand seven hundred and ninety three' " (*J* 378), is a suitably evanescent emblem of the power and mastery he thought his journey embodied. Yet the scene is nonetheless both dignified and moving.

ALTHOUGH, IN FACT, Simon Fraser's journey down the Fraser canyon may have been a match for Mackenzie's journey in danger and excitement, the written accounts of the two voyages are not equal. Fraser's journal is in diary form, and is characterized by brief reports of the day's events, seldom very detailed, and by no attempt at narrative continuity other than that provided by the events of the voyage itself.[4] Fraser's account reveals great potential for heroic character portrayal, but the materials are not developed sufficiently for the reader to form a clear picture of Fraser or of the magnitude of his achievements. Fraser's journal remains a document of primarily historical interest, with secondary value as an account of an exciting adventure. But Mackenzie's account,

by contrast, is clearly seen to have values which transcend its purely historical significance, and which make it a piece of writing with intrinsic merits.

Nevertheless, Fraser's journal provides an interesting comparison with Mackenzie's narrative. Fraser's journey was in many ways similar to Mackenzie's 1793 western voyage, so that in Fraser's diary of his journey we have a document similar in nature to the lost original journal of Mackenzie's second voyage, upon which the final narrative was based. By examining Fraser's journal, we can obtain a fuller appreciation of the powers of analysis and expression which must have been displayed in Mackenzie's original manuscript. From a literary viewpoint, a reading of Fraser's account serves chiefly to reveal how greatly the way Mackenzie's story is told — not simply its skeleton of events — contributes to its final impact.

In basic structure, and in the nature of the materials of the story, Fraser's journal closely resembles Mackenzie's narrative. The story is composed of a series of adventures and hardships, involving near-disasters in the rapids, difficult terrain, hostile or recalcitrant Indians, and rebellious members of the expedition. These are also the materials of Mackenzie's narrative. But Fraser's presentation is different. For one thing, he does not keep attention focused rigidly on himself; instead, he usually speaks of "we," referring to his whole party. As a result, the reader is not made constantly aware of a single will driving the party forward, although from occasional incidents we can infer that Fraser does need all his resourcefulness and persuasive powers at times to keep his men committed to the journey. But generally in his account some of the sense of dramatic isolation and forceful endeavour that is ever-present in Mackenzie's narrative is missing.

The descriptions of encounters with the Indians are also frequently lacking in the drama and suspense which Mackenzie infuses into his stories of such incidents. Where Mackenzie's account is circumstantial and clear, Fraser's tends to be general and vague, giving least detail where the reader would most like to be informed:

> I applied to the Chief in consequence of his promise of yesterday for his canoe, but he paid no attention to my request. I, therefore, took the canoe and had it carried to the water side. The Chief got it carried back. We again laid hold of it. He still resisted, and made us understand that he was the greatest of his nation and equal in power to the sun. However as we could not go without [the canoe] we persisted and at last gained our point. (*L* 104)

The means, so lightly passed over in the final sentence, by which Fraser and his men "gained our point" is the very thing the reader would most like to be told at length. But the dramatic details of the confrontation are omitted. Likewise, when forced by policy to bed down with one of the Indians, Fraser omits the personal details which made Mackenzie's account so vivid: "Apprehensive that the old man might regret his undertaking and give us the slip in the course of

the night," Fraser reports in his undemonstrative way, "I had his bed made in my tent by way of security" (*L* 67).

Nonetheless, even the laconic Fraser is at times moved by the extremity of the perils through which he passes:

> It being absolutely impossible to carry the canoes by land, yet sooner than to abandon them, all hands without hesitation embarked, as it were *a corp perdu* upon the mercy of this Stygian tide. Once engaged the die was cast, and the great difficulty consisted in keeping the canoes in the medium, or *fil d'eau*, that is to say, clear of the precipice on one side, and of the gulphs formed by the waves on the other. However, thus skimming along like lightning, the crews cool and determined, followed each other in awful silence. And [when] arrived at the end we stood gazing on our narrow escape from perdition. (*L* 76)

The precarious spiderweb of Indian ladders, upon which he must rely when climbing up and down the canyon walls, calls forth this understated yet evocative description:

> We had to pass where no human being should venture. Yet in those places there is a regular footpath impressed, or rather indented, by frequent travelling upon the very rocks. And besides this, steps which are formed like a ladder, or the shrouds of a ship, by poles hanging to one another and crossed at certain distances with twigs and withes, suspended from the top to the foot of precipices, and fastened at both ends to stones and trees, furnished a safe and convenient passage to the Natives — but we, who had not the advantages of their experience, were often in imminent danger, when obliged to follow their example. (*L* 96)

These passages, however, are the rhetorical high points of Fraser's account. They are almost the only places where he writes with an attempt to create an effect, or tries to convey something of his own mental state in other than the most general and neutral terms. In addition, he seldom expands on the incidents he describes. The only lengthy account of an adventure is a story, given in the words of the man to whom it happened, telling of an upset in one of the rapids in which the man was swept downstream for three miles clinging to an overturned canoe (*L* 90-91). This account, however, does not come anywhere near the excitement of Mackenzie's story of canoe-wreck and near disaster.

Usually, Fraser's story is couched in quite undramatic terms. Yet the potential for exciting scenes like Mackenzie's is present in Fraser's account. Like Mackenzie, upon occasion he can express a single-minded determination to succeed. When the Indians suggest an overland detour to the easier Thompson River, he announces: "But going to the sea by an indirect way was not the object of the undertaking. I therefore would not deviate and continued our route according to my original intention" (*L* 69). And Fraser's sense of the isolation of his party amid hostile peoples, and of their utter dependence on their own resources, is sometimes as strong as Mackenzie's:

> Here we are, in a strange country, surrounded with dangers, and difficulties, among numberless tribes of savages, who never saw the face of a white man. Our situation is critical and highly unpleasant; however we shall endeavour to make the best of it: what cannot be cured, must be endured. (*L* 81-82)

Fraser's shrewd and bold handling of the Indians is often evident. At one point when the Indians appear to be on the point of commencing hostilities of some kind, he reports:

> Sensible from our critical situation that mild measures would be improper and of no service, I pretended to be in a violent passion, spoke loud, with vehement gestures and signs exactly in their own way; and thus peace and tranquility were instantly restored. (*L* 108)

At times Fraser too must shore up the flagging spirits of his men:

> I remonstrated and threatened by turns. The other gentlemen joined my endeavours in exposing the folly of their undertaking [to go another way], and the advantages that would accrue to us all by remaining as we had hitherto done in perfect union for our common welfare. After much debate on both sides, our deliquents yielded and we all shook hands, resolving never to separate during the voyage; which resolution was immediately confirmed by the following oath taken on the spot by each of the party: "I solemnly swear before Almighty God that I shall sooner perish than forsake in distress any of our crew during the present voyage." (*L* 113)

Interesting as such an account is, it still lacks the immediacy of Mackenzie's suggestive paraphrases of his own speeches to his men on similar occasions.

Although Fraser never revised his narrative for publication, we nonetheless have an opportunity of observing him at work as an editor. The only complete journal extant of his voyage is a shortened account which he prepared for his superiors in the fur trade from his original notes. A section of what appears to be the original diary entries made at the time of the journey have also survived, and show how Fraser altered his original version in preparing his revised account. Fraser's revisions actually lessen the literary impact of his writing. Although he introduces a great variety of sentence structure and phrasing, he eliminates most of the details of day-to-day (and sometimes minute-by-minute) difficulties with the erratic and changeable Indians. He eliminates many of the comments which indicate the perplexed state of mind of his men and his exasperated impatience to get moving again. In short, he loses many of the human details which could give his story colour and depth. The most notable losses are the repeated observations on the strength and danger of the river, which by sheer repetition give to the diary fragment, despite its unsophisticated form, a profound sense of the awe which the powers of nature inspired in Fraser, and an acute sense of the smallness of man before such prodigies of nature.

MACKENZIE AND FRASER are, when all is said, heroes in an old-fashioned mould. At least that is how they appear when seen through the lens of their own writings. It is too easy and perhaps too tempting for the modern reader to impose a layer of irony onto the basically simple vision of writers like Mackenzie and Fraser; too easy to remember that Mackenzie did not, after all, really find a practical fur trade route, and that Fraser did not follow the Columbia River to the sea, as he had hoped to do; too easy to introduce the modern distrust of unambiguous statement and black-and-white vision; especially too easy to invoke our distrust of unquestioned self-sufficiency and superiority.

The worlds of Mackenzie and Fraser seem to contain no ambiguities or shadows. Every event is clearly either a step towards the goal, or a setback to the quest. We know that the raw nature which Mackenzie and Fraser appear to have mastered is in fact stronger than any individual human being. Yet, in reading the narratives, we suspend for a time our awareness of this truth. If the simplicity and narrowness of Mackenzie's and Fraser's vision prevents their writing from achieving elaborate literary effects, nonetheless the very simplicity and narrowness of their concerns create the strengths of their stories — strengths which are considerable.

The first issue of that formidable periodical, the *Edinburgh Review*, carried an article on Mackenzie's *Voyages from Montreal* which, as Victor Hopwood has observed, "touches shrewdly upon the attraction of Mackenzie's Voyages":[5]

> There is something in the idea of traversing a vast and unknown continent, that gives an agreeable expansion to our conceptions; and the imagination is insensibly engaged and inflamed by the spirit of adventure, and the perils and novelties that are implied in a voyage of discovery.

The author of the article goes on to describe the single-mindedness with which Mackenzie pursues his journey:

> He followed a painful course, through difficulties and dangers, to an unknown termination; and went steadily forward, without knowing where he was to issue, amidst the roaring cataracts, and the solitude of mountains; exposed to the daily hazard of shipwreck, and famine, and mutiny; and to the danger of treachery or assault from the melancholy savages that roamed across his course, or reluctantly consented to direct it.[6]

This description makes plain the romantic aura with which a sympathetic reader can surround Mackenzie's story, and suggests the heroic dimensions which the author and chief protagonist has assumed by the end of his tale.

Today we tend to dislike the man who sets out to impose himself on others or on nature. But Mackenzie and Fraser did not share our prejudices against simplicity or dogmatism. Nor did they share the contemporary ironic distrust of success.

Mackenzie feels he has gained his objective, and says so. He does not assert that he is a hero, but his narrative makes him one. He and Fraser tell stories which are, in underlying form, closer to the heroic tale or romance than to the modern novel. Their deeds and their determination make them seem to be greater men than the reader imagines himself to be. Their limited outlook gives every step of their journeys a greater significance than the reader feels exists in the world around him. They appear to have achieved more than common mortals can aspire to do.

NOTES

[1] Roy Daniells, "The Literary Relevance of Alexander Mackenzie," *Canadian Literature*, No. 38 (Autumn 1968), p. 20.

[2] W. Kaye Lamb, ed., *The Journals and Letters of Sir Alexander Mackenzie* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1970), p. 211. Subsequent references are given in the text and are identified by the abbreviation *J*.

[3] *Voyages from Montreal* (Toronto: Radisson Society, 1926), p. 206. Subsequent references are given in the text and are identified by the abbreviation *V*.

[4] W. Kaye Lamb, ed., *The Letters and Journals of Simon Fraser, 1806-1808* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1960). Subsequent references are given in the text and are identified by the abbreviation *L*.

[5] Carl F. Klinck, ed., *Literary History of Canada* (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), p. 29.

[6] *Edinburgh Review*, I (1802), 141, 142.

THE BURIED SELF

Joyce Carol Oates

innocent as lace it is froth groping
gumming its speech
its small measured breaths mimic yours

wading enormous in the Everglades
stinging like nicotine in your sight
the Arctic of its appetite appalls

review articles

TO THE PAST VIA THE FUTURE

George Woodcock

MATT COHEN, *The Colours of War*. McClelland & Stewart, $10.00.

THEODORE BEAM, the central figure of Matt Cohen's new novel, *The Colours of War*, travels through the future to return to the past, and as he journeys, past, present and future mingle like the colours of a shaken kaleidoscope.

Theodore, son of the Jewish editor of a newspaper in the rural Ontario town of Salem, has left home and wandered to Vancouver, where he lives the kind of easy existence — life without destination — that is possible on the Coast.

Social life, as he is rather dimly aware, is breaking down all over North America, for hunger has at last begun to afflict even the formerly affluent lands, and disorder follows hunger; the governments react in the only way that governments can:

> Every day it seemed there were new declarations of emergencies and martial law. Not exactly a new law; things being the same as always but carried one step further.

One day the irrational hand of power reaches out to Theodore, when two detectives invade his flat, rough him up and ransack his rooms. He is not sure whether they have come because of the packet of cocaine which his Chinese landlady expertly removes from their sight, or for something mysterious which he does not in fact possess.

The day is his birthday, and that night his father rings up from Salem. Theodore decides to accept Jacob Beam's suggestion that he return home. But the journey that takes him back into his past, and also in a sense into Canada's past, goes by way of a future that may await us all. When he reaches the station he finds it packed with people responding to obscure fears and self-preservatory urges.

> Not only were the departing trains completely booked, but the station was further swollen with those who were arriving. And for every one of us who was fleeing to some more certain home in the East, it seemed there were several who hoped that the mild wet winters of the Coast would be easier to survive. I was reminded again of old stories of the depression and the vast armies of the unemployed crisscrossing the country: when nothing else is possible, motion promises to fill the stomach.

Theodore manages to book a roomette on one of the trains that are leaving, to find eventually that it is no ordinary train. True, there are coaches where bonafide travellers, unaware of the real purpose of the journey, are crowded together and give an appearance of ordinariness to the train. But there are also sealed vans, and these are filled with arms and ammunition, and are in the control of a group of guerillas. Theodore has already encountered the partisan leader Christopher Perestrello by chance in the station restaurant. "There was a certain power about him. His voice and features were

so strong he seemed almost dangerous, even cruel: not the careless cruelty of the police but something more purposeful." Perestrello is attacked by a stranger and when the two are escorted out of the restaurant by the police Theodore picks up an envelope Perestrello has left on the table. It contains a map of the route the train will traverse, marked at certain spots with mysterious signs, and Theodore's possession of it leads him into contact with the partisans, for in the bar car on the train he meets a girl named Lise who takes him to her room on the train, and then pulls a revolver and demands the map.

Theodore becomes Lise's lover, learns of her long connection with an underground group seeking to undermine the established governments of North America and also realizes the true purpose of the train, which Perestrello has organized through his railway union contacts to distribute arms to partisan groups all over the country and to spread rebellion in its wake. Theodore is accepted into the partisan group, and is present when the citizen soldiers of Regina, mobilized by the government to preserve order, go over to Perestrello's cause, and the one farmer who opposes is shot in the square outside the hotel as Theodore watches.

> And standing at this window, looking out at this scene, we might have been anywhere, in any of the dozens of cities that have seen revolutions and coups, reprisals and executions. . . .
>
> . . . I had always thought that the external world would plod along forever, unchanged, a comfortable and amorphous bureaucracy, surrounding my life like a giant marshmallow, a giant excuse. Now that was fading and I was beginning to feel responsible for every moment I lived.

The train goes on, stopping several times every night for crates of weapons to be hurriedly unloaded. Theodore feels "as if the train was now turning itself into a long metal arrow drawing together the endless years of strikes, shortages, summer riots, outbursts of violence, into one spectacular collision." He is not sure whether the partisans are involved in a general uprising in which the unions and the army will combine to take over the country, or whether Perestrello is merely hoping his journey will coincide with other events to make a revolutionary situation. The latter seems in fact to be the case.

All through this journey, in dreams and reveries, Theodore is returning to the past that Salem — daily drawing nearer — represents for him. Perhaps the most evocative memory is that of a visit as a child to his ancient orthodox Jewish grandfather. He looks at the strange, gnome-like, ancient man, and shining out of a withered face sees "the pale blue eyes that I recognized as my eyes but a thousand years old, my eyes shining out of his face. . . ."

> As I lay in bed and waited for sleep, I held a secret in my mind — that my grandfather and I were the same person, that I had seen myself in the mirror of the glass door, and then the door had opened and he stepped out: me in disguise.

The whole interlude reveals the same intense concern with tradition and continuity that emerged in Cohen's earlier novel, *The Dispossessed*, and it is significant that the grandfather's gift to Theodore should be that of time, objectified in a gold watch, thin and old.

Even Perestrello — and this assessment of the revolutionary mind is certainly one of the thematic notes of *The Colours of War* — is really entering the future to find the past. (And what else, indeed, did either Marx or Bakunin attempt?) In the last scene in which he is actually present, Perestrello talks about "pure force," not merely as the urge of modern revolutionaries, but also as the urge that brought the people of the old world to the new world. Men had destroyed Europe; they

came to the Americas where: "Before we came, men lived here as true men, and every human being knew the meaning of his own life." The land was waiting, to "take for our own."

> Perestrello shrugged and leaned further over the table and the map this world had become. "Of course, we were wrong. The future was only the past in an elaborate disguise. The continent was ruined as easily as a child or a wife. With the slaves and the killings we poisoned ourselves. We began to realize that the new world had already become the old. There was no place to receive us. We could only go round and round, repeating ourselves.
>
> "I still have hope," Perestrello said. "Somewhere inside us there's a place that has never been touched, and is still innocent, waiting to be discovered. When we've suffered, when the violence is over and the false governments have fallen, when we're simple men and women again, standing on the face of the earth, there'll be something we can reach for, something noble inside us."

In fact, Perestrello is a creature of the time of violence, and never survives into an age of innocence regained. As the train continues on its journey, it becomes evident that all is not so completely in his control as it appeared at the beginning. His companion, Felipa, is attacked on the train by double agents; he himself is wounded by an unknown gunman at the last rendezvous for the delivery of arms; news comes that government troops have suppressed the insurgents in Regina and Vancouver; finally, the train reaches a railway yard where government troops are awaiting it with artillery, and in the skirmish Perestrello is killed. Theodore and Lise escape and so, independently, does Felipa.

Theodore and Lise make their way to Salem, which is filled with government soldiers whom Theodore fears. Nevertheless, there are some hilarious bibulous interludes with Jacob Beam and other town characters, before Theodore decides to take refuge in an abandoned stone church, converted into a dwelling, which lies in the countryside near Salem and is the property of an octagenarian lady, Katherine Malone, who had delivered Theodore's mother. When he goes there to ask her permission to live in the house, he sees a picture of Katherine on her twenty-first birthday, sixty years before.

> In those days she had been immortal; her bones slender and long, her eyes tinted so they shone like bright beacons of rural confidence. The house in the background had been almost a mansion in that era of prosperity. Although now it shambled and sagged, the wood coming through the paint, in those days it was gleaming white with hedges and flower bushes that grew thick around the stone foundation walls.

Katherine still lives as a personification of a simpler world, the old house still stands, and the old church even more solidly. There Theodore lives, after Felipa has appeared and led Lise away to become an urban guerilla. Hiding from the soldiers, he writes the book we have been reading, hunting his food in the woods around him with an old gun Katherine has given him, until, in the last pages of the novel, Lise returns.

> Once we dreamed of being citizens of a perfect state. The cells of our body ran wild with faith, pushing us through childhood to this place we have reached. I remember the dreams; but sometimes it can't be helped — I hear not music but armies moving in the night.
>
> The earth will try to feed us, no matter how foolish we are. Soon Jacob Beam will sit out in the garden in the afternoons, feeling his eyes go blind, the sun crossing his face.
>
> Old words flood through me. This hand records them — my hand, my father's hand.
>
> The sky is clear and the sun is out. I can see Lise walking across the field a rifle in her arms. For this day there is food again.
>
> We will go on living here.

It is Theodore, in his action, who has returned to the innocence Perestrello sought in vain through action.

There are features of *The Colours of*

War that, if we consider the book as a novel, seem exasperatingly ineffectual. Perestrello is a figure we never enter; indeed, encased in his impeccable blue uniform, he is remote even from the other characters, and we do not witness his death, which is narrated with offhand indirection. Lise and Felipa are type figures of naive and cynical radicalism, the sacred and profane poles of political enthusiasm. All three might be members of a dream of which the great train is the vehicle, and one reviewer has already accused Matt Cohen of populating his book with mannequins.

The criticism would be valid if one were indeed thinking of *The Colours of War* as a novel in the ordinary sense. But by the same criterion, the King of Brobdingnag in *Gulliver's Travels* and even O'Brien in *1984* might also be dismissed as mannequins, because they are not developed and credible as human beings. However, their function is something quite different, as is the function of Perestrello and the two women in *The Colours of War*. Theodore is in fact a kind of latter-day Candide, set to wander as an innocent through the man-made jungles of the present, and to find that all the promises of the future are illusory in comparison with the rediscovery of roots and of Matt Cohen's wry equivalent of Voltaire's cultivation of one's garden. Despite appearances, it is, as Voltaire's was, a counsel of defiance rather than defeat, of life continuing its tenacious way in the ruin of social order and of political idealism. Considered as a novel, *The Colours of War* may seem a maddening failure; considered as a parable — which I believe is what Cohen intended — it is direct and luminous and salutary.

ROMANTIC OFFENSIVE: *Tish*

Peter Quartermain

FRANK DAVEY, ed., *Tish No. 1-19*. Talonbooks, $12.95.
C. H. GERVAIS, ed., *The Writing Life: Historical & Critical Views of the Tish Movement*. Introduction by Frank Davey. Black Moss Press, $4.25.
KEITH RICHARDSON, *Poetry and the Colonized Mind: Tish*. Preface by Robin Mathews. Mosaic Press/Valley Editions, $3.95.

"I RUBBED MY EYES A LITTLE," Emerson wrote to Whitman, "to see if this . . . were no illusion"; yet such work "must have had a long foreground somewhere." It would not do to push the parallel between *Tish* in 1961 and *Leaves of Grass in* 1855 (and besides, who would play Emerson?), but it is tempting indeed to suggest a parallel between Robin Mathews and the Boston *Intelligencer*, which saw *Leaves of Grass* originating in lunacy. Professor Mathews and Keith Richardson, in *Poetry and the Colonized Mind*, see *Tish* as originating in what for them amounts to the same thing, the Black Mountain "school." The influence of poets like Creeley, Duncan, and Olson on *Tish* need not be denied, nor do I believe it need be attacked; the "long foreground" of *Tish*, however, lies elsewhere.

In a recent (Spring 1977) issue of *Contemporary Verse Two*, Frank Davey listed as sources for Vancouver writing such writers as Pound, Bunting, Stein, Butor, Merleau-Ponty, and H. D., among others; in the "Introduction" to *The Writing Life* he says that "the *Tish* movement has its roots in Matthew Arnold's view of the writer as cultural custodian." Perhaps it does. The first nineteen issues

of *Tish*, certainly, are insistent on redeeming men's vision through language — and *that* idea has a long history indeed. I would like to point, though, to a couple of things about *Tish*'s origins, forebears — for there is something very curious about that magazine, which needs an accounting: for a crummily produced, fragile, rubbishy-looking piece of ephemera, filled with goopy statement after goopy statement, facetious, irreverent, and sometimes downright rude, not to say crude, *Tish* had a lot of power and a considerable influence. How come? What is the source and nature of that power? And after some sixteen or so years, that power is still there to be felt: reading back issues of old magazines certainly has its politely boring moments, yet *Tish* seems to have fewer of them than one might perhaps expect. One need read only a few pages of *Tish* to recognize that it offers a disturbance or challenge to something far deeper than Richardson's currently fashionable jingoistic nationalism. *Tish*, I suspect, offends a sense of order and propriety deep-rooted in genteel Canadian letters.

Aside from the youth of its contributors, *Tish* draws its energies and power from, I think, two main circumstances. The first that I would point to is that *Tish* is a part of the legacy of Romanticism; and second, that it is a magazine of the contemporary City, offers a poetry of the City (and I believe it is the first Canadian magazine to do so). The Romantic artist reinvents his art from scratch, he makes it new, as though no one had written or painted before him; he forgets his history, he ignores convention, he devises his own technique. Keats runs the risk of *Blackwood's* and the *Quarterly*; Blake runs the risk of arrest. *Lyrical Ballads* is scorned, Byron loses his private life, is the first film star, and Whitman is driven to pen his own reviews. (The opening issues of *Tish* continually ask "What is a Poem?" and come up with weird answers — e.g., "all poetry is spontaneous.") I would talk of the Romantic Offensive, were the pun not too crude. The offence is to succumb to the tempting notion — which easily becomes an assumption — that sensibility is enough, is adequate equipment for the writing of poetry (or the painting of pictures), that poems are made out of feelings, or out of ideas or even convictions. Yet as he persists in his work, the Romantic discovers (and the discovery may make him give up) that the pursuit or service of the Mallarméan Work demands a very great deal of solid hard labour and of very hard thought: writing is not sensibility only, or thought, or feeling — it is Something More. (And as you read the first issues of *Tish*, you see this discovery dawn on the contributors: poetry needs *work*, is *craft* — and the tone of the editorials, the reviews, changes. It is not till the fourth issue that one of those seemingly interminable 'statements of poetics' at last includes the word *work*, when Fred Wah reminds Frank Davey that writing involves discipline. And this, I think, also offers a clue to part of the magazine's power: we see the editors learning as they go along.)

This century is notable, among other things, for its invention of new forms (as well as for its revival of old ones), for its willingness to experiment, to exploit. We seem to see ourselves as so absurd, perhaps, that it does not matter if we look stupid: perhaps, even, that it is impossible to be anything else! Tristan Tzara, say, is willing to compose a poem by reading words drawn out of a hat; John Cage will perform a silent concerto; Raymond Queneau will write *Cent Mille Milliards de Poèmes*, a book of flip-strip sonnets. (*Tish*, in fact, looks at times not only somewhat stupid, but also astonishingly conservative in its literary prejudices and judgments. Frank Davey, for

example, in *Tish* 4 ["The Problem of Margins"] dismisses George Herbert's "The Altar" and Dylan Thomas' "Vision and Prayer" as "dead, unreal," precisely because they are shaped like an X on the page.)

Perhaps we have discovered that knowledge is a form of ignorance, and that — if so — then ignorance might well be, perhaps, a kind of knowledge or, more accurately, a way of knowing. Writing, in the last century and this, has continually distinguished between looking and seeing, implying that the act of *look* includes the preposition *for*, and thus carries its own preconceptions, expectations. Thoreau with his "seeing without looking" follows Blake, and in his insistent moral tone brings me back to the Romantic Offensive: there is an arrogance involved, and it is the arrogance of the man who would throw over the conventional world if by doing so he might clarify his vision, and thus *see* what might be called the Really Real. On 30 August, 1856, Thoreau wrote (a shade pompously) in his Journal:

> Let not your life be wholly without an object, though it be only to ascertain the flavour of a cranberry, for it will not be only the quality of an insignificant berry that you will have tasted, but the flavour of your life to that extent, and it will be such a sauce as no wealth can buy.

Whitman insisted that poetry should include the apparently trivial; *Lyrical Ballads* is — according to one critic anyway — an exercise in "sentimental democracy." Thoreau's, Whitman's, Wordsworth and Coleridge's point, surely, is something else altogether, has to do not with the *subject* of poetry but with the *source*: that one's life, one's work, one's seeing and one's thought derive from the immediate, from the particular, and from the local — not, that is to say, most emphatically not, from a predetermined system of ideas or expectations of the world. "Enjoy an original relation to the universe," Emerson said. Be responsive to the world.

It is small wonder, then, that in reaction against a neo-classic or Augustan age, sentiment or sensibility might be thought adequate equipment for the poet. There is an arrogance involved. And as I said before, the first nineteen issues of *Tish* are insistent on redeeming men's vision through language. And in issue 4, with its attack on Milton Acorn, *Tish* declares war on the poets of the rest of Canada. Indeed, reading through all these issues, virtually at a sitting, one wonders: will they never write a *favourable* review? One needs to know what the nature of that vision is that leads *Tish* writers to make war.

In 1944, the poet H. D. wrote that "we are here today in a city of ruin, a world ruined, it might seem, almost beyond redemption." Her words were not published until 1956, two years before Warren Tallman, in a well-known essay on Kerouac which has just been reprinted, wrote that "if our cities are in something like ruins, there have been survivors." If our cities survive, or are peopled by survivors, they have survived not a war between man and the wilderness, between man and "nature" (whatever that is), but between man and man, man and his *made* environment, man and himself. There can be few New Yorkers, in 1977, who do not feel that somehow the city has *turned against* its citizens. It has been a war of forms. In the age of the junkie (and Vancouver is Canada's Junkie City), in the struggle to stay alive, one uses whatever resource comes to hand. "We can only use what we've got," says Robert Duncan. Including junk. So Andy Warhol makes endless movies of men dressed to look like Jean Harlow, languidly eating a banana, or films Billy Linich's haircut parties in endless and detailed repetition. To say such things are

a drag might be to pun unnecessarily, were it not that "drag" itself, as a word, suggests the conditions the ruined city imposes if one would therein survive. Whatever "story" might be there, is not very interesting, and it is no more Eliot's Unreal City (for those struggling to survive, it is all too real!) than it is Saint Augustine's City of God — though both remain possibilities. Ruined houses make gaps, leave space: one would rebuild. In a city of ruins, a tar-paper shack affords shelter. In a world without tar-paper, or where tar-paper will no longer work, one has to improvise. It has been a conflict with *made things*: a time of confusion.

The collapse, of course, was more than of the city. It was of made things, poems; it was of the meanings of words, of syntax; it was of language: and in a time of instability in language and in the world, innovation can be at home. That instability, however, can be the source of desperation, and the innovation the result of dire need. Certainly this century has been a time of continuing crises, in which the language, like the city and like the poem, has needed to be rebuilt by starting virtually from scratch. William Carlos Williams reconstituted the world of objects by writing about roses as though they had never been written about before, thus freeing North American language from its heavy dependence on English antecedents and associations. In Canada, in the fifties, Dudek, Layton and Souster learned, from Williams, how to talk of their own experience in a language which would not carry with it overlays of meaning drawn from another culture.

Similarly, the contribution of Louis Zukofsky (another American) was (and still is, for that matter: he is still writing) to strip words of their meaning so that *no* meaning will come through — or so that *all* meaning will, and this most difficult of poets showed writers like Duncan and Creeley how to let the movement of words generate a play and discovery of meaning, by paying attention to their music so that the language might *sing*. Meaning became a matter of relationship among words, and words, language, became the matter of the poet. Names would no longer do: Gertrude Stein was bored by them ("Why after a thing is named write about it" she asked), and linguists and philosophers showed that no adequate account of meaning can be given in terms of names. Yet Robert Duncan was insisting that the poet was Namer as well as Maker, and Wittgenstein, earlier, had outlined a world in which the only reality was *fact*, and fact was known by its *name*. A time of confusion, in which it becomes possible to talk intelligibly of words as a congregation of sounds and figures previous to dictionary meanings, yet also a time in which one might be driven to put one's trust in names: *Tish*, which Richardson ascribes to an "excremental vision." Michael McClure, when *Tish* was in its third or fourth month, wrote in *Kulchur* (No. 8, 1962) that "a man names what he sees and then puts away the fear of it." In times of uncertainty, one must experiment: one has to improvise.

One has to improvise. Wordsworth wrote, we have been told, to the sound of the linnet and the thrush; Creeley, to the sound of John Coltrane and Charlie Parker. Basil Bunting (who calls himself a traditional poet) has defined poetry as a sequence of repetition and variation making a pattern; meaning may or may not be a part of that pattern, and sound *must* be. The stating of propositions about the world, that is to say, or about the writer, is not a function of poetry: such statements exist in the poem for the sake of the pattern. A poem by George Bowering in *Tish* 4 about a bicycle leaning on a wall, or about smoking a cigarette in the car and thinking about his

girl friend, hardly gives us information about the world or even about George Bowering, but both are nevertheless strong poems of the city. Reading a poem for the *content* is like listening to John Coltrane for the *tune*, and we have laboured long under the notion that music should have tunes and poem content. (Keith Richardson, incidentally, seems in addition to believe that it is the business of the poet to write quotations.) Such a notion carries with it certain presuppositions about form, and may very well suppose that form and content are in some way separable. It is interesting to note, here, that Richardson, in his insistence on a Canadian "tradition" which he sees *Tish* as betraying, leaves his reader to *guess* what that tradition might be: I am led to guess that it is embodied in Mark Twain's friend and neighbour in Connecticut for some ten-odd years, Emerson's relative, Bliss Carman, writing poems of a recognizable (because named) Canadian *content*. "When a poet," William Carlos Williams wrote, "begins to devote himself to the *subject matter* of his poem ... he has come to the end of his poetic means." It is not entirely clear whether Richardson views literature and tradition in terms of set themes, set subject matter, or not.

It is clear, however, that *Tish* writers do not. "It is not for man to order," Frank Davey wrote in *Tish* 5. One cannot "order" one's theme as one might order a made-to-measure suit or a battalion. One can only write, "not trying to make anything more of life than it is" (*Tish* 8). One can improvise, discover not *one's* theme, but the theme that emerges (in the second issue of *Tish* Jamie Reid writes about Philip Whalen in just such terms) and which is a phenomenon parallel to, but in no sense more important than, the sensory, emotional, or linguistic data which gave rise to it. To rebuild the city, the language, the poem, demands co-operation with the materials which are at hand, and with one's fellows. A co-operation of the senses, of language, of thought, of feeling. The great strength of *Tish*, its vigour, comes at least in part from the sense one has, reading it, that here are a number of (admittedly feisty) young men wholeheartedly, earnestly, and *jointly* grappling with a problem that is of great urgency to them. The writers of *Tish* view their activities as a shared and a shareable endeavour: to be at home in the language and in one's own experience.

And one great weakness, of the early issues especially, is that the writers in *Tish* are not able to correlate, clearly, their insistence on testimony, on obedience to the (emotional or felt, perceived anyway) event, with questions of form. There is, in these early numbers, no clear exploration of form, but a lot of fumbling. In the first four or five issues, the writers themselves do not seem aware that their apparently thematic concerns ("the poem must be testimony"), their programmatic statements about the content and activity of poetry, are in fact formal concerns. It is, then, instructive to read the first dozen issues, and observe the dawning of this realization, the realization, as Frank Davey was to put it in *From There to Here* in 1973, that "ultimately, only the form of a writer's work speaks to us," for

> the rightly controlled, formalistic, and elegant poem shares formal assumptions with a company directorship, while the loosely structured film or lifestyle shares assumptions with the commune.

The goopy statements in *Tish*, incomprehensible as they sometimes are ("that percussive and reverberating energy released from a cathexis of the poet on contemporary reality" — *Tish* 1) are goopy because they are fumblings. And the fumblings themselves contribute to the magazine's strength: these young

turks, thumbing their noses at the rest of the world, taking themselves seriously, taking their work seriously, cracking in-jokes, setting themselves up as an in-group ("WE pioneers, ... WE *know*," they seem to be saying), sneering at the east, littering their magazine with (dreadful) slogans and injunctions ("Poems in Tish Are Intended For Reading Aloud" — *Tish* 4; Tell us what You are doing, "especially if you're *making it*" — Tish 2), offering incomprehensible formulae and equations ("Margin = Locus" — *Tish* 3), hopelessly in love with a jargon derived mainly from Olson and Williams, poeticizing *ad nauseam* (how relieved readers must have been when in 1962 *Tish* offered a Valentine's Day present: no more poeticizing; and how disappointed when it continued to appear, disguised as book reviews), making grandiose and pretentious claims ("keeping you informed on what is happening in Vancouver — its writings, its tastes" — *Tish* 4) while castigating almost every book they reviewed (with George Bowering as chief hatchetman), these young turks, wanting so much to *say* what is real (so desperately aware were they of what seemed to them *un*real — the academic-humanist tradition), these young turks gathered strength and energy not through their love of labels or names but through their preparedness to puzzle over what the world knows is obvious, through their determination, like children, to find out, through their complete lack of fear: if they looked foolish, very well, they looked foolish. There is not one truculent word in the first nineteen issues of *Tish* — at least, not by one of the editors — though there is quirkiness and cockiness by the pound. The strengths of *Tish*? It was a family newspaper. What a sigh must have gone round Vancouver when George Bowering at last got together with his girl.

Marianne Moore says somewhere that the study of rhyme and metre is a dangerous activity. Robert Duncan, following the lead of Keats if of no-one else, talks of the perilousness of poetry. The five editors of *Tish* were not afraid to take risks, either public or private, and were not afraid to be honest. An issue attacking Gwendolyn MacEwen's *The Drunken Clock* is followed by two issues which print her work. In a rationalist world, such behaviour would be thought inconsistent. But the world of *Tish* is not rational, it is Romantic, and it is concerned with the poem and its craft, its form. "Being Canadian," says the Editorial in *Tish* 8, "must never be treated as an end in itself." Many of the poems, nevertheless, record what it is to be Canadian: George Bowering's "Radio Jazz," for example, in *Tish* 1, captures precisely the record of life in the Interior (of B.C. and of Bowering), just as his later "Confessions of a Failed American" and *A Short Sad Book* record, and record with wry humour, not what Richardson or Mathews would *like* Canadian life to be, but what one particular Canadian life *is*. Tradition is made up of *what happens*, which may be desirable and which may not. A concern with tradition, in any case, lies outside the work, the working, of art, of the poem.

This leads me, inevitably and necessarily, to a brief consideration of Richardson's book. It is tempting to dismiss *Poetry and the Colonized Mind: Tish* as merely silly (what, by the way, is a *colonized* mind? The invasion of the body-snatchers?), but the book deserves more attention than that simple blunt judgment provides. Basically accurate in its facts (Richardson has done some homework), the book is not so much a study of *Tish* as it is a series of complaints about the sell-out of an (unspecified) Canadian tradition to a pack of American invaders and conspirators, led by Warren Tallman and abetted by

Robert Duncan. Filled with misprints and spelling mistakes, the book is utterly humourless (witness for example the grave attention paid to *Tish* 40's "banana smoke-in") and at times is so anxious to grind its axe that it distorts its data by offering selective "evidence." We are told on page 66, for example, that *Tish*'s "successor," *Writing*, devoted a complete issue to Jack Spicer. This is true. What we are not told, is that at least three of the issues of *Writing* published Canadian writing only, while one issue was devoted entirely to the work of the English poet Basil Bunting. And it is strange to read on page 30 — and I quote, square brackets and all — "the area [in] which man has had the most chance to become aware of." Richardson is accurate, I think, in devoting the bulk of his attention to *Tish* 1-19, but he misses completely the cheekiness of it. "!!FLASH!! . . . arrival in Vancouver of Brian Finn and Sydney Aster. Who next, fellers?" (*Tish* 8). Tish's power lies in part in its astonishing ability to lure fools out of the woodwork.

The strength of *Tish*? Theoretical, infuriating, a bunch of young kids with the temerity to re-invent or rebuild the poem — with the *ignorance*, if you like, to think that they are doing so. An act of gall? But an act of gall does not last for eighteen months: there were so many issues (19!) that you *had* to take them seriously — or at least pay attention. If a man says "It's all rubbish!" once, you shrug. But when he says it once a month for a year and a half, when he says it for 409 pages, you begin to pay attention, or (like the Boston *Intelligencer*) think the man lunatic. (The moon is, traditionally, a figure of the Muse.)

The difficulty with Richardson's "argument," if I may thus dignify his book, is that *Tish* published so many interesting and so many good poems. In *Tish* 2 Jamie Reid articulated, clearly, what all

five editors believed: "The most important thing to [the poet] is not what he will know, not what he has known, but what he knows *NOW, at this moment in time, at this place in space.*" Such insistence on the local, on the immediate, on the *experienced*, goes back not to an American like Williams ("No ideas but in things"), nor to a British traditionalist like Bunting ("If I talk about rubbing gravestones, I've rubbed bloody gravestones"), but a Protestant impulse. Works like *Tish* have, as Emerson reminds us, a long foreground, and at the beginning of these pages I remarked that the first nineteen issues of *Tish* are insistent on redeeming man's vision through language: one must experience the Real, the Really Real, directly, without the intermediary, the priest.

The poet, then, grasps, comes to grips with, the local. Read the first nineteen issues of *Tish* and you will see a bunch of poets writing what I can only call "geographical poems"; and they discover that the poem of place, of the local, of Vancouver, is not achieved by dropping local names, reciting local history, discovering local "themes." It is, as Frank Davey and David Dawson clearly show, a matter of discovering the history of one's own desire or anguish enacted in the history and landscape of the world around one (Frank Davey's more recent *The Clallam* comes to mind as an exemplar), or it is a matter of wry narrative (of one's amours? perhaps) or of simple (to read) but difficult, painstaking (to write) and tightly *focussed* narrative of observation (like Fred Wah's poems). It is not in naming: there, Gertrude Stein was right, and our politicians are wrong. Somewhere in *Tish* 5 Frank Davey talks of the poem as "a series of temporally connected events," where cause and effect have disappeared. Werner Heisenberg and Niels Bohr tell us that in physics, "cause" and "effect" have not been intelligible terms for fifty years or more. I notice that the syntax of *The Clallam* is paratactic, or at least appositional. I notice in *Tish* that David Dawson's "Tentative Coastlines," Frank Davey's "Bridge Force," George Bowering's "Sunday Poem," Fred Wah's "The Woman" or "For R.D.," all of these propose few cause and relationships: the connections are temporal. Men do not feel for *reasons*, but they do feel *in* time. "We learn," says Thoreau, "by converse with things." Meaning is discovered, not forwarded by thesis. *Con*verse. Con*verse.*

I would say that the history of *Tish* is yet to be written. *The Writing Life* usefully reprints documents about *Tish* (some of them, like Carol Bergé's, a waste of time and ink). It is designed as a companion to *Tish 1-19*. It is a supermarket book, which provides the reader with some of the materials for a history; it is not, by and large, critical. *Poetry and the Colonized Mind: Tish*, like the magazine it attacks, is sloppily produced (and in its remarks on Robin Blaser is quite possibly actionable, were one to take them seriously). It is also, despite its homework, the product of slovenly intellect. *Tish 1-19* is more than welcome, for it reprints a body of work which, like it or not, had an effect, has an effect still, and is yet to be understood. *Poetry and the Colonized Mind: Tish* is, I believe, at the very least a misguided and dangerous book, for it suggests, in its continued polemic, that what one does not *like* must be dismissed or denied. The history of *Tish* is yet to be written, but it must be written by someone who has the discrimination and the sense not to lump everyone together, automatically, as members of an amorphous but somehow all inclusive Black Mountain "school" and its "adherents." To do that is like calling Canada "a Christian country."

THREE POETS

Alexander Globe

MARVYNE JENOFF, *Hollandsong*. Oberon Press, cloth $5.95, paper $2.95.
LAURENCE HUTCHMAN, *Explorations*. DC Books, paper $2.50.
LEONARD GASPARINI, *If You Love*. Borealis Press.

THE HOLLAND OF Marvyne Jenoff's title is her man; the song is her celebration of the things they share, from carrots to showers, from the first blush of joy to a few latter day confrontations. Most of the poems deal with ordinary situations experienced by two normal people in love. Because the book is so close to the reality we see around us every day, it might appear banal to some. It probably won't please ardent women's libbers or equally dedicated male chauvinists. This is a pity, since Jenoff shows in "Wrapping Up" that she can observe three generations meticulously. She is aware of all of the old stereotypes and even plays with them, but she is never strangled. The same is true of her prosody: her ability to write in traditional metres gives her a sure sense of what will work in her own brand of free verse. She has succeeded in a most difficult task: recording contemporary urban life both poetically and naturally.

Hollandsong is filled with feminine insights, uncompromisingly rooted in experience, untempted by easy poetic tricks. One is struck by recognition after recognition, not only about love and personal relationships, but also about a wide range of incidental subjects, like an intelligent woman's ironic awareness of her clothes, or an awareness of people out of her own age bracket, like

> . . . the three boys whose next year promises
> something entirely different, three
> boys with a bicycle in the shade
> of the library,

or the description of how habit eventually dulls the cacophony of new surroundings ("The New Bathroom").

Jenoff has an objectivity that can, with sympathy, penetrate points of view that are obviously not her own. This quality gives her book a refreshing breadth of reference and maturity. Closely related is a sense of humour that not only saves the collection from the claustrophobia of many autobiographical confessions, but often has one smiling with pleasure.

The cover of *Explorations*, with its enlarged view of the small intestine, couldn't be more unfair to Laurence Hutchman, whose poems usually begin in the world at large, from Ireland, London, Amsterdam and Paris, to eastern Canada. He even tries to link general statements to particular situations and to escape the cage of self through universal statement. Thus "La même maison" tackles the issue of biculturalism not with abstract slogans, but in a bilingual poem where a house in cosmopolitan Montréal is shared with a Dutch landlord and his Japanese wife: "enough of this separation in the basement"!

Like Wordsworth and his successors (including the contemporary socially and politically aware), Hutchman searches for poetry in the lives of ordinary people, often on the fringes of society, like Irish and Spanish expatriates slogging in London restaurants, or a retired boxer in New Brunswick, whose "strange kindness" is contrasted to "Lord Beaverbrook's smug bust." Too many of these poems are like hurriedly taken, poorly developed snapshots, lacking in general interest. Hutch-

man seems to feel the deficiency himself, since he often uses the final stanza of a poem for a mythopoetic statement to heighten or contrast the realistic approach of the rest of the poem. Unfortunately the results are not always poetically coherent, nor are the ramifications always thought through. Despite his social awareness, he can be condescending, whether culturally ("Smells") or on the personal level. "Café in Amsterdam," for example, presents a sympathetic sketch of an old man trying to communicate:

> Tears
> fall across the veins of his eyes.
> "It's cold," he says, smiling
> and tugs at his sleeve
> showing me an unsealed scar,
> a white slash across his life . . .
>
> and in my country the world is silent
> insects hum through the apple groves
> through petals of bright orange flowers.

The contrasts between age and youth, pain and comfort, cold white and gaudy spring orange, and the movement from external reality to the mythologizing consciousness of the poet are the stuff of poetry. But the last stanza leads one to suspect the limit of the sympathy so endearingly delineated in the first part of the poem. Perhaps travellers (particularly young ones) normally feel sympathetic in inverse proportion to their responsibility, and one should be thankful to find this characteristic so successfully sketched. But it would be more comforting to feel that the poet understood the implications of the last three lines of the poem.

"Perseus," with its fantasy on the stain on the ceiling of a rented room, shows that Hutchman can write a powerful poem, but few of the pieces in *Explorations* approach its coherence. A traditional metre sags after a few lines on the first page. Although Hutchman can echo the oracular voice of his favourite Yeats ("dreams move out of night / into the blueness of the morning"), the symbols in "Autumn Sunday" are not successfully integrated with the images from ordinary Irish life. The ambitious six-page long "The Highway" needs a firmer organizing principle than the red line on a map, linking London (Ont.), Toronto and Montreal. The random images of city and countryside, interspersed with reflections on the history of central Canada, do not form the microcosm one finds, for example, in Walt Whitman's catalogues that evoke American life so surely.

If You Love presents a selection from Len Gasparini's six previous volumes of poems. The first eleven pieces deal with love, ranging from romantic lyricism and the celebration of "adultery without guilt" to the less predictable reflections on the family circle and the meaning of Christmas. The poems reflect characteristic masculine attitudes, whether the sensuous lyricism of "Morning Worship," the pugnacious report of a lovers' quarrel in "Written on a Paper Napkin," or a father's feelings, deftly recorded in "Jimmy": "His young muscles swell the pride I feel / as he selects a baseball bat."

A full third of the collection consists of nature poems. Where the poet knows what he wants to do, the result is well focused, like "Weeds," with its rhetorical argument directing the narrator's outrage and wonder at their "lack of restraint." "Pastorale I" is typical of another type of poem where the images become metaphors (e.g., "apple-light of autumn"), producing a rich texture that is poetic, rather than merely descriptive. Too often, though, the poems remain content with recording simply another snapshot, another simile. "Recitative" points in the direction of something more original, the use of nature imagery to convey intensely personal experience, but this mode is as yet in embryo.

The middle section, about half the poems, accepts the challenge of recording

contemporary urban life, primarily in Windsor, overshadowed by Detroit, with its junkies ("Jazz Requiem", "Junkball") and black ghetto (the ferocious, funny "Soul Poem" and lyrical "Mood Ebony"). These are the most interesting pieces, since there are no long pedigrees to fall back on. Gasparini often chooses North American popular forms as his model. Thus a prostitute is out earning the rent while moaning the "Streetwalkin' Woman Blues." Such forms can be turned to the poet's personal experience, like his job as a truckdriver. Here again he is less interested in the merely personal than in the collective experience that lies behind legends, like those of Paul Bunyan. A modified ballad stanza (not always in metrical control) in "Truckdriver Blues" mixes tall tales with the required machismo crudities:

> Once blew out a tire a[t] midnight
> And bottled some fireflies for a flare;
> There were rubbers in my tool box,
> So I used 'em all to make a spare.

Other poems celebrate the archetypes of popular culture, whose lineage stretches back through TV to the radio and movies. Sometimes the pieces are dangerously close to the sophomoric — like "Bela Lugosi." At their best, they crisply mimic the language and situations of Hollywood productions, while keeping the objective distance of parody. "Pick-up", for example, reduces the element of suspense in the undercover detective genre to slapstick. Gasparini also adapts these conventions to shoot his own scenes from contemporary life. "Tunnel Bus to Detroit," for example, spares neither the young secretaries "dressed for romance / instead of work" nor the young man who politely offers his seat while secretly hoping for a mechanical failure that will give him an opportunity to ravish the girls.

Gasparini is a child of the times, building a "theatre that projected our youth / onto its screen", as "Theatre Piece" puts it. He is well aware that he is dealing with poses (see "The Marginal Man") and succeeds where he limits himself to dramatic parody or celebration of the current postures. Unfortunately, when he moves outside the conventions to make critical comments, the reins tend to loosen. The deficiency shows most clearly in "Emily Carr," where he says all of the obvious things woodenly, especially by comparison with Carr's best paintings and writing. In the end one feels that the poet's vision has been too limited by popular forms: he does not assimilate and transcend them. The youthful postures are simply multiplied, like a succession of TV shows, where synthesis is unknown.

To recognize a limitation that in future might prove crippling is not, however, to claim that *If You Love* is without merit. The range of subject matter and tone is no mean achievement: Gasparini is not going to be trapped into repeating the same thing ad nauseam. If the 51 poems were the product of a vigorous year's work, one would be more willing to overlook the faults. But only seven of the poems appear in book form for the first time. In fact, only eight of them did not appear among the 65 poems of *One Bullet Left* (1974); over two-thirds of them (35) have been published in at least two of his volumes since 1970.

Revision is the rationale for this industrious repetition. Occasionally it improves a poem dramatically. Thus the alterations to the third stanza of "Grapes" (*Cutty Sark*; *One Bullet Left*; *If You Love*) introduce a quiet allusion to the garden of Eden that is in keeping with the tactful contrast between the unconscious sensuousness of an Italian girl and boy, and the religious values of their milieu. The rewriting also shows Gasparini's preference for the common word and the commonplace image that he can rein-

vigorate by extending the metaphorical content. But most of the adjustments amount to a word or two, hardly justification for printing them two or three times in five years. The more radical rewriting of the nature pieces results in different poems, but not necessarily better ones. Too often they reflect simply a different set of external stimuli, rather than a controlling poetic vision. Better to set such efforts aside as incomplete drafts.

Gasparini offers some interesting fare, but he should resist the temptation of squandering so much creative energy both on rewriting and on the annual reprinting of so many previously collected poems. The Borealis Press needs an astute proofreader.

LIFE AND CLAUSTROPHOBIA

Jean Wilson

LINDA ROGERS, *Some Breath*. Fiddlehead Poetry Books, $4.00.
FREDERICK CANDELARIA, *Liturgies*. Sono Nis Press, $3.95 paper, $10.95 cloth.
FLORENCE MCNEIL, *Emily*. Clarke, Irwin, $5.95.

SOME BREATH is what the poems in Linda Rogers' book hardly allow. These taut, incisive, jarring poems rarely loosen their grip on the throat. Between the airlessness of the glass jar of the title poem and that of the world outside it in which even a lovers' bed is "like a coffin" and "rain and cold fingers/ strangle our green summer" there is little extra oxygen. Words hammer at each other — "trails of mushroom explode roomfuls of coupling ants"; "... this foetid wash spits out of slick/basement" — with a relentlessness only occasionally relieved by a poem like "Hands are For":

> Hands are for
> climbing trees, touching the
> sun,
> peeling oranges, picking
> flowers, turning
> pages, buttoning buttons and
> holding the rain.
>
> Hands are for loving.

This poem and a few others are so startlingly simple and lyrical that it is a shock to drop to such an untortured level of experience.

Images in this collection are more often possessed, dark, sinister. Neither nature nor human existence is benevolent or, at least, very comfortable. Stars and seeds "explode in fire," a river in winter is quiet because "its roaring/washed the dead/away their/eggs buried in gravel," "the real blood in communion cup/spills into open/pits and earth/swallows." Life "only hurts when we breathe"; "we dance on razors." Even when "we lurch alive, explode the quiet/birdsong fan of wings/ cocksalt of spring" and "our crazy laughter echoes in frog weddings," it is not so much the aliveness that strikes home, it is the "lurch" of it, the "crazy laughter." Not an easy aliveness.

Occasionally in this staccato poetry there is a note of sane laughter, as in "November Tea":

> Only the king of the sun and the stars
> came to the kangaroo
> tea,
> sharpened his teeth on her china
> cup
> and frightened the baby
> away.

They sat in the fog by the river,
drinking and banging
their spoons.
Then he
jumped in her pouch and he
stayed there
until after the honey
moon.

But invariably, rather monotonously, images of decay reappear, of death, destruction, the cold and empty, devouring time, the dark and damp, madness. This is not a book to be taken lying down. It compels you to grapple with its images and sounds, and although the experience is claustrophobic, it is generally worthwhile.

Liturgies, by Frederick Candelaria, is occasionally claustrophobic, too, but much more breath is allowed. The book is divided into nine sections, each a liturgy of some sort, a confrontation with illusion and a recognition of reality. "Take care," warns "Valediction," the last poem in the book; liturgies can be frightening to explore.

The distance between illusion and reality may be only as great as that in Circe's house, described in "Fugue," where "you became your desires/EVERY WISH GRANTED," only to have "hard x-rays" reveal "illusions burning in the brain." Self-deception can be practised only "for a while." But although Candelaria grimly warns about "the silent green slaughter house" where "an immense school of small flat fish/hangs doubly suspended, surprised in brine/like pickled tongues torn from lying mouths," a metaphor for the sensual and spiritual slaughter house of human life, he often dissects illusions with wit and grace. Even in the slaughter house there is some room for breath.

Sometimes he simply plays with found poetry, a form which at least in small doses can be fun, as in "Where It's At"; and Candelaria is adept at the wry twist, too, as in "Skinny Dip." Yet some of the best poems in *Liturgies* describe the sinister. The crow in "In this Year of the Crow," who lands on the TV antenna, claims the screen with his image, "owns our eyes/and then our minds." He's like the gulls in "Icarus on Poetry and Poets," whose

Fragile feathers
in ranks and rows
symmetrically balance
air and flight
in silent music
the colour of sea,
sky, and sand

but each of whose "greedy body/is badly attached" and essentially "all raucous gut/demanding the garbage/of floating acclaim."

This is a book of many moods. Poems such as "With Songs Full of Sunlight" check the sinister, disillusioning ("these woods are still/full of birds/who always awaken the dew/and rescue you/from the edge of dream's deepest/silence/with songs full of sunlight"). So does the delight in language which runs through the whole collection: "a feather/falls thundering in the desert"; the sky "holds more thunder/than it's gripped in years"; "words I watched you sharpen with a nervous urge/to a scalpel's homicidal edge"; the landscape's colours "change and fade/in the arpeggio of flight." Perhaps because it has so many moods, so many fragments, *Liturgies* doesn't leave me breathless, but it nevertheless in its best poems accurately measures the distance between illusion and reality.

The form of Florence McNeil's *Emily* is narrative, a reconstruction of the stages, events, and themes of Emily Carr's life and work. This is more comfortable, less demanding poetry than that of the other two collections reviewed here, which is not intended to downgrade *Emily*'s achievement. The spirit of Emily Carr is in this book, not an easy thing to capture.

The main expression of that spirit is the "surge of sea and wind and rain" in the opening poem, "Waves," that moves through the book, as it did in Emily Carr's own life. In "Corners of Kitwancool Village," "liquid life/surges through me." In "France II," Emily Carr paints "lines and fragments/adding up to/bold strokes/that set/ a village/on its head/ the sun like a child's hoop/rolling out of/ the landscape." "Discoveries I" is a veritable eruption onto paper of Emily Carr's vision as expressed on canvas and captures its excitement:

> Take that tree above the cliff and br
> eak up the trunk find wrestling pul
> p
> put that seething and li
> quid
> r
> u
> n
> n
> ing
> on your brush.

Emily Carr of the poems climbs mountains with her eyes, rushes them into colour ("Home"), is "possessed" by totem spirits ("Totems II"), can feel "the swirl of the/raven," "the arithmetic of the seagulls," and "go exuberantly ahead" ("Discoveries III"). Even when exhausted, she longs to "run to the forest/shake rain drops from the willing trees/roll with the tangle of moss and fern" ("In the Hospital I"). She is never vanquished, despite all the art society ladies, souls "hatched/ in genteel egg crates," and "bald and tubular" school teachers with their "segmented minds seeing nothing."

> I turn around the mirrors
> say to my landscapes You reflect me
> there is some spirit here
> and life.
>
> ("1945")

These mirrors reflect not only the whirled forests and omnipresent ravens in her paintings, but also Emily Carr's physical and emotional landscapes. There is Victoria, "squarely British"; France and London; the House of All Sorts, where the painter tells "splattering old ladies" she is merely resting while "I sharpen my brush"; the B.C. wilderness where her fingers "growing patient by/the centuries/ play with trees"; the hospital where she lies "like a wounded animal," her heart "burst from living." There are the personalities of her world — her father, who "lived more stiffly than the wicker chair we prayed around"; her mother, "who sewed us together with patience"; the uncomprehending Canadian public; even the Carr menagerie, "proof of my kindly fertility."

I could go on rolling out lyrical words and phrases that bring Emily Carr so vividly to life, the boisterous, flamboyant, pugnacious, gentle Emily Carr. But that's unfair. Meet her for yourself in this book.

D. C. SCOTT

Sir,

I am working on a biography of Duncan Campbell Scott (1862-1947) and would be grateful for any information your readers might supply which would help me to locate letters or to gain access to useful biographical information.

ROBERT L. MCDOUGALL,
Carleton University.

books in review

VICTIMS OF BIGOTRY

HARRY POLLOCK, *Gabriel.* McGraw-Hill Ryerson, $8.95.
IAN MACNEILL, *The Battle for Saltbucket Beach.* McClelland & Stewart, $8.95.
JAMIE BROWN, *Stepping Stones.* Clarke, Irwin, $7.95.

PERHAPS THE MOST intriguing aspect of these three first novels is their very marked difference from one another. *Gabriel,* by Harry Pollock, is the story of a Toronto Jewish boy as he fumbles his way to sexual maturity in the 1930's. Written, on the average, in sentences four words long, *Gabriel* explores its hero's environment with relentless zeal. Few stones are left unturned, and what Pollock finds under most of them will not amuse Auntie Maud.

Ian MacNeill's *The Battle for Saltbucket Beach,* by contrast, is a debonair satire about a Toronto real estate developer who attempts to turn a prime area of Cape Breton into a sea-side playground for the rich. MacNeill's other targets include federal politicians and the sort of police officer who sees a Red under every bed.

Stepping Stones, by Jamie Brown, is the first volume of a trilogy aimed at chronicling "the rise and fall of a Canadian family's fortunes through three generations." Volume One traces the early career of Grandfather John Moncrieff, from his birth on an impoverished Manitoba farm in 1880 to his marriage to a millionaire's daughter in Shrewsbury, Ontario, in 1912. Author Brown obviously sees Grandfather John as a romantic hero, yet he has written his story with economy and restraint, interspersing just enough historical detail to keep the saga convincing. We have a genuine storyteller here, as opposed to a researcher with a yen to write novels.

What links the three books despite their evident differences is the common environment with which each set of characters has to cope. The physical landscapes may vary — from big city to small town to rural countryside — but the psychological climate remains oppressively the same: the ordinary Canadian, all three novelists point out, is likely to be victimized not by Nature but by bigotry.

Harry Pollock, writing out of a deep consciousness of Jewish tradition and experience, is the most insistent of the three. Gabriel, his protagonist, was born in the Polish town of Opatow and emigrates to Leonard Avenue, "an abrasion in the backside of the Toronto Western Hospital," at the age of five. ("Leonard was a cauldron in which the differing races simmered without yielding up their individual biases.") By early adolescence he is playing Sir Joseph Porter in *Pinafore* at the local social services centre and sneaking into a vaudeville theatre where he falls in love with a striptease dancer. The neighbourhood teems around him, throwing up an attempted gang bang here, a wild Polish wedding there. Chunks of prose distinct from the main narrative and headlined as in old newsreels convey the onrush of the Depression, social upheaval and World War II. Every now and then a solemn description of a Jewish ritual (Gabriel's Bar Mitzvah, Grandfather Judah's funeral) interrupts the naturalistic flow. The book ends with Gabriel's successful visit to a prostitute signalling the beginning of his manhood, and a brief sentence announcing the invasion by Germany of Poland. Throughout, the reader's awareness of omnipresent racial and religious friction is seldom allowed to relax.

Harry Pollock's prose style is various, ranging from clipped ("Separate fish from chips.... Pour on brown vinegar. Let soak in. Pour more vinegar") to evocative ("The City Hall clock tolled the half-hour. The reverberations cannonballed across the city in hollow diminuendos. They called to Gabriel: Sad and lonely. Sad and lonely") to relentlessly precise ("Aunt Sadie stood, stared, withdrew her right index finger from her nostril and pulled with it a gob of mucous. She regarded its color, contemplated its texture. She wiped the jelly on her blouse, returned the finger to her gaping mouth and sucked in imitation of the infant").

The style of this novel, in fact, is superior to its subject matter. *Gabriel* is like an ugly urban parody of *Who Has Seen the Wind*, played to background music from *Ten Lost Years* as orchestrated by James Joyce. It's also inexcusably dirty, for it lacks the wit and humour which might have redeemed it. It is well matched in a cover illustration which shows a partly-clad girl with her legs spreadeagled above a church steeple and a rooster crowing at her feet. Subtle, it's not.

Ian MacNeill is a screenwriter for the National Film Board, and his first novel contains several earmarks of the popular screenplay. It has an extraordinary cast of characters, including a group of teenaged Maoists, a pratfalling RCMP inspector *à la* Peter Sellers as Inspector Clouseau, a collection of canny Cape Bretoners, a handful of city slickers, a pair of young lovers and a wicked caricature of a Canadian Prime Minister whose name everyone is careful not to mention. Its settings include a general store and a small hotel, a lobster boat at sea, the bedroom of a rich American widow and a Maritime Museum. And, last but not least, it has a happy ending.

The Battle for Saltbucket Beach is flip, witty and rooted in the conservationist conviction that to be 50 years behind the times is really to be 50 years ahead. It also offers a few choice suggestions for Canadian political and social reform. These are so submerged in a sea of comic dialogue, however, that they are unlikely to disturb the peace of the casual reader. (Others will find them inartistically close to propaganda.)

Initially, MacNeill's handling of characterization is very skillful indeed. Once his federal politicians enter the picture, he virtually jettisons his entire cast in favour of broad satire. Such a course might work well enough in a film, where the kidnapping of a Prime Minister by a gang of 15-year-olds would make up for in spectacle what it lacked in credibility, but in print it is barely successful.

Still, *The Battle for Saltbucket Beach* displays a fine wit ("I cracked my muffler on an ox-trail, got attacked by a mongrel called Baron — Baron! for Christ's sake — got shafted by a Cape Breton Okie, got shit from Ames, and spent about twenty bucks getting nowhere with Mr. Archie McPhee. Jesus! They deserve all the regional disparity coming to them") and a nice perception of rural-urban hostility. As a first novel, it is an impressive debut.

James Moncrieff, the hero of Jamie Brown's *Stepping Stones*, discovers more than one kind of prejudice in his meteoric career. There is the hostility of race and nationality, as evidenced by Winnipeg's immigrant community when he attempts to move among it freely from his safe base on the right side of the tracks, and the hostility of class, which he encounters as a labourer attempting to join the Shrewsbury tennis club.

Along the way Brown also manages to work in a few sly digs at the blinkered timidity of Canadian bankers and the injustice of preferential freight tariffs. But his main business is to describe the birth

and growth of the Moncrieff Moth, the innovative horseless carriage which his hero designs and builds in 1901. His description of a 1908 Auto Race between Toronto and Montreal, in which the tiny Moth competes against the best that New York and Europe have to offer, is well sustained and the highlight of the book.

Stepping Stones may not have been written expressly for young people, but there is no doubt that it would prove a useful addition to courses in Canadian Studies. It's a story in the Horatio Alger mould, granted, but Brown's prose possesses a saving degree of sophistication and his portrait of John Moncrieff as a romantic hero and a successful entrepreneur who makes his name in Canada is, to say the least, refreshing.

PAT BARCLAY

HOLLYWOODEN

PIERRE BERTON, *Hollywood's Canada: The Americanization of Our National Image.* McClelland & Stewart, $13.95.

THIS BOOK EXAMINES the 575 Hollywood films over 1907 to 1960 whose plot is set entirely or mainly in Canada. Having viewed or read the scripts of all of them Berton concludes that Hollywood hid a Canadian national image "under a celluloid mountain of misconceptions." Thus he insists that the whole world, Canadians included, was brainwashed into believing and handing down this false Hollywood's Canada. It is a mythical country, he says, a snowbound waste speckled with pine jungles and populated by classical "western" characters who make a mockery of the Canadian way.

In repetitious Yankee melodramas six-guns-ablaze, Mounties metamorphize into sheriffs, "sneaky, grasping, cowardly, dirty" Metis replace Mexicans, and Native Nations, like American "Indians," scalp-hunt and wagon-burn through life with gusto.

But while Berton correctly repudiates these depredations, he fails to recognize that there are two distinct Canadas. The Canada to which he devotes most of the book is immigrant colonial Canada whose attitude to Native Canadians bears striking resemblance to Hollywood's. The other, the secondary Canada of Native Peoples, stands helpless in the sin and shame of the less-than-human "image" Hollywood ascribes to it. It is this second Canada that has borne the brunt of "distortion" at the hands of Hollywooden film-makers. Whole nations and their cultures have been wiped out, not only on the screen, but also in the "reality" that Berton eagerly seeks.

Yet Berton has not treated the desecration of second Canada's world image with the detail with which he invests Mountie lore. He focuses here on the line of RCMP Commissioners as they fight off Hollywooden production men from further besmirching of the Force, e.g. Hollywooden redcoats actually *sing* in *Rose Marie* (1929); some wear, oh horrors, stetsons with too many dents.

Alas, why does not Berton raise an albeit belated voice to ask why Canadian governments and social institutions failed to intercede on the Native's behalf? Why did they too, like the Mounties, not have access to political power to rescue themselves from Hollywood's insidious machinery? The absence of an answer takes away much of the validity of Berton's arguments.

Also, he bases his thesis on an assumption: that Hollywooden films "blurred" the national identity of immigrant colonial Canada. This is not true. Certainly, in Britain and the Commonwealth (where Hollywood found its largest market outside America) Canada's vital associations with British history and institutions were well known. To even less literate mass

publics, returning immigrants, students, the royal mail and books like *Beckoning Trails* articulated the Canadian reality. Wherever Canadian missionaries went, foreign school-children became aware of Albertan oil, prairie grain, Helen Keller, the Laurentian Shield, Wolfe, Ottawa, winter, maple, beavers, Quebec, MacKenzie King and majesty of the Rockies. Commonwealers did not allow asinine acetate to block out Banting and Best, the true RCMP, John McCrae's *In Flanders Fields*, the RCAF or Ernest C. Manning's *Back to the Bible* broadcasts. They were not allowed to because extensively travelling Canadians — from admen to ambassadors, from zoologists to zitherists — preached a Canadian way of life that had preciously little to do with Hollywood.

Whom then did Hollywood deceive about the Canadian national image? Not Canadians, argues Berton. The French had their own Quebec story, talkies appeared in the late 1920's, and translations and sub-titles are comparatively recent developments. All things thus considered, the conclusion is that Hollywood deceived itself only. Americans fell for their own propaganda.

So if Americans still turn up at the border with skis and toques in midsummer why should we fear? Better that than high velocity shells, napalm and anti-personnel fragmentation bombs with which they are entering other countries. If Gary Cooper, not the political order that dehumanized the Metis, put down the Riel Rebellion; if Randolph Scott, not foreign navvies, built the CPR; and if Jimmy Stewart, not the Mounted Police, set down Klondike law it was all done in the general interest of greed and seduction. Canada merely extended the locational range of the money-spinning, mindless but appealing western movie. Avalanches replaced tornadoes and tumbleweed. Mounties replaced sheriffs. So what?

If there were doubts about the depiction of the world of immigrant colonial Canada they have all gone now. What remains is the racist fate of the Blackfoot, the Cree, the Athapascan, the Montagnais and the Metis. Hollywood did not invent that filth or have a monopoly on its production. School books, made in Canada, still circulate the same fare. *Hollywood's Canada* begs the question: Now that Canada has its own film industry what has it produced to put the records straight? Especially for those Canadians who perish every day in living rooms and streets under the guns of the swinging, ever-winning cowboys?

CLYDE HOSEIN

MUSEUM PIECE

Winnipeg Stories, edited by Joan Parr. Queenston House, $2.25.

IN HIS INTRODUCTION *to Winnipeg Stories*, David Arnason speaks of a Winnipeg style. "Just what the style is," he declares, "will come to you as you read the stories themselves". I don't doubt the sincerity and devotion of his statement, but I disagree with him. After reading the sixteen short stories, I am unable to find any connecting link between the stories except land and weather. I may have begun with a bias, but I am not sure I believe in the regional concept of writing.

Winnipeg Stories, published in Winnipeg in 1974, was aided by a grant from the Winnipeg Centennial Celebrations Committee, and is a thoroughly regional operation, allowing contributions only from Winnipeggers and ex-Winnipeggers. This may keep the collection pure, from the viewpoint of origin, but it doesn't assure an even level of quality. Regional stories are always in danger of becoming

an affectionate collection, rather than an anthology of stories chosen as examples of good Canadian writing.

I felt the affection in the book for "the city," as Arnason calls it, a disturbing response, making me feel almost alien as a British Columbian. I couldn't say in reading about a particular incident or remembering a town, place or custom, "Yes, it was like that, I remember it well," shaking my head in the comfortable knowledge or gratification of having been there. The best short stories deal in their subject matter with a deeper than average insight, and are technically intact.

From this viewpoint, there are five outstanding stories. "Westward O Pioneers!" is the liveliest and most contemporary. Written in first person by Edward Kleiman in the voice of a Yorkshireman awkwardly adapting to North American behaviour, it shatters middle-class respectability with triumph, delight and a supreme irony. "Up and Down in the Depression," by Chester Duncan, combines the deprivation of the hungry-thirties with the spiritual elevation of music and has the authenticity of a knowledgeable musician and writer. W. D. Valgardson's "The Baseball Game" is not really about baseball, which is only a catalyst, but reveals an obsessive character and a troubled marriage. "That Sensual Music," by Fredelle Bruser Maynard, relates the difference between two sisters in personality and outlook during teen-age years, and ends with a remarkable acceptance of the differences. "My Uncle's Black-Iron Arm" by Mort Forer depicts "an artist in black iron," and is written in metal. Uncle Solomon is a superb character whose tragic history illustrates morality, ethics, the brutality of war and depression. Forer's black-iron prose says of Solomon: "Every year his giant arm strengthened and blackened like his black-iron art. His muscles bulged and valleyed and his hands slowly grew a thick leather crust. On his face, over the million burn marks, deep lines furrowed up, even into his coarse, dark hair."

The other stories fall dimly into varying degrees of depth and technical competence. Miriam Waddington's "Summer At Lonely Beach" is a pleasantly reminiscent, wistful account of loneliness, and "Willie" by Jim Burke strikes a similar note of sadness, although it's concerned with the innocence of a retarded boy and the ignorance of his oppressors.

As for Rossa Williamson's "The Pink Hat," previously published in "various European magazines", I doubt whether any self-respecting woman's magazine in North America would print such a story anymore, or even *Playboy* for that matter. There are no boy-meets-girl, pink-hat stories anymore. "The Pink Hat" has its charm, but it's nevertheless a relic, and the best example in the book of Winnipeg's affectionate past.

I liked the cover by Ross Sundmark and Solveig Borgford, but I can only regret that *Winnipeg Stories* is more of a museum piece than a consistently good collection of short fiction written and published in Canada.

LORRAINE VERNON

A SEDENTARY OVATION

FRED EURINGER, *A Dream of Horses*. Oberon, cloth $6.95; paper $3.50.
JOYCE MARSHALL, *A Private Place*. Oberon, cloth $6.95; paper $3.50.
JOHN METCALF, *The Teeth of My Father*. Oberon, cloth $6.95; paper $3.50.

IN "Feuille d'Album," the master of the short story, Katharine Mansfield, renders the quintessential conclusion of the genre and the supermundane nature of artifice in the symbol of an innocent, shatter-

proof egg. "The Strange Aberration of Mr. Ken Smythe," opening story of John Metcalf's collection *The Teeth of My Father*, concludes considerably more truculently, but no less glibly: with a bottle in a character's face, and indeed in the reader's. What seems initially a highly comic piece concerning the reception of a touring German boys' band by an audience of inebriated British World War II veterans and picture-snapping American tourists proves to be a harshly hyperbolical picture of reality. The audience hurls more than invective. The photographers capture a plethora of hœmorrhaging life — switching to colour film when life really begins to flow. Here Metcalf shocks the reader in order to inform him that his subjects elsewhere in this well-composed collection transcend the grotesque. The author does not put all his *œuvre* in one basket.

The most moving piece in the collection is the title story, in which is depicted with remarkable precision and warmth a son's belated realization of his love for his deceased father. The "teeth" are just one of the son's memories of his father which, at the opening of the story, he is relating to a drinking companion. But like the teeth this nostalgia is false, and in the rest of the story the son, through an examination of memories and of stories he has composed — like most of Metcalf's characters this one is an artist — attempts to arrive at the truth of the filial relationship, a ten-year-long process culminating in a scalding tear of unrequitable love.

More psychologically complex is "The Years in Exile," which records the reminiscences of an old Canadian writer as he awaits an interviewer from a literary journal and considers the sorting of his corpus of manuscripts and letters promised to Queen's University. Metcalf arranges his narrative in an ostensibly itinerant manner which reflects the wanderings of an antiquarian mind. Of course, the seemingly extemporaneous is the most highly contrived, and such a mundane symbol as a lawn chair, with which the story opens, is highly evocative of a sedentary, contemplative existence. Indeed it is the seat of exile. The old man dislikes the chair and thinks of the more satisfactory thrones of his boyhood, thereby inaugurating a descent into the past in search of order, similar to that represented in the title story. The aged exile sorts through manuscripts and memories, the tangible and intangible documents of life. Not until old age does this "pilgrim" realize that his destination had been reached in his youth; and in trying to recapture the memories of childhood he reconstructs thought into the short story we are told could not accommodate it, written by a writer who considers himself too old to write. The pilgrim continually returns to the reality of the present, but, motivated by the associations inherent in his surroundings invariably abandons it and returns to his British childhood. The mind moves in pictures:

> I stare at my wrist as it lies along the aluminum arm of the chair, the blue veins. The left side of the wrist might be the river Avon and its estuary, the right side of the sea. And then my fist, the bulge of the headland.

And just as the present recalls the past, the past invokes the present; hence this temporal vacillation:

> I wonder if my room smells, if I smell? I often remarked it in old people when I was younger. I can remember still the smell of my grandmother. Thank God I will never know. I can, at least, still bathe without assistance though she insists I do not lock the door. Some I remember smelled medicinal, some of mothballs, some just a mustiness. I have not shaved today. I must remember to shave before evening for the young man is coming to ask me questions.

Whereas the exile could not often find an "adequate structure" for his stories,

Metcalf has structured well the associations of ideas. The other stories in *The Teeth of My Father* are not only well-written but related structurally and thematically, forming a collection which assumes its highest literary value collectively.

Fred Euringer's *A Dream of Horses* is a collection not as well unified, but some of its stories are still highly successful. Occasionally, though — as in "One More for the Practical Cats," about a man haunted scatalogically by the ghost of a cat he destroyed years earlier, and in "The Rat and the Goose," about the destruction of a gander both in its hutch, by a nibbling rat, and at the dinner table, by the youth who avenges the foul and verminous deed — the stories are except for their grotesque, cinematic detail scarcely interesting. At times Euringer simply fumbles with awkward, inappropriate language:

> . . . I've never been able to watch a newsreel of German soldiers doing what they call the "goose-step" without feeling that I had some sort of secret private knowledge that shed semantic light on the derivation of that otherwise none-too-accurate descriptive nomenclature.

Yet this descriptive overreaching is not disturbingly prevalent. The remaining stories in the collection are generally well-executed. In one, an interesting literary experiment entitled "A Christmas Pageant," Euringer even seems to recognize his stylistic weakness and, by articulating it, transcend it. The story is an attempt to articulate a recurrent vision which the narrator has never been able to express adequately. Both the author and his persona recognize the causes of inarticulateness:

> . . . either my skill with words is inadequate, or the medium itself is inappropriate for the embodiment of this vision.

Ironically, this story is an admirable and original exploration of a universal artistic predicament, scrivener's palsy.

More conventionally self-conscious, but even more successful as a short story, is "Homer's Door," a futuristic examination of the artist both as creator and as destroyer. In 1999, at the age of sixty-five, David is forced to vacate his residence, and hence to sort out his books and manuscripts. Among the latter is a collection of poems composed thirty years earlier. "The Homer Poems" documents David's pathetic relationship with Homer, who occupies the flat across the hall. Adventitiously, David begins to observe Homer through a tiny hole in their common wall. He soon becomes an aesthetic scopophiliac and composes "The Homer Poems." Euringer renders a fine picture of the artist who, at the barrier between reality and fiction, "with a darning needle, penetrates the opening imperceptibly, to make it larger, widen his perspective." After completing the poems David tacks them to Homer's door. This confession results in a temporal suspension; not of art, but of life, *viz.* the suicide of Homer. The reader himself is suspended somewhere between the years 1969 and 1999, and Euringer thus concludes a satisfyingly disturbing story.

In *A Private Place* Joyce Marshall concerns herself with a variety of subjects — solitude, separation, death, friendship, vicarious experience, mutual confession, innocence — and artistic approaches to them, but still manages to produce a balanced, unified work of art. Like Metcalf and Euringer, Marshall has the twentieth century obsession with observing the observer. In the title story, Lars, after renting the flat of a dead man, begins to receive letters from Margaret, the deceased's mistress, who is unaware of the change of occupant. Lars eventually reads the letters and finds, in a relationship much more warm than that between

him and his estranged wife, a bizarre, vicarious solace. In the end this epistolary voyeurism proves to inhibit Lars's future success with other more real women.

In "Salvage," a woman's attempt to help a girl, Sylvia, to recover from an attempted suicide proves to be more therapeutic to the philanthropist — like Lars she is separated — than to the girl. Rhoda, this maternal "do-gooder," appropriately nicknamed "Goose," finds the solutions to some of her own psychological problems and, ultimately, discovers that, while neither she nor Sylvie knows herself, each knows the other, and this precarious knowledge is the basis of a mysterious "covenant between them."

A simple and entertaining story is "The Old Woman", a fantastic tale about a power house attendant in northern Quebec who eventually, though the decision causes his mental breakdown, chooses to attend rather to his machine (the old woman of the title) than to his wife. The fantasy is well-controlled, an effective tonal break in a demanding progression of stories. Perhaps the most successful story is "The Little White Girl," in which the narrator recalls a vision of supernal innocence through the medium of recurrent dream. Subtle Dantesque allusions suggest the angelic nature of the little white girl, and elevate the story, and indeed the collection, to a celestial sphere of excellence.

These three interesting collections published by Oberon are entertaining, stimulating, and occasionally edifying explorations of human existence, from the mundane, to the grotesque, to the supermundane. Their deviations from the circle of artistic perfection are usually of the artificial, ovoid variety; not mind-shattering, but delicate and precious. In the contemporary Canadian short story the aesthetic egg breaks, but in so doing allows the emergence of life not to be avoided by the curious reader.

PAUL M. ST. PIERRE

TWO PARABLES FOR THEATRE

ROBERT GURIK, *Api 2967*. Translated by Marc F. Gélinas. Talonbooks, $3.00. *The Trial Of Jean-Baptiste M.* Translated by Allan Van Meer. Talonbooks, $3.50.

ROBERT GURIK's *Api 2967* and *The Trial Of Jean-Baptiste M.* are parables about man's place in two types of insidious society. *Api 2967*, set a thousand years into the future from the time it was first performed, recreates the Adam and Eve story to make the point man's scientific propensity and ultramodern technology will be the eventual death of civilization. The play's thesis is obvious, and dialogue, situations, and characters all appear to emanate from a jejune imagination. *Api 2967* resembles the exercises improvised in developmental drama courses, for science fiction of this type is easy to contrive.

What has gone wrong? Well, for one thing, the satiric machinery shows little originality. The Adam and Eve myth has virtually had its day. What is left to satirize in it? Gurik does not seem to know, so he elects to play it safe by giving us a laugh or two about a Computer-Age Eve (called E. for contrived symbolic effect) who is filled with fear upon first seeing an apple (called Api for sci-fi buffs who appreciate this type of cryptic strain). E. and the Professor (a unique, scientific Adam) live in a world of plastics and mechanical programming. The Api, therefore, confuses them, so until they have tasted it, they know it only by its smooth, plexiglass texture and by the Professor's anatomical description of it

as "a cross between spherical and ovoid volumes, truncated in both extremities with swellings and internal poles of attraction." The scientists have reversed the scale of values familiar to human beings, thereby providing a new dimension to acts and life. Their world is a place of pre-established and scientifically calculated diets, of research on longevity, of population controls, of Huxleyan test-tubes. It is a world where all acts are regulated by quotas to conserve energy so that longevity may be extended. But it is also a world of death-in-life for though the common salutation is "Let there be life" there is no life as we know it in this new world. The lighting, set design, and movements are meant to suggest the Garden of Eden's serenity, but this world is a Paradise only to programme-happy scientists. By tasting the Api, E. reverses some of the implications of the Biblical myth for instead of merely introducing pain, turmoil, and death into her world, she lets in emotion and life as well.

Of course, this is not altogether a novel idea; even John Milton conceived of the Genesis story as a conflict between the appetite for knowledge and life on one hand and the divine injunction against total freedom and experience on the other. Nevertheless, it leads into Gurik's thesis that science and history have reversed the meanings of life and death. Until E. tastes the apple (for which she predictably develops a keen hunger) life on the Professor's planet is a kind of elongated death where immobility is a prime stance and monotonous repetition a solemn decree. Once the Api has been tasted, E. and the Professor remove their jackets and hoods (in a parallel to Adam and Eve's nakedness) and discover each other's metallized skin in the first warm flush of lust. But again the parallels between Gurik's fictive situation and the Genesis myth are obvious and stereotyped and it would take a most ingenious

production to make these scenes work on stage for audiences to feel other than a sense of *déjà-vu*.

The final statement of the play, once E. and the Professor are nearing their end, is that feeling is what counts most of all — even more than language, that humanizing idiom. Ironically, however, Gurik's play lets us feel so little for its characters. They are puppets, well preserved in white plastic, and accordingly they cannot but fail to elicit our deepest feelings. There is a resulting alienation between audience and characters that goes beyond artistic distance. This unresolved gap between play and audience is not at all like Brecht's *Verfrumdung* or "estrangement" effect, for Gurik's play does not arouse in its audience a desire to alter the object of recognition.

This point opens up the second major reason for the failure of *Api 2967*. Although Gurik has taken care to spell out a technical style for his play, he has failed to create a truly surprising or "dangerous" environment. Despite its use of various media, the play looks outmoded and fails to achieve in its audience the psychological synchronization so essential to any type of theatre that intends to extend its scope beyond the realist tradition. Gurik's scenography is kinetic in a restrained way: it allows light to float around, furniture to be self-propelled, and animated film to explode on screens, but its motion does not offset the depersonalization of E. and the Professor, and the play, as a result, has a static quality which hardly succeeds in being exotic, much less an assault on our minds and nerves. Gurik's sci-fi fails to vibrate around us or to hit us with bursts that could even faintly resemble futurist synthetic expressions of cerebral energy. The rhythm (of sound and gesture) and conflict are not aggressive enough and do not create a strong atmosphere of cruelty on stage. After Marinetti and Artaud, Jarry and Ionesco, this play is decidedly *passéist*.

But Gurik still remains a significant playwright, for his *Trial Of Jean-Baptiste M.* succeeds, where *Api* fails, in bringing life and power to art. Ostensibly an investigation into the causes for its protagonist's crimes against society, the play is a powerful indictment of a corporate society which denies a male his manhood. But it is also more than this, for it lives its subject rather than contemplating it.

Jean-Baptiste M. uses the full extensions of its subject by both an intelligible language of words and a strong emotionality. As such, it aligns itself with all those plays by O'Neill and Ibsen which attempt to go beyond mere narrative and touch the wellsprings of universal emotions. Textually, the language of this play hardly exceeds that of *Api*, but *Jean-Baptiste M.* shows much more than *Api* ever does.

One reason might well be its subject. Jean-Baptiste M. is a Canadian of mixed background, having been born to a French-Canadian father and an English-Canadian mother. His Christian name is that of Quebec's patron saint but his surname is incomplete and this mixture of allusiveness and anonymity adds to the character's instability. Like John the Baptist, J. B. (as he is sometimes called) tries to make smooth the way for moral righteousness but he is thwarted by corporate society which is capable of sacrificing anyone who is a real or imagined threat to its bureaucracy. So, J. B., hardly capable of being a first-class citizen much less his dream of Prime Minister, goes from job to job and this flux reaches a height after his dishonourable discharge from the Canadian army for having given a recruit a haircut during initiation. J. B. initially treats life as a game but discovers to his regret that this playfulness is out of place in an aggressive society

that demands strict obeisance to its narrow laws.

The naturalist current clearly intends us to see the destructive power of the corporate industry. Dutron, "the greatest chemical empire in the world," is the industry which controls this society, and J. B. has to contend with its emasculating force. He discovers he cannot ever find a worthy place in this world and since he is a passionate man, he reacts passionately to his failure. Like Camus' existentialists, he discovers his final choice comes down to murder or suicide, and he chooses to kill his bosses in a disruption of the accepted order.

But this is not a play about murder, for the dominant question is one of manhood. Where the apple was a key symbol in *Api*, genitals figure in *Jean-Baptiste M.* Right from his birth, there is an uncertainty concerning J. B.'s identity. He is passed around from hand to hand while the usual comments are made about his complexion, physique, and potential. One witness puts a hand on J. B.'s genitals as if to affirm that the boy is a male, and in due course there are threats to J. B.'s manhood. When he fails in his army career, his father mocks him bitterly for not being a man, and J. B. discovers how difficult it is to be a man in a society which fosters the delusion of equal opportunity for all. In short, it is he, the perennial aspirant to a just place in society, who is the victim of psychological castration — a fact that is made explicit in a scene where J. B. screams and holds his genitals after his rifle breech has been pulled out. The metaphorical contract between the rifle and manhood works well, for Gurik obviously intends us to see how society impels J. B. into a violent defence of his virility.

The play is replete with ironies and one of the largest is the very ambition of J. B. Instead of wanting to be a rebel, he wishes to belong to society. He never tries to reject society even though he is accused time and again of being anti-social. All his life J. B. seeks to do something useful and to be respected, but meets with nothing other than a series of rejections and indictments. He misreads his society as a democratic one when it is really, as Willy Loman could have informed him, an economic one. His aspiration for dignity is doomed for he is a second-class citizen whose identity is incomplete. Ironically, he compounds his doom by embracing Dutron, the very force that is designed to suppress him. As a further irony, it is he and not Dutron that becomes the designated enemy of society.

J. B. is caught in the powerful machinery of corporate society and he is crushed in a manner not unworthy of O'Neill's intensity. However, the play refuses to sentimentalize its passion for surely one of its ironies is that life is fundamentally a useless passion in an industrial society. As such, then, Gurik's sense of protest is restrained by a philosophic realism or, as some might prefer to call it, cynicism.

Whatever the merits of Gurik's philosophic attitude, *The Trial of Jean-Baptiste M.* has a dynamism which is the very symbol of life. In his production notes the author stresses an improvisational quality and suggests how several "readings" can be made of the play. These notes reinforce the impression we obtain from the text of a type of theatre which lives by reason of its flexible structure. The drama begins with a montage of noises and has a strong filmic quality for its scenes dissolve into one another, and lines of time braid together in a way that approaches the cinema's sense of mobility. All these things help the play attain a workshop quality that would probably have delighted a Copeau, Meyerhold, Piscator, or Brecht — all of whom subscribed to and encouraged in different ways the idea of theatre as a

liberating experiment on the hidden emotional life of man.

KEITH GAREBIAN

CULTURAL TACTICS

ROWLAND SMITH, ed., *Exile and Tradition.* Africana Publishing Company and Dalhousie University Press. $18.00, paper $7.00.

SIX OF THE THIRTEEN articles collected in Rowland Smith's *Exile and Tradition* appeared in the Winter 1973-74 issue of the *Dalhousie Review.* All thirteen were first delivered as papers at two Dalhousie Conferences on African and Caribbean literature. Gathered here, they are a forceful reminder of the social engagement in African writing and a helpful introduction to the tactics of African criticism.

There are essays here on and by individual figures like Kofi Awoonor, Chinua Achebe, and Wole Soyinka; there are thematic surveys (alienation in North Africa, exile in West Africa and Martinique); there are political polemics, linguistic analyses, critical credos. Such an observation hides, however, the extraordinary degree of coherence these disparate essays achieve. Smith's title declares a thematic overlap. But the observations of exile and tradition also convey a collective overview of African experience. This perspective involves not just Black Consciousness (Donatus Nwoga gives *négritude* a moderate defence), but also a respect for the cultural continuities which the apparent discontinuities in African life (slavery, colonialism, exile) seem to deny. The criticism of the colonial presence in Africa and government policy in South Africa is sharp and clear; even severer is the criticism levelled at critics (Western or African) who impose a Western bias in their reading. The message is direct: listen to Africa before you try to interpret Africa. The positive example which the essays set shows the virtue of listening closely.

Donatus Nwoga's explicit rejection of cultural "universality" and Peter Okeh's insistence upon cultural "authenticity" are both attempts to distinguish between patterns of cultural tradition and the kinds of distortion which modern interpretations have imposed upon them. The other half of their argument appears in the observations of Isaac Yetiv and Rowland Smith about North and South Africa respectively, where "cultural schizophrenia" — giving the lie to Canada's exclusive national claim to it — is seen as a contemporary norm. Douglas Killam, too, notes the danger involved in a society "trying to get rid of [its] gods and demons." African and Caribbean societies all have their own problems. The argument, however, turns out to favour neither colonial imposition nor wholesale recidivism, but rather the power of cultural survival. "The state of exile," writes Max Dorsinville about Senghor and Césaire, "was always wedded to the native land, the consciousness of the deep self identified with the accidents of history and contingency." Furthermore: cultures "from their first contact with the Other ... tactically [redefine] themselves." This is a process of renewal rather than of negation, which allows the "conquered" to be the ultimate victor and lets survival express a certain unquenchable joy. Art serves a social function in these instances. It faces the exigencies of political life, yet — here becoming of particular relevance to the Canadian literary scene — manages still to maintain a perspective towards experience, affirming the persistence of respected cultural values, the power of the artist to communicate them, and the capacity of the people to appreciate and understand.

W. H. NEW

WILL TO LIVE

WALTER BAUER, *A Different Sun.* Translated from the German by Henry Beissel. Oberon, $8.95.

IN HIS INTRODUCTION to this volume Henry Beissel describes Walter Bauer as Canada's immigrant poet *par excellence.* Bauer may very well be just that, despite the fact that he has written primarily in German, his native tongue. What should be underlined, as is so often the case, is the role immigrants have played, and continue to play, in the life of Canadian literature. This is not altogether unexpected, especially since it has been recognized, not least by Margaret Atwood, that Canada is really a nation of immigrants, and also, that one of her currently most talked-about writers is F. P. Grove, the immigrant novelist *par excellence* — one might say.

Be that as it may, Bauer is unique as a poet. He brings to his writing a sensitivity and experience shaped by the vicissitudes of his seventy-two years, during which he has been imprisoned in Nazi Germany and has lived a life of "double exile." No wonder, in these poems, we find him brooding on such themes as exile, loneliness, the struggle of the immigrant, self-doubt, political revolution, workers in a factory, and the continual exploration of the landscape of the mind. These themes are inevitable as the imagination tries to come to grips with pain, disappointments, and the general wish to dramatize the human condition.

An extremely prolific writer, Bauer has written over sixty books, nine of which are about Canada. Strangely enough Bauer has not been given the recognition he deserves, considering the fact that he has been living in Canada for twenty-four years. In Germany itself, where he has won the Albert Schweitzer prize, his reputation continues to grow.

A schematic preoccupation in this volume is seen in the continual juxtaposition of the Old World with the New: the ambivalences of pain, suffering and "desperate love" of the former with the awareness of hope in the latter. But very often the holocaust that Bauer witnessed during the Second World War, and the stirrings of revolutionary impulses in Europe form an ironic undertone in his cogitations about Canada. Thus in one of his best poems, "The Sun Here," he writes:

> The sun here must be a different sun
> From the one under which I used to live.
> The sun here has seen forests and rivers,
> The long crawl of primeval ages, . . .
> Not the end of cities burning to ashes like
> useless toys. . . .

Against this image of innocence he says the Canadian sun is one "without depth, without shame, without guilt, without shadows," as if, as Beissel reminds us, the Indians have been treated without shame.

The poems are all journeys into experience, tinged with brooding melancholy and self-assessment, but never pessimism: the persona preferring to live with *equanimitas* than with self-destroying turmoil. Thus in the poem "Toronto," which Bauer reminds us means *meeting place*, not only has he changed his habits, or learnt a new language, but "Here I steeled my No/Here I heated my Yes."

Whether the poems are aesthetically pleasing it is difficult to judge, mainly because the nuances and rhythms of the original German suffer in translation. As they are, in English, quite a few tend to be flat: the resonances are never deep enough to help us make the imaginative leap from the particular to the universal. Others, too, tend to be trite or sentimental; but beyond this they express a timeless truth about human existence, of man's will to live, despite holocausts and exiles. This perhaps is where the solid

resonances of Bauer's poems lie, and why it is essential for us to be able to read them in English.

CYRIL DABYDEEN

THREE TRADITIONS

ROBERT OLVER, *The Bicycle Tree*. McClelland and Stewart, $8.95.
JOHN BUELL, *Playground*. Farrar, Straus and Giroux.
CAROL SHIELDS, *Small Ceremonies*. McGraw-Hill Ryerson, $8.95.

CONSCIOUSLY or unconsciously, most novelists work within the framework of a tradition. Robert Olver's *The Bicycle Tree*, for example, recalls the rural novels of such writers as Frederick Philip Grove, Robert Stead and Ernest Buckler in which the relationships among a family or a community develop against an agricultural background. In his latest novel, *Playground*, John Buell analyzes man's confrontation with wilderness, a subject previously explored by, among others, Susanna Moodie, Charles G. D. Roberts and Margaret Atwood. These writers describe characters isolated from their familiar society who are forced through life in the wild to reassess nature, society and self. *Small Ceremonies* by Carol Shields is a psychological domestic comedy in the manner of Margaret Laurence, or the earlier Frances Brooke and Rosanna Leprohon, in which the protagonist (frequently female), caught at a moment of acute awareness of the problems in her relationship to her family and her society, achieves a re-ordered vision of life.

To place a novel within a tradition does not assign it to a confining pigeonhole. Rather, the process is a recognition that other authors have attempted to write on similar subjects. Ideally, an author should write so as to make the reader forget, at least temporarily, the other works; an author should achieve individuality within the tradition. The three novels under review here illustrate a full range of possibilities — dismal failure, modest achievement and solid success. Robert Olver slavishly adheres to a formula; John Buell handles the genre competently but without distinction; Carol Shields remodels the tradition in her own image.

The story of Handy Rice as told by Robert Olver in *The Bicycle Tree* possibly contains every cliché associated with a rural novel: a hailstorm, a frustrated artist, a rape, a vengeful town, a grand project to irrigate the land, a bullying father and a tragic conclusion. Even the epigraph from the Book of Deuteronomy — "To me belongeth vengeance, and recompense" — suggests a tired rehearsal of tired material. Handy Rice has married Leslie McGowan with full knowledge that she was raped by her stepfather when she was fourteen, that she had a child and that she will never again bear children. They adopt a son, Matthew, but Handy continues to feel that he is being punished for the stepfather's act. He either ignores or terrorizes his son, and he allows his friend Dickie (the frustrated artist) to grow in his wife's and his son's affections while he devotes himself to a plan to divert a creek with dynamite. Olver's characters, scenes and symbols are clumsy and heavy-handed to the point of embarrassment. The ironic tragedy of the ending, the son's death in the explosion, sparks derisive laughter at the author's perpetuation of a formula. Robert Olver either has no awareness of previous novels on similar subjects, or he has intentionally imitated them with his lesser talent.

In *Playground* John Buell has adopted an equally traditional subject, but he handles it much more competently. Spencer Morison, a wealthy Montreal profes-

sional, flies off course when he is heading toward a campsite in northern Quebec. A thunderstorm forces him to land the plane on a lake, but the plane sinks and he is left stranded in the bush without equipment. His struggle to survive teaches him that nature is not a "playground," as he had come to see it, and that his life in Montreal had been "a closed system, a self-contained illusion, a routine that would be deadly in the long run." Buell develops his points with some subtlety, but he draws back from presenting a personal view. He does not specify the permanent change in Spencer Morison; he only shows his character's sense of kinship with the Indians who rescue him rather than with the anthropologist who studies them. The absence of an informing pattern of ideas matches the weakness of the characterization. Except for a few incidental details, Spencer Morison is the same character who appeared as Joe Grant in Buell's previous novel, *The Shrewsdale Exit*. The limitations of this character become clear in *Playground* because the subject matter demands a prolonged examination of his mental functions. Unfortunately, Buell's character is too shallow to sustain the analysis, and the author must resort to vague generalizations to describe the protagonist's responses. Buell handles the traditional plot of wilderness survival with professional skill, but he lacks the power to make it fresh and original.

Carol Shields understands the dangers and the potential of traditions in fiction. In *Small Ceremonies*, her first novel, she includes a satirical abstract of the Canadian rural novel that should destroy forever the credibility of such novels as *The Bicycle Tree*. The first person protagonist, Judith Gill, is engaged in writing a biography of Susanna Moodie, and Shields suggests some subtle parallels between their lives. The element of pioneer struggle is absent, however, for Shields sets her story in what appears to be contemporary Ottawa. Judith Gill is a successful but unsatisfied biographer, the wife of a professor who specializes in Milton and the mother of two teenaged children. Shields selects a modest scope for her story: the lives of the members of this family and their friends over one academic year. No great calamities occur and no cosmic revelations are made, but the author holds and increases the reader's attention with a clear focus on details. Still, the novel is not a simple, amusing portrait, for Shields uses the image of biography to examine some substantial issues. Judith Gill is dissatisfied with her career as a biographer both because facts limit her creativity and because she cannot resolve her questions by speaking with her subjects. Her problems increase when she tries to apply her biographical skills to her family and friends, for she discovers the inadequacy of these techniques to explain the people she really knows. She had attempted to write fiction and failed, but fiction appears to be the only solution to her problem. Furlong Eberhart, the otherwise satiric figure of the fraudulent western novelist, tells her, " 'People must be preserved with their mysteries intact. Otherwise, it's not real.' " The writer's goal is to express real knowledge without reducing life to a simplistic pattern.

Robert Olver has missed the essence of his subject in *The Bicycle Tree* because he has reduced everything into a formula. John Buell has not simplified his subject in *Playground*, but he does not express any valuable knowledge. Only Carol Shields, a much more competent novelist than her heroine, combines perceptive intelligence with an appreciation of the complexities of human life. In *Small Ceremonies* she unites a control over details with a sure knowledge of their significant pattern.

CALVIN L. SMILEY

POETIC HISTORIANS

TOM WAYMAN, *Money and Rain: Tom Wayman Live!* Macmillan. $5.95.
MILTON ACORN, *The Island Means Minago.* NC Press, $3.95.

BECAUSE Wayman and Acorn are declared "political" poets, and therefore presumably conceive of the poem as a moral or social instrument, these two collections immediately conjure up that never to be laid to rest rhetorical problem of the decorum and efficacy of didactic or paraenetic verse. As Keats once said, "we hate poetry that has a palpable design upon us. . . . Poetry should be great & unobtrusive, a thing which enters into one's soul, and does not startle it or amaze it with itself but with its subject." In this context, Keats's objection, however, is not to didactic poetry as such, but to poetry that employs less than subtle or overt propagandistic rhetorical strategies of persuasion, to deliberative poetry that draws attention to its suasory rhetorical designs. Being very perceptibly concerned with the fundamental moral, social, and political life of man, both Wayman and Acorn declare that their intention as poets is to be honest. As Wayman says, "to see the truth of what is is to want to change it." But honesty in poetry — like sincerity — can never be more than a rhetorical *ethos*, the reader's sense of the "character" (in all senses) of the speaker. Such political poetry need not be offensive if the didactic strategies are subtle, if the appeal or address to the reader is indirect, and if rhetorical mode is meditative rather than sententious or declamatory.

Both Wayman and Acorn have had varying degrees of trouble with their didactic modes. In Wayman's *For and Against the Moon* and in Acorn's *More Poems for People*, their immediately preceding volumes, there are considerable "ethical" problems — a strong sense, in many cases, that the poems do indeed have palpable designs upon us. But the voice of the poems in both the new collections is less sentimental, less self-righteous, less strident, and more reflective. Although the persistent tension between the lyric and the hortatory in Acorn and between the narrative and the moralistic in Wayman is still present, both new collections restore in their range the balance between the poem as artifact and the poem as utterance so abundantly evident in *Waiting for Wayman* and *I've Tasted My Blood*. Yet running through both new volumes is what seems to me to be a slight but significant shift in mood, a new lower key or discontent — dissatisfaction, yes, with moral, social, and political structures of man, perhaps with the very terms of human existence; but the discontent neither descends emotionally to despair nor rises fervently to an absolute belief in the perfectability of man. Both extremes are evident in Wayman's previous verse, and the latter in Acorn's. Wayman, despite his conscious knowledge of the misery and pain of the economically and politically oppressed everywhere, has come to the realization,

> If my sorrow added to yours could help, . . .
> I would give up joy.
> I swear that, if I could, I would go right now to live in a different world:
> some planet without this constant unhappiness.
> But I no longer believe my pain
> will help another human being.

Acorn still writes out of love and anger, but he no longer "shouts love", and his anger is subdued; a sense of mellowness pervades the volume despite its political subject matter. Both poets, however, remain stylistically loquacious; both need to speak in an effort to come to terms with life as they perceive it.

For Wayman, that need is fulfilled pri-

marily by the poetic anecdote, a fundamental mode of history or storytelling that reflects his sense of the poet as a recorder of the experiences of ordinary men in everyday life and of the poet's own particular place and time. As poetic historian, Wayman wishes to record "what is happening to myself, and my friend, as we move through our time alive here, through the only part of history in which we can live". Because of this desire, Wayman's voice never seems idiosyncratic but communal as it weaves and modulates through the four relatively self-contained sections of the book: "Friends," "The Factory Hour," "The Chilean Elegies," and "The Kiss and the Cry." "The Chilean Elegies," meditations on the significance of the overthrow of Salvador Allende's government and the importance of Pablo Neruda to the poet, are the most overtly political and moral poems in *Money and Rain*; but because they drift towards the moralistic, they are, in my judgment, the least satisfying in the volume. The brief section entitled "The Kiss and the Cry," consisting of only three poems, is much more successful in its communication of moral and fundamental political attitudes.

Like Wayman, Acorn in *The Island Means Minago* is also concerned with recording the history of ordinary people — the "forbidden history," as he calls it, of Minago, the aboriginal (Micmac) word for "The Island" referred to as Prince Edward Island only in, as Acorn would say, official histories. The book is an unusual mixture of archival photographs, prose essays and fragments, brief dramatic scenes from a play in progress, and an extraordinary range of poems (some unrevised and revised from previous volumes) in a variety of modes: love poems, portrait poems, satires, dialogues with historical figures, and landscape or seascape poems. Most of the selections focus on the forbidden history of the tenants struggle against absentee landlords dating roughly from 1785 to 1896 and the continuity of that struggle as it relates historically and symbolically to the present moment, but other poems not specifically concerned with this issue are analogous in mood and tone, if not in subject matter. Ironically, as in the case of Wayman, the most efficacious poems in the book are those that are not of a blatant political nature — for example, "A Shard of Steel," "The Squall," and "The Wind Rustles the Forest."

Both *Money and Rain* and *The Island Means Minago* are, because of their political concerns, rare volumes within the context of the general poetic output in this country. So far as I can see, we really do not have an established tradition of worthwhile political poetry. Both these books should therefore be perused because they extend and enrich the range of the poetic practice in Canada.

BARRY CAMERON

PLAYWRIGHTS

A NEW SERIES IS *Profiles in Canadian Drama*, edited by Geraldine C. Anthony and published by Gage at $3.25 softcover and $5.95 hardcover. The first three volumes are *Robertson Davies* by Patricia Morley, *Gratien Gélinas* by Renate Usmiani, and *James Reaney* by J. Stewart Reaney, the dramatist's son. They are all quite short, the longest just over 100 pages with apparatus, but such studies, even if they are — as these appear to be — written with an eye to the undergraduate market, are likely to be widely useful in view of the fact that, unlike poetry and fiction, Canadian drama has been the object of relatively little critical attention. All of the present texts are rather flatly written, and one cannot say that they sparkle with critical insights, but they are informative, sensibly organized and acceptable as introductory guides. Further volumes on George Ryga, John Herbert and Michel Tremblay are planned.

L.T.C.

opinions and notes

THE GREAT WHITE HOAX

FIFTY YEARS AGO literary people in the United States found it fashionable to discuss an imminently expected messiah called "The Great American Novel," which would for once and for all give the diverse American states and territories a single sense of identity, telling the world precisely what Americans consist of. Like "The Great White Hope" in boxing, a mythical blend of supposed Polish strength, German science, and Irish fighting spirit, who would knock out all black champions to establish white supremacy, "The Great American Novel" became a cultural fixation. Just as every new white fighter was hurled straightaway into the ring with first Jack Johnson, then Joe Louis, Sugar Ray Robinson, and Muhammed Ali, regardless of his skill and stamina, so every young novelist was measured up against critical great expectations that had in truth never been met by anyone, and never would be. Theodore Dreiser offered *An American Tragedy*, Gertrude Stein *The Making Of Americans*, Sinclair Lewis *Main Street*, John Dos Passos his *U.S.A.* trilogy, John Steinbeck *East Of Eden*, and William Carlos Williams even titled his effort *The Great American Novel*, but none quite blended Nathaniel Hawthorne and Herman Melville's vision of the east and colonial beginnings with Mark Twain's vision of the west and Manifest Destiny with Stephen Crane's vision of the Civil War with William Faulkner's vision of the south and Reconstruction; none quite combined Upton Sinclair's consciousness of the immigrant, working poor with F. Scott Fitzgerald's insight into the nouveau riche; and so all ultimately failed, not because they were not great writers — all were, beyond doubt — but because they were expected to speak for an imagined collective, rather than for themselves as artists and thinkers, with individual outlooks and individual limitations.

Gradually it dawned on American critics that "The Great American Novel" was a "Great White Hoax" — and that had it existed, it would have contradicted every principle of America's real identity: not a melting-pot, but a vast, free-wheeling marketplace, filled with every kind of product and every kind of producer, turning out not just one concept of quality but myriads of them, that every buyer might seek his own satisfaction. Frank Norris wrote "The Great American Novel" for California's San Joaquin Valley with *The Octopus*; Jack London wrote it for Oakland with *Martin Eden*; Ernest Hemingway wrote it for expatriates with *The Sun Also Rises*; Ralph Ellison for Harlem blacks with *Invisible Man*, unless James Baldwin did it with *Go Tell It On The Mountain* — and for Chicago blacks Richard Wright did it with *Native Son*. A different "Great American Novel" came to be for each and every small segment of the American population, as individual authors found their individual voices, writing well of what they knew instead of badly about a group so vast and so diverse no single author — or artist of any kind — could possibly hope to capture it all within a single work. Representative cross-sections, American creators came to realize, belong to polls and surveys; result in statistics, not literature. The real American sense of identity lies in having the freedom to choose one's own identity, completely different, if one wishes, from that of any other. "The Great American Novel," if it ever did come, would like "The Great

White Hope" destroy a large measure of freedom, wiping out diversity and opportunity, establishing in their places narrow ethnic chauvinism and a catholicized, canonized social hierarchy. It would throw at least a major element of American culture back into the dark ages, with one book, the Bible or equivalent, and one god, to be found within it or else.

Canadians understandably hate to be accused of following in American footsteps, but half a century behind. Nonetheless, the current and continuing intellectual quest for a uniquely Canadian literature repeats "The Great American Novel" fallacy — and like it, prevents great Canadian authors from developing and expressing their individuality. In hindering individual growth, Canadian literary chauvinism actually kills the art it would nurture. And it has done so, continuing to do so, ever since "The Great American Novel" era; while American critical attitudes broadened, Canadian critics have rigidly maintained concepts equating a nation's writing with flag, anthem, and boundaries, all sterile symbols and arbitrary lines having nothing, in final analysis, to do with the essence of the nation adopting them. Stated Douglas Bush in *The Canadian Forum*, December 1926:

> In the literary way Canada is probably the most backward country, for its population, in the civilized world, and the quickest way to get rid of this unpleasant family skeleton is to abolish critical standards and become a booster. We don't know what to write but by jingo if we do we have the pen, we have the ink, we have the paper too. And so we have bulky histories of Canadian literature appraising the product of every citizen who ever held a pen; bulky anthologies preserving every thing metrical that has sprung from a Canadian brain; little books celebrating the genius of people who in another country would not get beyond the poetry corner of the local newspaper; reprints of Canadian 'classics' which not even antiquity can render tolerable . . . in short, an earnest and sincere desire to establish a completely parochial scale of values.

As Ken Norris says in *The New Earth Review* #4, "What's depressing to note is that it can be quoted fifty years later as a statement about Canadian writing and still be relevant."

Bush, Norris, and May Cutler of Tundra Books all agree that lack of qualitative judgment by Canadian critics is to blame. "There is no good Canadian criticism", Norris says.

> One outspoken short story writer and novelist, Clark Blaise, has made the comment that at a conference dealing with Canadian writing, he heard every bad book he had read in the last ten years praised by someone as a masterpiece. Sad but true. The critics are playing it safe, afraid to take a chance and damn a book because some day it may be a Canadian classic and they wouldn't want to be in the wrong.

Carrying on the same argument, Cutler said in *Maclean's*, December 1974:

> Creativity hasn't developed more in Canada because the universities fail to establish high critical standards. . . . any country that does not respect excellence of performance is doomed to be second, third, or fourth rate. . . . There must be only one standard — that of excellence. Once protectionism comes in — once we start to protect the status quo — then we are finished. This goes on a great deal in Canadian literature.

With the Parti Quebecois attempting to divide the Canadian nation, we hear nationalist critics crying all the louder for writing that will bring us together into the homogeneous mass the French — and other cultural minorities — justifiably fear as the end of their individual identity. Searching for a scapegoat, some easily targeted reason why such a literary melting-pot has not emerged yet and shows no sign of emerging now, poet Robin Mathews leads a contingent blaming American influence. He would drum such American poets-in-residence as Tom Wayman and Joyce Carol Oates from Cana-

dian universities, replacing them with native Canadians apparently regardless of achievement, as if solitary confinement rather than free intellectual exchange initiated the creative impulse.

Indeed, the two best-respected Canadian authors on the international scene are non-nationalist critics: Northrop Frye, whose theories on Shakespeare are absurd but much-echoed, and Hugh Kenner, who almost single-handedly restored Ezra Pound to his rightful place of honour among twentieth-century authors, alongside T. S. Eliot, W. C. Williams, and the many other greats who borrowed and promulgated his aesthetic insights. Both Frye and Kenner — and Atwood, for that matter, and Saul Bellow, of Canadian birth — enjoy their greatest reputations in the United States, which seems to suffer no such literary identity crisis as Canada's nonetheless.

We might well begin to question the whole concept of a national literature. Is there indeed any feature of living in Canada that should naturally mold Canadian books into something obviously different from American books, or English books, or Australian books, even? Apart from our monomaniacal quest for national identity, the answer is no. The Maritime provinces have more in common with Scotland, Ireland, or New England than with the prairie provinces, which have more in common with the American midwest or Australian or even Russian plains than with British Columbia and the Yukon, which in turn have more in common with the American Northwest and Alaska than with any other part of Canada. The Canadian people are, like the American and Australian people, composed of numerous immigrant groups, principally northern European but coming from dozens of distinctive ethnic traditions now widely intermingled, exchanged, partially forgotten, and partially reinvented. Except in Quebec, we speak English predominantly, the same language used in England, the United States, Australia, and New Zealand — and consequently deal with the same basic set of linguistic principles, the same requirements for effective literary style. There is no reason whatever why a good Canadian book should not also be a good English book, American book, or Australian book; if it is good, it deals in depth with universal human themes and a specific environment that nonetheless shares certain features with other environments all over the world. Conversely, we lose nothing by reading and appreciating books from the United States, England, Australia, New Zealand, and even South Africa, if books emerge from those places touching us emotionally, stimulating us intellectually, bringing us into spiritual kinship with a few more real or imaginary fellow human beings.

A uniquely national literature is not, cannot be, and must not become a symbol like a flag, anthem, or borders, simply because great literature must live, not merely exist. Any nation can have symbols, and many do that have no literature: Communist China is a classic case in point. Only a nation affording individual breathing room, respecting individual difference, can produce literature — and in that respect the Soviet Union, which only banishes cultural rebels to Siberia and mental wards, is vastly ahead of Canada, which from doodling exercises in kindergarten on strives to mold individual consciousness into collective representation. An Alexander Solzhenitzyn or Boris Pasternak can stand in the Soviet Union, come the hell that may, and be respected. In Canada he would either be ignored utterly, until forced into exile among Americans, Englishmen, Australians, or even Israelis better appreciating him; or praised to high heaven for his first feeble works, never criticized, and

thereby be kept from even approaching creative maturity.

Because we belong to the British Commonwealth, we may tend to measure Canadian literature against that vast assemblage taught in universities as English literature. This august body made England great, we are told, inspiring the Elizabeths and Victorias, educating the Drakes, Raleighs, Gladstones, Disraelis, Lloyd Georges and Winston Churchills; and when we boast a comparable assemblage, we might think, we too will gain similar ascendency. We forget or never notice how heterogeneous and diverse supposedly "English" literature really is. It borrows from three great linguistic strains, Anglo-Saxon German, Norman French, and classical Latin, introduced at intervals of approximately two hundred years. Geoffrey Chaucer made no secret of Dantean influence, Shakespeare drew heavily upon Italian romance, and Alexander Pope's contemporaries made emulation of the Greeks and Romans a prime literary objective for three generations, before, inspired by the Spaniard Miguel Cervantes, Daniel Defoe and Henry Fielding popularized novels using the prose vernacular. The master of English satire, Jonathan Swift, was actually an Irishman, as were later "English" masters including George Bernard Shaw, W. B. Yeats, and James Joyce. Rudyard Kipling became voice of the British empire by writing about and from India, Afghanistan, and other points east. His contemporary Joseph Conrad was a Polish sea captain, who took up English composition at age 35, and their rivals included the American-born Henry James, and E. M. Forster, another writing of and from India. In the twenties England adopted more American expatriates, including Pound and Eliot, even as it exiled the native-born D. H. Lawrence, whose work was largely repatriated after winning American acceptance. In short, the so-called English national literature is actually an international literature — and a similar case can be made for the American, produced by expatriates more often than not, but criticized and appreciated as American nonetheless.

Only when Canada develops similarly broad critical perspective, learning to reject the narrowly nationalistic in favour of the powerfully universal, will Canadian writers feel free to pursue individual aims and destinies. Only when Canadian writers do pursue individual aims and destinies, and Canadian critics forget about finding a national literature, will Canada develop a national literature — a paradox only to the provincial.

MERRITT CLIFTON

REACTIONS TO SARAH

SOME THIRTY YEARS have passed since Paul Hiebert's *Sarah Binks*[1] was first published. The immediate critical reaction to it was almost exclusively approbative; *Sarah Binks* was heralded in Canadian publications as a new and welcome adjunct to the three or four genuinely "humorous books produced in Canada ... that is, books intentionally humorous."[2] Hiebert's work was rated by some on a level with Stephen Leacock's writing at its finest, to wit, his *Sunshine Sketches of a Little Town.* Of the twenty-two reviews of *Sarah Binks* that appeared in late 1947 and early 1948 only two were censorious in the main; the remaining twenty were enthusiastic in their commendation.

Its initial acceptance by critics notwithstanding, *Sarah Binks* has received little additional attention from either its early reviewers or from the younger generation of Canadianists. An exception is A. Lloyd Wheeler, whose "Up from the Magma and Back Again with Paul Hiebert"[3] was

followed up by his insightful Introduction to the McClelland & Stewart reprint. The *Literary History of Canada* gives less than a sentence to Paul Hiebert and *Sarah Binks* combined;[4] and *Canadian Literature*, in a note by C. C. J. Bond entitled "A Haunting Echo,"[5] is the only journal devoted to Canadian letters that contains any examination of the book, however cursory. It remained for Hiebert himself, in an article in *Mosaic* named "The Comic Spirit at Forty Below Zero,"[6] to alert contemporary scholars again to its existence. Because of this relative dearth of writing on *Sarah Binks* since its reception, it seems that a survey of the early reactions to it might serve to remind readers of the place this work of humour occupies in Canadian literature.

Quoted above is Roy Daniells' notion of this book as outstanding Canadian humour. Earle Birney, whose review appeared in the *Vancouver Sun*, is equally commendatory, describing *Sarah Binks* as "the first funny book about Canadian poetry. . . . recommended reading for anyone with a sense of humour, and required reading for all English professors, reviewers, and members of the Canadian Authors' Association."[7] Also writing from Vancouver, now in the *Vancouver Daily Province*, is one R. M. S., who sees Hiebert's book as causing the reader to "give way to helpless convulsions and screams of maniacal mirth."[8] Further, "The Observer" of the *Family Herald and Weekly Star* praises the book as "one of the funniest I have read for years. It is equal to anything Stephen Leacock wrote, with the exception of two or three of his best books. . . . The humour lies in the contrast between the ponderously solemn treatment and the ludicrously inadequate subject of the eulogies."[9]

All reviewers see *Sarah Binks* as a work of humour, which it obviously is, and most, with the singular exception of Daniells, describe it as a satire — usually on the academic mind which takes itself too seriously. Hiebert, speaking to me in an interview I conducted at his home in Carman, Manitoba on 15 January 1975, takes exception to the label of satire given his work. I quote:

> I protested greatly to the publishers when they began to promote my book as a clever satire. I don't think it's a satire at all. Nothing, and nobody, is being taken off there. It's simply that when you are writing in a humorous vein, you are always, more or less, parodying human nature. . . . No one person is ever kept in mind. *Sarah Binks* is simply not satirical. . . . Parody is something else again. It's a kindly fellow feeling in which you say, well let us not laugh *at* people but laugh together *with* people.

Mavis Gallant, writing in the *Montreal Standard*, also cites Hiebert on this question. " 'The academic mind,' he complains, 'just cannot see things as they are. Face value is unacceptable to them — they must look deeper. But there is nothing deeper. . . . The heavy academic mind which sees deep trends and undercurrents in every bit of writing is . . . being kidded.' "[10] Gallant adds: "Hiebert gets fairly irritable over the idea that he was trying to satirize anything."

Hiebert's objections have nevertheless been in vain, for on the cover of the current printing of the McClelland & Stewart edition appear the following words: "[*Sarah Binks* is] a satirical gem for the world's storehouse of comedy masterpieces." To further underscore the belief that it is widely regarded as a satire I provide two typical quotations. Birney writes that it "is probably the most amusing prolonged satire in Canadian literature. It is also a satire on Canadian literature, on our tendency to find literary swans in every village goose." W. G. Conrad, writing in the *Montreal Gazette*, probably gets a trifle closer to Hiebert's original intention by calling it "a hilarious but good-natured satire on the academic mind."[11]

Parody, and not satire, is of course what Hiebert intended, and I will here lay before the reader statements by reviewers who do in fact see it also as parody and, occasionally, burlesque. Mavis Gallant describes *Sarah Binks* as a book which "parodies the academic mind probing into life and literature, and which one professor of English has called 'a perfect imitation of a second-year essay.'" Further, she says it is a "full-dress burlesque . . . of the whole wind-in-the-wheat school of Canadian writing. . . ." Edith Fowke, whose review appears in the *Canadian Forum*, lists poets Hiebert is parodying, and according to her they include Wordsworth, Keats, Longfellow and Kipling among many others.[12] Hiebert, in my interview with him, told me that this writer was merely "showing off. . . . There's only one parody, and that is the one called 'Hiawatha's Milking'. . . . I don't think there's a single other poem in the book that can be called a parody."

Yet, if Hiebert has not parodied particular poets other than Longfellow, what or whom has he parodied? A review in the *Ottawa Citizen*, by one A. C. C., puts it as follows: Hiebert "has parodied and pilloried that bane of the newspaper editor's life — the Bad Canadian Poetess." He goes on to quote examples other than Sarah's of such "Bad" verse, "the range of [which] is astonishing — patriotic, personal, pastoral, tragic, martial and even religious."[13] Much "good bad poetry," as Hiebert defines it in the Introduction to *Sarah Binks*, is found throughout the book, and A. C. C.'s categories together with others, with the exception of the religious, are represented. Birney, who praises Hiebert as "master of . . . sustained parody," sees a wealth of it in *Sarah Binks*. He expresses himself this way:

> The hundred or more ditties . . . which Hiebert has sprinkled throughout his "biography" probably constitute a larger body of metrical parody and burlesque than can be found in all the rest of Canadian literature. . . . [Hiebert is ingenious] in building and toppling rhythms and meaning to produce something uncannily like the verse which is written in all seriousness in this bardic country of ours.

B. K. Sandwell, in *Saturday Night*, finds different targets for Hiebert's parody. He says:

> [Hiebert] maintains a high level of parody. . . . imbedded in a prose text written in an exact and merciless imitation of the style of the portentously serious literary critic and biographer; and this text is adorned by yet further parodies of the more gushing tributes of Miss Rosalind Drool, the international vaporings of Dr. Taj Mahal, the meticulous delvings of Horace B. Marrowfat, "Professor Emeritus of English and Swimming" at St. Midget's College, and finally the kind of geological scientific writing composed by those whose main purpose is to persuade the citizenry to put up enough money to drill for oil.[14]

Relatively few critics write about the quality of Hiebert's "good bad poetry"; the few that do, maintain, for the most part, that the poetry is parodying bad verse which their creators think to be good. Among these reviewers there is one notable exception, however. I indicated above that Fowke sees, mistakenly, parodies of Keats, Wordsworth, Kipling and others in Sarah's poems. She continues:

> [Hiebert] fails to reveal the extent to which [Sarah's] poems run the whole gamut of English and American literature. Such is their depth and breadth that we may almost say that she has rendered all previous poets obsolete. . . . The attempt to quote freely in confirmation of those contentions is almost irresistible. . . .

One cannot but wonder what poems inspired by what authors Fowke would have come up with. Hiebert would be sure to have a chortle, knowing there is only one parody among Sarah's verses. Fowke is nevertheless generous in her praise of the quality of the poetry. She says: "the

author has obviously failed to realize the true greatness of Sarah's genius."

Hiebert's characterization is lauded by the few critics who mention it. R. M. S. in the *Vancouver Daily Province* states that "the characters come alive in bright clarity, especially for the reader who knows the prairie." In a review in the *Hamilton Spectator*, one S. A. G. writes the following: "Without reservation, the reviewer believes Sarah, 'the sweet songstress of Saskatchewan,' to be one of the most brilliantly amusing creations of some time."[15] It might be valuable here to quote Hiebert on the question of Sarah the character. When I asked him if he thought *Sarah Binks* would live he replied:

> I think what will live is Sarah as a character. I like Sarah very much because she's so very confident. She has no sense of humour. And she has no end of confidence in her own ability and that she has her definite place in the literature of Saskatchewan. I think that will keep her going or nothing else will.

Nothing is said about the larger meaning of *Sarah Binks* except in Daniells' review. It is as if other critics were chary about committing themselves on this issue or else did not see in *Sarah Binks* any greater significance. Daniells, however, says:

> there subsists in *Sarah Binks* a secondary and concealed current of significance. As the reader lays down *Don Quixote* he suddenly feels what his conscious mind has hitherto missed — the supreme virtue and rightness of the foolish old knight, so above the delicious fooling and sharp wit of *Sarah Binks* there is audible a deep and serious overtone, the author's cry of love and admiration for the fortitude and the courage of those who in the early decades of the century fought the hardships of the Canadian climate and of the frontier and made in defiance of all difficulties a way of life for themselves and for us. It is this that lifts the book above the level of the simply humorous. . . .

Finally, I wish to bring to the reader's attention the few adverse criticisms of *Sarah Binks*. Hiebert discusses two in *Mosaic*. Suffice it to say that they appear in the *Victoria Colonist* and the *Saskatoon Star-Phoenix*; the former excoriates *Sarah Binks* on what Hiebert calls "moral grounds," while the latter condemns it because it is not literally true.[16] More constructive and incisive analysis is found again in Daniells' comments:

> The book has perhaps a weakness in that the rural scene and the pseudo-academic comment fall apart a little. It might have been better to reduce the number and oddity of Sarah's critics. Occasionally, too, the humour shifts into farce as when Grandfather Thurnow, "stuffed and mounted and presented to the nation," subsequently was accepted as a candidate by both Liberal and Conservative parties. Fine as some of the incidental shots are, they fall a trifle beside the main target. The extremely careful focus which Leacock achieved in *Sunshine Sketches* (and seldom elsewhere) is not quite achieved here.

I trust that this résumé of the initial reactions to *Sarah Binks* will move Canadianists to read the book with a fresh eye and provide new assessments of it in the light of other Canadian literature, especially humour published since 1947. This might well be an onerous task; hovering over them will be Hiebert's spirit chuckling at the academic mind taking itself so seriously. But Hiebert's spectre notwithstanding, readers must have the courage and diligence to re-examine a classic of Canadian humour.

NOTES

1 *Sarah Binks* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1971).

2 Roy Daniells, "Sarah Binks," *Winnipeg Free Press*, 13 January 1948.

3 "Up from the Magma and Back Again with Paul Hiebert," *Manitoba Arts*, 6, No. 1 (Spring 1948), 3-14.

4 *Literary History of Canada*, ed. Carl F. Klinck et al. (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), p. 720.

[5] *Canadian Literature*, No. 16 (Spring 1963), 83-84.

[6] *Mosaic*, 3, No. 3 (Spring 1970), 56-68.

[7] "Canadian Bards Cleverly Burlesqued," *Vancouver Sun*, 24 January 1948.

[8] "His Tongue in His Cheek?" *Vancouver Daily Province*, 13 March 1948.

[9] *Family Herald and Weekly Star*, 14 January 1948.

[10] "Sarah of Saskatchewan," *Montreal Standard*, 17 April 1948.

[11] "Songstress of Saskatchewan — Hilarious Satire," *Montreal Gazette*, 13 December 1947.

[12] "*Sarah Binks*," *Canadian Forum*, March 1948.

[13] "The Deathless Lure of Verse," *Ottawa Citizen*, 30 March 1948.

[14] "Cultural Must," *Saturday Night*, 20 March 1948.

[15] "Prairie Laughs," *Hamilton Spectator*, 21 February 1948.

[16] Hiebert, "The Comic Spirit at Forty Below Zero," 60-62.

REYNOLD SIEMENS

REFERENCES

TWO RECENT ADDITIONS to the increasing shelf of Canadian reference books both belong to series. *Canadian Essay and Literature Index 1975* (University of Toronto Press, $35.00), compiled by Andrew D. Armitage and Nancy Tudor, is the latest in a series of annual author-title-subject indexes to English-Canadian periodicals and collections which are not indexed in the *Canadian Periodical Index*. This is a laudable goal — though one wishes that the two enterprises would get together. *CELI* waits every year to find out what *CPI* has left out, and fills in the gaps; the gaps vary annually as *CPI* adds to the number of works it indexes; yet both of them leave out newspapers, leaving the many useful essays in the *Toronto Star*, for example, still unindexed That said, *CELI* offers an authoritative and clear guide to the works it has indexed, and warrants praise.

To find lists of Canadian material published outside Canada, interested readers still have no single authority, although the selective annual bibliography in the *Journal of Commonwealth Literature* remains the first place to look. Such a procedure is becoming increasingly necessary, moreover, for there are more and more commentaries on Canadian culture being written and published outside the country. Special issues of *Modern Fiction Studies* (in the United States) and *Akzente* (in Germany) appeared in 1976; further special issues have been planned in Italy and in Belgium (*Revue des langues vivantes*); still other studies appear in journals like the French *Commonwealth* and *Caliban*, and the Danish *Common Wealth*, and other publications concerned with Commonwealth Literature. Recently two new journals devoted solely to Canadian studies have begun: in Scotland (*Bulletin of Canadian Studies*, from the Canadian Studies School at Edinburgh — the first issue of which contains an interesting article by Wreford Watson reflecting, from the vantage point of the historical geographer, on the implications of literary *images* of Canada), and in France (*Etudes canadiennes*, under the editorship of Régis Durand at the University of Lille). They are signs of a developing international interest in Canada, of which Canadian critics should be constantly aware.

The other recent reference work is the 7th volume of *Contemporary Literary Criticism* (Gale Research Co., Detroit), which excerpts critical comment on the work of various writers from a number of different countries. Canadians who appear in this current volume include Robertson Davies, Mavis Gallant, Brian Moore, P. K. Page, and Audrey Thomas; they join others (like Avison, Nichol, Munro, Birney, and Richler) who were represented in earlier volumes in the series. The editors have excerpted fairly from books, articles, and reviews, and widely from a range of international sources. What the series gains by its breadth of coverage — a sampling of international reception and range of approach — it loses by its inevitable superficiality. Like so many other reference works it is useful to beginning students once they have read the primary works, as a place to begin their secondary enquiries.

W.H.N.

REPRINTS

OF THE FIVE LATEST New Canadian Library titles, two are designed for a popular market: Thomas Raddall's swashbuckling historical romance *His Majesty's Yankees* (introduced by James Gray, who summarizes the historical events on which the novel draws), and Ernest Thompson Seton's *Wild Animals I Have Known* (with Alec Lucas' affectionate introduction, asserting the conservationist intent of the stories and decrying attempts to turn them into nationalist beast fables).

Like these two, the other three also focus on the past, and are more interesting as social documents than as works of fiction. Indeed, it is hard to know how to describe Andrew Macphail's *The Master's Wife* (1939): more or less autobiography, it tells how family tradition and community experience develop a Prince Edward Island boy's educated imagination. Because it is *his* mind on display, it warrants attention — for its particular detail, certainly, but more because of Macphail's other contributions to Canadian intellectual history. By contrast, Antoine Gérin-Lajoie's 1862 book *Jean Rivard* (translated here by Vida Bruce, complete with sections deleted from later French editions), which pretends *not* to be a novel — narrative ostensibly written as history — tells a more direct story. Again, however, it is the stance rather than the story which attracts attention, and here the stance is that of agrarian conservatism. The novel asserts themes that have since become familiar in Quebec writing: notions about independence and self-reliance, tempered by collective beliefs in family solidarity and religious affiliation. John Galt's *Bogle Corbet* (1831) offers a stylish contrast as well as a fast change of cultural attitude; comic and succinct, where *Jean Rivard* is leisurely and earnest, *Bogle Corbet* revels in scene and character while at the same time it gives evidence of a precise social eye. Galt, a transplanted outsider, brought to Ontario a keen wit and an able pen. His novel deserves a wider audience.

Yet another group of works is more openly historical: T. C. Haliburton's seven 1839 letters to the *Times*, for example, constituting *A Reply to the Report of The Earl of Durham* (Golden Dog, $2.95), with a careful introduction by A. G. Bailey, underscores the importance of Haliburton's political views to his whole body of work. And in William Bleasdell Cameron's *Blood Red the Sun* (Hurtig, $4.95), we find history written as narrative. Cameron — who with Theresa Gowanlock and Theresa Delaney survived the Frog Lake encounter with Big Bear and wrote about it — revised his work late in his life. Though the Cameron work, together with the Gowanlock-Delaney memoir and a series of historical commentaries, appeared in the Carleton Library (as *The Frog Lake "Massacre"*) in 1976, edited by Stuart Hughes, the Hurtig reprint contains an additional chapter. The availability of these perspectives, along with the recent translations of Riel's diary and further interest in Dumont and Big Bear, should enable renewed study of an event that Canadians for generations have found persistently fascinating. It also offers an open invitation for further reflection on the intricate relation between historical narrative and narrative history.

W.H.N.

ON THE VERGE

*** GRATTAN O'LEARY. *Recollections of People, Press and Politics.* Macmillan, $12.95. Canada has had few classic Tories, but Grattan O'Leary was one of them, an intensely conservative man with a high sense of honour and — as he says — "the fascination of great words, great ideas ... engraved on my mind." Born into a poor Irish community in Gaspé, he spent most of his life as an Ottawa journalist and editor, but not until he was old and expecting death did he decide to write the memoirs of a long life, and the result is far briefer than one might have hoped, though it is filled with vivid character sketches of the notable figures of the Canadian past from Laurier's age to Trudeau's. O'Leary was discriminating in his friendships and loyalties and tended to pick out men lacking the usual qualifications for popularity, men doomed to be brilliant failures, and this inclination is exemplified particularly in his attachment to Arthur Meighen. For their sympathetic reassessment of Meighen's character alone, these *Recollections* would be worth reading, but there is much more and, despite his considerable *pudeur* regarding self-revelation, the portrait of O'Leary that emerges almost by default is an attractive one.

G.W.

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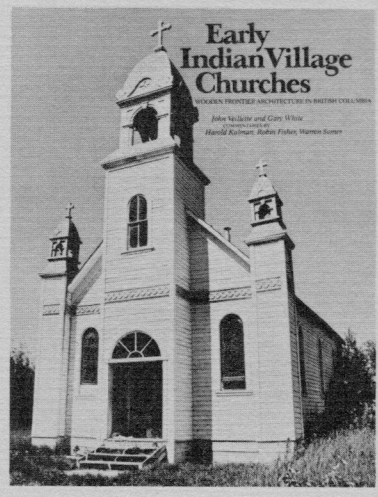

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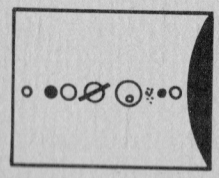

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