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CANADIAN LITERATURE No. 78

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WRITING FOR CHILDREN

Articles

BY MORDECAI RICHLER, MARGARET ATWOOD, DIANNE WOODMAN, ELISABETH HOPKINS, CHRISTIE HARRIS, J. KIERAN KEALY, MICHAEL GREENSTEIN

Poems

BY ALEXANDRE L. AMPRIMOZ, DENNIS LEE, ELIZABETH BREWSTER, DAVID KNIGHT, THERESA MORITZ, TOM WAYMAN, RON MILES

Reviews, Opinions, and Notes on Criticism

BY STEPHEN SCOBIE, HILDA THOMAS, JOHN LENNOX, LINDA LEITH, FRANCES FRAZER, J. KIERAN KEALY, G. V. DOWNES, JACQUES MICHON, NICHOLAS CATANOY, GEORGE WOODCOCK, ERIC THOMPSON, EUGENE MCNAMARA, PATRICIA KEENEY SMITH, P. MERIVALE, E. D. BLODGETT, WAYNE GRADY, PETER SUCH, BRANDON CONRON, ANN MANDEL, W. H. NEW

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contents

Editorial: The Enjoyment of Overreaching 2

ARTICLES

MORDECAI RICHLER
Writing Jacob Two-Two 6

MARGARET ATWOOD
Production Problems 13

DIANNE WOODMAN
Canadian Children's Books 16

ELISABETH HOPKINS
The Tale of a Story 22

CHRISTIE HARRIS
In Tune With Tomorrow 26

J. KIERAN KEALY
The Flame-Lighter Woman 32

MICHAEL GREENSTEIN
The Apprenticeship of Noah Adler 43

POEMS

BY ALEXANDRE L. AMPRIMOZ (5), DENNIS LEE (8), ELIZABETH BREWSTER (11), DAVID KNIGHT (15), TERESA MORITZ (24, 25), TOM WAYMAN (31), RON MILES (52)

REVIEW ARTICLES

STEPHEN SCOBIE
A Scheme Is Not a Vision 53

HILDA THOMAS
History-Making 58

JOHN LENNOX
Critics & Publishers 65

LINDA LEITH
Haunted by "Can. Lit." 68

BOOKS IN REVIEW

BY FRANCES FRAZER (74), J. KIERAN KEALY (76), G. V. DOWNES (78), JACQUES MICHON (79), NICHOLAS CATANOY (82), GEORGE WOODCOCK (83), ERIC THOMPSON (87, 99), EUGENE MCNAMARA (88), PATRICIA KEENEY SMITH (91), P. MERIVALE (94), E. D. BLODGETT (97), WAYNE GRADY (101)

OPINIONS AND NOTES

PETER SUCH
News from Nowhere 103

BRANDON CONRON
Munro's Wonderland 109

ANN MANDEL
Critical Streets 124

W. H. NEW
Children's Eyes 130

editorial

THE ENJOYMENT OF OVERREACHING

THIS ISSUE FOCUSSES on children's literature in Canada, on the joys and the pressures of creating it, and on some of the problems associated both with writing for children and with finding the books that have been written with children in mind. Some of these problems have to do with language. Dianne Woodman mentions, for example, the difficulty of locating French-language children's books in Western Canada, which is vexing for booksellers and bookbuyers alike. Neither group wants to order books sight unseen. Yet both want access to the best of children's literature, for both have an investment in children — hence in the future — and therefore in the prospect of their children's facility in Canada's two official languages. Regional truths deeply and variously affect people's daily lives. But part of every Canadian child's national, federal birthright is that of access to both English and French. Deliberately to deny such access comes close to being an immoral act. One understands it, perhaps, if it derives from ignorance or fear. But far more difficult to contend with are the accidental denials, the oversights or the preconceptions that prevent information from being readily circulated. If local booksellers cannot rely on publishers in both languages giving them adequate information to order stock wisely, then it would be a useful effort for publishers collectively, or publishers in collaboration with the Secretary of State, to set up regional or provincial information centres. By this I do not suggest setting up propaganda houses. But booksellers — and the general public — need access to permanent available displays of whatever works are in print, so that they can choose wisely for their own community: their customers, their family, and themselves.

Denying access to either language may result for any number of reasons. But like any repeated practice, it gives the impression to readers or listeners that the subject doesn't matter. A society that tolerates illiteracies in national television and radio daily news broadcasts should not wonder idly why a younger genera-

tion does not see the need to master grammar. And a society that effectively says to its children that they don't need to learn English or French should not wonder at a pervasive linguistic intolerance or a studied lack of enthusiasm. Such attitudes are not natural. But they result from the force of a daily education, and they run totally counter to the notion of egalitarian opportunity we loudly espouse, and to the actuality of mobility which is — or ought to be — part of every modern child's expectations.

There do exist various aids for enquiring adults and inquisitive children. There are bibliographies, and reference libraries, and critical periodicals like *Canadian Children's Literature*. There are some splendid children's magazines, including *Owl* (flamboyantly investigative about nature), *Canadian Children's Magazine* (inventive in its use of games, and intelligently conceived), and in many ways best of all, *Vidéo-Presse* from Montreal. Profusely illustrated in colour, and captivating for children who read, *Vidéo-Presse* contains cartoons, games, quizzes, narratives, and scientific documentaries; it takes children's actual lives seriously, and shows what with imagination and effort children can do; it focusses each issue on a special topic, and over a year's subscription supplies children with a kind of mini-encyclopedia on a whole subject; and it amply demonstrates how education can go hand-in-hand with entertainment. No library should be without such journals; no child should be denied access to them.

Librarians, teachers, parents, and other powers-that-be, unfortunately, often hesitate before exposing children to a challenge which — like long words, complex sentences, and a second language — they themselves perceive as difficult. But as is the case so many times, the problem is less the children's than their own. Many educators and officials designing new school curricula, for example, try to resolve the problems which they encountered in school rather than to take account of whatever problems teachers and students are currently facing. Similarly, unthinking institutions often — often even in the name of *standards* — perpetuate misconceptions about literature and learning. And they do so without taking account of the average (or the extraordinary) contemporary child's life. Television, for one thing — which is a visual medium all right, but intensely *verbal* as well — has increased many a child's ability to read early. A lot of the messages are repetitive, but they are also linguistically quite sophisticated. To tell a child that the message flashed on the screen "doesn't mean anything" is implicitly to say that reading doesn't matter. To dismiss, either directly or tacitly, a child's growing capacities for reason — for mental activity — is to say that schooling doesn't matter. And to insist that children's reading ought to follow culturally archaic or semantically deprived models that have nothing to do with their own experience and observation of speech and the world is to engender a distaste for all language: for books, for reading, and for the worlds of words. If language doesn't mean, if it isn't to be taken seriously, if it conveys only the

banal and the factitious, and if it doesn't provide enjoyment, why learn it? Or put another way, why teach language — however formally or informally — in such a way that negative attitudes towards language come into being at all?

Bruno Bettelheim, writing in a recent issue of *Harper's* magazine, takes up many of these issues. "If the child," he writes, "is to realize his potential to talk — and his potential to read — the necessary skills must be encouraged. . . . Only if the words he learns enrich his life and increase the pleasure he receives from talking will he wish to keep adding new ones to his vocabulary. . . . If the parent shares his enjoyment in overreaching himself in this manner, the word soon becomes a permanent addition to the child's vocabulary. The child begins by trying to participate in what he views as his parent's magical ability to use complex language; in his efforts to make this 'magic' his own he . . . develops the ability to comprehend more complex thought processes. . . . "

"Without an earlier commitment to language through such positive experiences" — and the important point here is that the sharing of enthusiasm for language is a large social phenomenon and not solely a family possibility — "words will remain for the child just that: abstract, and devoid of personal meaning, useful for communication, perhaps, but essentially unattractive."

Bettelheim goes on at some length to chastise the makers of textbooks for not taking vocabulary, syntax, or children's social roles seriously, for unpardonably underestimating children's abilities and children's capacities, and for reinforcing negative cultural attitudes towards the power of intellect. He makes a good point. And there is a profound sense in which the imagination, just as much as the intellect, has to be free to try to overreach. But then he goes on to reveal a bias of his own, to curtail educational possibilities, and to define the limits of enjoyment in an unjust way: "Learning to read is serious business for the child, and . . . the pleasure that can be gained from reading is a serious pleasure, not a vacuous one. There is no reason why our basal readers could not confer dignity on learning to read. . . . For it is this pleasure, and not the delights of teasing, or joking, or jumping wildly, that is the pleasure inherent in literacy." I have no quarrel with the serious intellectual pleasure of reading, nor with the dignity of learning to read. But one of the great enjoyments of reading is that it also allows us some moments of freedom from the seriousness in our lives. To be unable to enjoy fantasy, to be unable to distinguish between fantasy and reality, to be unable to see the relevance of fantasy to reality: these are the characteristics of the person who is unable to laugh. And the person without enough sense of his language to enjoy its jokes, its jumps, and its ways of voicing life's incongruities is a solemn pedant and a social autocrat. Bettelheim must know better. Any society that values intellectual growth in its children and intellectual flexibility in its adults has to know better. And that society must remember also how to encourage the growth and the flexibility: by providing access to language, by taking delight in

intellectual and imaginative overreaching, by expressing pleasure when art and life give pleasure, and by relaxing in laughter against the autocrats for whom order is unchanging and rigidity is king.

W.H.N.

AGAINST THE WISH OF BOROMEO

Alexandre L. Amprimoz

In the Roman dusk,
against the wish of Boromeo,
the wind rose like a lonely idea.

Merisi, pale
from years of blanc d'Espagne,
took the thought with usual violence:
the solar fist
reducing ancient rules
to shape and colours,
according to El Greco's old testament.

The wind rose not like a dogma
but like a strong faith
and the cardinal mumbled to the painter:
"Someone should mould,
away from usual doctrines,
a theory of icons
aching with solitude
like Anthony in his empty land."

Against the wish of Boromeo
Merisi spoke of the true,
the real and the living.

In the isolated mind
the Greek diminuendo,
the mannerism in decay
and the art of imitation
all sank below the will of fresh anatomies.

WRITING JACOB TWO-TWO

Mordecai Richler

WRITING ABOUT WRITING is something I find excrutiating, embarrassing, even dangerous, and so I usually beg off such an assignment, pleading a slipped disc, other commitments, or falling back on my favourite A. J. Liebling anecdote.

The late A. J. Liebling, a superb stylist, was once sent a batch of how-to-write books for review. He promptly returned them to the editor with a note saying the only way to write was well and how you did it was your own damn business.

O, I agree, and how I agree, but I have also, alas, agreed to write something for this special issue of *Canadian Literature* on the writing of books for children, and what follows is to honour that commitment.

I have five children who, when they were very young, were told again and again it was too early for them to read *Cocksure*. Or even *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*. Well then, one of them asked, not unreasonably, isn't there anything of yours we are not too young to read? The short answer was no, but I also promised that one day I would write something that would be just for them; and that's how I came to write *Jacob Two-Two Meets The Hooded Fang*. The book was meant to be family fun, with certain built-in family jokes. It began, innocently enough, as a bedtime tale told to amuse our youngest child, Jacob, and as it made him (and even the others) giggle I started to write it down.

To backtrack briefly.

As a child, I never read children's books myself, but cut my intellectual teeth on *Superman*, *Captain Marvel*, and *The Batman*, moving on from there to Ellery Queen and Perry Mason, and finally, at the age of twelve or thereabouts, to the first novel that I ever read, *All Quiet On The Western Front*. So my experience of children's books, such as it is, came to me from reading aloud to our children, an office that is usually filled by my wife. In reading aloud to them

I was somewhat shocked to discover that a few classics old and modern, and the incomparable Dr. Seuss, aside, most children's books were awfully boring or insufferably didactic or sometimes both. These dreary, ill-written books were conceived for profit or to teach the kids racial tolerance, hygiene, or other knee-jerk liberal responses. In Canada, tiresome Eskimo or Indian legends seemed to be the rule. In contemporary children's stories parents were never hungover or short-tempered and the kids were generally adorable. I decided if I ever got round to writing a book for my kids its intention would be to amuse. Pure fun, not instruction, is what I had in mind.

But I resisted sitting down to *Jacob Two-Two* for more than a year, because I also have a prejudice against children's books, too many of which are written by third-rate writers for children already old enough to enjoy at least some adult books. Say, Mark Twain, some Dickens, certainly *The Scarlet Pimpernel*, and our own Farley Mowat on the north. Put simply, I think bright children beyond the age of twelve are ready for the real stuff, properly selected. Presented with it, they will respond or are already beyond the pale, destined to be *Reader's Digest* subscribers no matter what you do.

So *Jacob* was to be for the younger child, our Jacob actually, who was not yet ready for adult books. Writing it, really, was not very different than writing an adult novel, which is to say it was largely hard work, and, as is usually the case with me, went through many drafts. I did not worry overmuch about vocabulary, my feeling being that if a child didn't understand a word he could look it up in a dictionary. On the other hand, I did feel a rape scene might be inappropriate. I wrote it, first of all, for my own pleasure (and in fulfilment of a rash promise). Of course, I hoped, as I always do, that it would appeal to a large audience, but that is never a consideration in the actual writing.

Something else.

I have no special attitude towards children as a breed. They are, after all, merely little people, some of them obnoxious, many more stupid, and a few, a cherished few, absolutely enchanting.

The success of *Jacob Two-Two* has surprised, even embarrassed me. It was immediately accepted for publication in England and Canada and, after something like seven rejections in the U.S.A., was finally taken on there by my adult book publisher, Knopf. It has come out in a Bantam edition and will soon be a Puffin. It has been translated into several languages. Christopher Plummer has done a delightful recording of the story and there has also been a film version, which may be released one of these days. The Children's Theatre in Toronto is to present a musical adaptation this autumn. Most delightful of all, hardly a week goes by when I don't get a batch of letters from children in Canada or the United States. They want to know if it's a true story or just something I made up out of my own head. My favourite letter, one I keep pinned to a board on my

office wall, is from a boy who begins by saying, "I really liked your book Jacob Two-Two Meets The Hooded Fag."

Ironically, I suppose, *Jacob Two-Two*, in hard cover, has already outsold even my most successful adult novel, *St. Urbain's Horseman*. Maybe I missed my true vocation.

PERCY

Dennis Lee

I

Percy was a pixie,
  A pixie of renown.
He played his little pixie pipe
  All around the town.

He played a pixie hornpipe
  He played a pixie lay
And people came from blocks around
  To hear the pixie play.

For Percy played it roundabout
  And Percy played it square
And Percy played the rhythms
  That were dancing in the air.

But Percy had a problem
  And here is what it was:
He loved his sweet old mother, but
  She looked like Santa Claus.

Her beard was overwhelming.
  Her belly was a sight.
And Percy wondered why this was,
  As any pixie might,

For other little pixies never
  Had to shave their mother,
Nor wrap her in a table-cloth
  When visitors came over.

So Percy's pixie piping
  Grew wizened, bleak and mute,
Till Percy sold his pixie pipe
  And bought a business suit.

II

Returning from the office
  One windy winter day
Percy met a wizard
  With an eye of steely grey.

He spoke a sudden warning,
  Which sounded fierce and weird:
"Don't feed your Mum chrysanthemums —
  Or else she'll grow a beard.

"And if she's beaten with a cat
  Her stomach's sure to swell."
Percy gave a cry of grief
  As to the road he fell.

"I fed my Mum chrysanthemums!
  I beat her with a cat!
And that is why her beard grew long
  And why she seems so fat!

"Alas for all my piping
  Alas for all my glee
My Mother looks like Santa Claus
  And all because of me."

Then Percy stumbled home again
  And took his business suit
And gave it to a Mission for
  The Wholly Destitute.

He went to seek his pixie pipe
  He sought for forty days
He cried, "At last I comprehend
  The error of my ways."

And in that time of trial
  He wandered high and low,
A pixie with a burden
  Of remorse and burning woe;

Yet he received a vision
  Of what his life was for,
And he regained his piping lip
  And all his pixie lore.

III

Now Percy is a pixie
  Of consummate renown.
He plays his little pixie pipe
  All around the town.

He plays the pixie hornpipe
  He plays the pixie lay
And people come from miles around
  To hear the pixie play.

And yet, if all the truth be told,
  They come to watch another:
A slim, clean-shaven dancer by
  The name of Percy's Mother.

She dances like a leprechaun
  She dances like an elf
She dances like a ray of gold
  Upon a silver shelf.

Her slender belly shimmers
  Her step is sweet and thin
And she displays, while Percy plays,
  A lean and silky chin.

And sometimes when the people
  Begin to clap and stare,
They ask him why his mother's face
  Is so devoid of hair,

And how she keeps her waistline
  At an age when others spread.
And Percy gives a crinkled grin
  As though his wits had fled:

"If Mother gets too bristly
  If Mother gets too fat
I stroke her with chrysanthemums
  And feed her like a cat."

Then Percy and his mother
  Both solemnly arise
And Percy pipes them off again
  With glory in his eyes

And all his pixie piping is
  Hosanna in the street,
A ticklish hallelujah
  For the music in their feet,

And Percy's mother dances
  Like a prophetess of old,
And all their ways are silver ways
  And all their songs are gold.

I ATTEMPT ONCE MORE TO CONJURE

Elizabeth Brewster

Smaller, colder again
I crouch once more over paper
pen in hand
  as always comforted
by these words.
  As always?

Is it gone, then, the lifting spirit
that could alter all
make the world whirl and shine?

Wand, wand, come again.
Come, Grimalkin, my cat, come.
Invisible cards, open your pack like a fan —
let out king, queen, knight, serving-man.

Black books of memory, I conjure you — open.
I raise the dead.
Yellow as goldenrod
the child's hair wound in a curl
in my mother's Bible
flies again to the child's head.
Am I that child?

My Bonnie lies over the ocean
my sister sang
in the house with diamond-
shaped window panes.

We walked by a green shore
the seashore
tonguetwisting our tongues
while the wind sang.

O Bonnie knight
crusading over sea,
what happened to your handsome armor?
You are drowned, you have never reached me.

The old king and queen
lie in the snow-cold
burying ground
under the dark boughs
of fir and spruce.

Where are the little princesses
who lived in the turreted palace?
Their serving-man, old Time,
has turned his malice
against their buttercup-golden
crowns

Oh, yellow gold
of goldenrod and yellow
dandelions turned white
blowing fluffed
seeds away

PRODUCTION PROBLEMS

Margaret Atwood

I'M NO AUTHORITY ON CHILDREN'S BOOKS, either as a reader or as a writer. As a reader, I tend to choose books for my child that will not drive me crazy the tenth, fiftieth or hundredth time I read them. I like them to have a strong plot, humour, and bright pictures, though I require these things not out of any theory about what such books ought to be, but simply because they hold the interest of small children.

I suppose I hope that the stories I write will have similar qualities. I haven't written very many children's stories. Those I have written have been for the youngest age group possible. They have simple plots and vocabularies, they are very short, they tend to rhyme, and they always have happy endings.

A critic of the type prone to analyzing Beatrix Potter's Dark Period would probably say that I write these stories not just for children but for myself, because I can do things in them that the age denies me in adult fiction and poetry. Such an analysis would not be entirely wrong: I wrote *Up In The Tree*, for example, at the same time I was writing *Surfacing*. Perceptive readers may find a similarity in theme, though a slight difference in treatment.

Writers who work in various forms are always in danger of being thought frivolous. This comes from the specialist view that we tend to have, now, about all forms of work. "Work" is the one narrow area you are supposed to dedicate yourself to. "Work" is what you don't enjoy. "Work" hurts. "Play," on the other hand, is enjoyable, but, because of the absence of pain, it is somehow not serious. Sooner or later, every writer encounters from almost every interviewer some question aimed at getting the writer to divulge how much he suffers. Descriptions of suffering somehow validate a writer in the eyes of his audience. This is probably why writing for children is still viewed as a kind of non-writing: it doesn't look as though it hurts enough to be taken seriously. It does no good to say that your "adult" writing, even your most dismal and depressing stories and poems, is a joyful experience. If writing contains pain, it must have been painful to do.

And I know many will flinch in disbelief when I say that in some ways *Up In The Tree* was a much more painful book to work on than *Surfacing* was. Not that it was painful to *write*; but, in a fit of enthusiasm, I had said that I would illustrate it myself. And that was when the pain set in.

Up In The Tree is not "Canadian" in content; in fact, I think self-consciously "B is for Beaver" books for children are probably a mistake, since it is very hard to make them interesting. ("Q is for the Queen of England" would have exactly the same problem. Children instinctively rebel against books that are heavily weighted in favour of instructing their minds as opposed to delighting their imaginations.) So the writing of it had nothing to do with my Canadian citizenship. But the choices about the illustrations — how many, how big, what kind of printing, how many colours — had a lot to do with the fact that the book would be published in Canada. Anyone who has shopped for children's books knows what the competition is like. Low-priced, excellent, four-colour English and American books abound. Canadian books are often either higher-priced or somewhat drab. Why? It's the economics of publishing once more: except for blockbusters like *Alligator Pie*, the print runs in Canada simply aren't large enough to bring the price down.

All the choices I made about the appearance of the book were determined by this fact. *Up In The Tree* was originally to have been eight by ten, with alternating two- and four-colour two-page spreads. To cut costs, it came down to four by five, with two colours throughout. To save on typesetting, I hand-lettered the whole thing. At one point I was going to do the colour separations myself, to avoid those costs as well, but I found it too painful to work with acetate film, so my publisher took this over. I did the line drawings and the publisher's art department did the overlays for each colour. What we avoided by this method were the high costs of photographing a finished, painted picture and separating the colours afterwards. But because of this, and the two-colour limitation, the illustrations have a rather stencil or folk-art quality. I would have preferred watercolour, which allows for more blends and shadings, but we had to be aware at every turn of the necessity of keeping the cost down. That is why the trees are blue rather than brown and the sun is pink rather than yellow. Pure economics.

Why was this experience so painful? Only because I didn't know what I was doing. Although I had once done lettering and illustration for the poster business I ran in youth, I'd forgotten everything about it, and I was faced at every turn with my own incompetence and with the strictures of the form. How do you get everyone's heads and bodies the same size? How do you draw a giant owl, flying, *sideways*? I tortured myself with peeks at Helen Oxenbury and other mistresses of the art. I longed for an art course or for some catastrophe that would get me out of this mess. Measured on the pain scale, *Up In The Tree* is my most serious book.

But the lesson, if any, is that producing books for children in Canada is something like making movies for adults in Canada. The small potential market limits what you can do successfully and still compete with the low prices of imports. Does this mean that in order to have a financially viable children's book culture, unsullied by subsidies or special tariffs, we will have to practice a kind of minimalism?

IN THE GARDEN OF THE LOST CHILDREN

David Knight

In the mansion of lost children
white predominates
and sometimes in their minds
there are no more walls
as such
but long unsought limits
respected
disquieting in their precision;
the small details of half-remembered
realities traced and
traced again
with painstaking attentiveness.

In that garden they are like children
in their innocence and trust;
mute to the world
their thoughts
a solitary walk through landscaped
lawns that slip away.

The lost children linger
among the paths and hedges
trimmed so neat
and with infinite patience
they wander and murmur their legends
to the uncaring flowers.

CANADIAN CHILDREN'S BOOKS

A Bookseller's Point of View

Dianne Woodman

CAN YOU IMAGINE a Canadian bestseller NOT written by either Berton, Mowat or Laurence which has sold 125,000 copies since it was published four years ago? It's a runaway Canadian success now in its sixth printing, a book of poetry written by a serious academic with a sense of humour and a love for the sound and feel of words.

This incredibly successful book is of course *Alligator Pie*, a Canadian children's book, whose author, Dennis Lee, is becoming as familiar to Canadian children as their favourite figures on television.

They love his rhymes, his sense of the absurd and the rollicking good humour of *Alligator Pie* and his other two books for children: *Garbage Delight* and *Nicholas Knock*. Combined sales of these three titles are over 200,000 copies. Not bad by any standard.

For many years now, publishers have told us that they can't publish children's titles because they can't make any money on them and they can quote quite dismal sales figures to support their case. But then we look at the phenomenal success Lee and his publisher Macmillan of Canada have had and we realize that there *are* people out there who are willing to support Canadian children's books if they are of quality, have integrity and are not sloppily put together.

May Cutler, publisher of Tundra books, provides another example of high quality children's book publishing that has been successful commercially. *Mary of Mile 18* by Ann Blades was the first book Cutler published, and it has done extremely well, both in Canada and abroad, as have the Kurelek titles she has published. Cutler appears to be the only Canadian publisher who aggressively seeks foreign sales and is making an effort to buy the rights of acclaimed European children's books to introduce to the North American market.

The success stories of Dennis Lee and May Cutler are reflections of the scene today in children's books in Canada. There are a lot of things happening across the country and one of the most encouraging is the number of independent bookstores specializing in children's books. They stretch from one end of the country to the other. In the Toronto area alone there are four, one of them the well-known Children's Bookstore which has had a spectacular success in only four years. It wasn't the first children's bookstore in the country — that honour goes to the tiny Storybook Corner in Toronto — but it has done a lot to make Canadians aware that the children's book industry in Canada *does* exist.

Word of mouth is still what sells books best — provided the books are available in bookstores when people are talking about them. But next to that, it is the newspaper and magazine bookpage that generates sales. It's encouraging to see the *Globe and Mail* featuring more and more reviews of children's books and *Chatelaine* often featuring children's book reviews in Michele Landsberg's column. The Edmonton *Journal* now has a children's page and regularly runs book reviews written by children.

These are helpful sources for the bookseller who tries to keep up with the latest publications. So is *Canadian Books for Children* by Irma McDonough. The second edition of this excellent bibliography has just been published by the University of Toronto Press. It gives a very complete list of children's books published both in French and in English. *In Review*, edited by McDonough, is another good source of reviews of children's books along with *Quill & Quire*, the newspaper of the book industry.

In Edmonton we're fortunate to have a number of people interested in and active in the promotion of books for children. The Children's Literature Roundtable is a group who meet informally once a month to discuss their favourite (and sometimes not so favourite) children's books. The University of Alberta, like most universities across the country, now offers courses in Canadian children's literature which are always oversubscribed. Jon Stott, one of the lecturers and most popular professors in this field, issues *The World of Children's Books*, an informative quarterly distributed nationally and internationally. It features reviews of children's literature of Canada and all over the world.

The Children's Book Centre in Toronto, formed last year through funds provided mainly by the Canada Council, was created to foster public awareness of Canadian children's books. Their Children's Book Festival, promoted across the country last November, was a great success. Booksellers, librarians and teachers who participated in the promotion found both children and parents eager to read more and learn more about Canadian books.

To get adequate distribution of the 55 "Choice" Canadian children's books picked for promotion last November, the Centre had to rely on the good will and co-operation of the independent bookstores across the country, because they

appear to be the only retailers prepared to make a special effort on behalf of children's books.

The Big Three — Classic's, Coles and W. H. Smith — didn't show any interest. In fact, the chains have so far ignored the renaissance in children's books in this country. And that despite the dilemma of many people in many areas whose only access to books for sale is through a chain bookstore.

Last November chain bookstores lost a lot of money when they didn't bother to stock the children's books recommended for the Children's Book Festival. According to an Edmonton school librarian who'd planned on buying the recommended titles at a chain store, all she found was *Anne of Green Gables*!

When she came to our store, she was delighted to find an entire store fixture set aside for the display of the CBC Choices. She was able to get everything she needed at one store in one single shopping trip.

There's a certain mystique about children's books that seems to scare booksellers off and perhaps we should be making an effort to help them to demystify children's books. My dream is to see a team of two or three knowledgeable people travelling across the country giving short workshops on children's books for bookstore personnel. It's a field that demands a lot of knowledge and the standards of children's bookselling in chain operations could be raised considerably if managers, buyers, and people working on the floor could attend these seminars. Perhaps the Canada Council is listening?

In the meantime, the Canadian children's book market is getting stronger and publishers are beginning to realize it. Picture books and fiction for older children are steadily improving but it's in the area of nonfiction publishing that Canadian books are most lacking. There's virtually nothing for preschoolers and very little for children aged 6 to 9 years except for a few titles on our native people and some sport books.

The age 9 to 12 nonfiction books are more numerous but they are mainly books that have been produced for the educational market and have had a spillover onto the trade side. Fitzhenry & Whiteside is doing more than most in this dual field but it still isn't enough.

The Alberta government has just announced an $8.5 million publishing program to produce books with Canadian content for use in Alberta schools and one can only hope that some of the titles will be suitable and available for distribution to the general public through bookstores.

McClelland & Stewart is a publisher that has consistently produced quality children's books. It recently reinstated the Little Brown Canadian Children's Book Award which over and above a cash prize guarantees publication in both Canada and the United States. The juvenile paperback series "Canadian Favourites" has kept in print a number of Canadian children's classics including several of the L. M. Montgomery titles.

The past fall season, McClelland & Stewart published twelve new hardcover books of children's fiction and launched the ambitious but ultimately unsuccessful *Magook* series.

What went wrong with *Magook*? Despite two years of "market research," it seems the marketing aspect didn't come off too well. The format of the *Magook*s is awkward. Neither a magazine nor a book, their size is an in-between defying display on conventional magazine shelves or regular paperback racks so the mass-market distribution M&S counted on just didn't happen.

From a bookseller's point of view we did quite well with them and utilized the dump bins provided. We weren't happy with the fact that we had to compete not only with supermarkets but also with Scholastic for the market. Their price offered through the schools was lower than we could sell them for and that seemed unfair.

The *Magook*s look attractive, are slick and have lots of appealing colour for kids, although they are bound in such a way that they are difficult for a child to hold and read easily. It was an an ambitious undertaking and it's unfortunate that the marketing got off track. Booksellers did their part to get behind the project and so did school and public librarians.

A lot of people *want* to buy Canadian books for their children and go into bookstores specifically looking for them. Although we feel that Canadian children's books shouldn't be put in a separate "Canadiana" section, for the convenience of our customers we put small red maple leaf stickers on the spines so they can be easily seen on the shelf. Some of the most popular books at the Village Bookshop are Canadian titles, such as *Hug Me, Jacob Two Two Meets the Hooded Fang, Little Badger and the Fire Spirit*, and, of course, the Dennis Lee books.

Selling children's books in Canada means an equal measure of satisfaction and frustration. It's frustrating to be unable to find a good source of bilingual books as well as other foreign language editions of the classics. We have a number of schools in Edmonton that have instituted a bilingual Ukrainian-English program (as well as French-English) and so far we have found only one title for the beleaguered school librarians — *Kyrylo, The Tanner* — published last fall by Kids Can Press.

We'd like to carry more books by French-Canadian writers and would like to know the availability of English-Canadian books in French. There's a French edition of *Anne of Green Gables* listed in *Canadian Books for Children*. The publisher is Hachette but we've been unable to find a source for Hachette books. We're hampered in Western Canada by lack of access to wholesalers who distribute this type of book. A letter we wrote to a wholesaler in Montreal a few months ago remains unanswered and will have to be rewritten in rusty high school French, it seems.

It's frustrating to open Hurtig's *Canadian ABC Book* for the first time. Any attempt to be original, funny or "Canadian" is negated by racial and sexual stereotypes that make the book objectionable to adults and less than educational to Canadian children. It's another example of the urgent need for professional editors who care about quality and integrity in Canadian books for Canadian children.

There's a lot of satisfaction in reading at our weekly story hour Maria Campbell's newly published *Little Badger and the Fire Spirit*, and having the children respond so positively to the warm and loving text and illustrations that they ask for the book to be read to them again and again.

There's the satisfaction of *Hug Me*, written by Patti Stren, a young Canadian woman who studied with Maurice Sendak and who has produced a small gentle book whose text and illustrations are what picture books are all about. Neither would be complete without the other. There's satisfaction in seeing children respond to the honesty of the story and pictures.

I find it encouraging that we sell more preschool books than books in any other age category. More young parents are trying to introduce their children to books than ever before. Although we haven't detected any sales resistance to the expensive hardcover picture book, the paperback picture book is becoming increasingly popular. There aren't enough Canadian books done in this format. Elizabeth Cleaver's *How Summer Came to Canada* went out of print recently in cloth and will be reprinted this summer in paperback. That's good news and one hopes other publishers will follow suit with their out of print books.

We now have a public most eager to know more about Canadian children's books; we have reviewers in the media willing to do their part; we have committed and knowledgeable booksellers all across the country (albeit not enough) — now all we need are Canadian publishers who will overcome their reticence, hire good children's editors and designers and make an aggressive aim at the market.

Patsy Aldana, the new president of the ACP and the head of Groundwood Books, a new publishing company specializing in children's books, was quoted recently as saying that Canadian publishers in 1977 produced only 60 children's books and made a plea for government assistance to increase this number substantially.

Greater quantity, unfortunately, doesn't mean better quality. May I make a final plea for professionalism? May publishers be inspired to hire competent children's editors from wherever they can find them. We need editors who have a knowledge not only of the Canadian scene but also the international world of children's literature. They should have an awareness of racism and sexism at the very youngest age levels, an eye for illustration as well as content, and the honesty to produce books that will be loved by children and adults everywhere.

CHILDREN'S BOOKSTORES

NOVA SCOTIA

The Book Room
1664-1666 Granville Street, Halifax, B3J 2N7

A Pair of Trindles Bookshoppe, Old Red Store
Historic Properties, Halifax, B3L 1W5

Readmore Books
Bayers Rd. Shopping Centre, Halifax, B3L 2C2

QUÉBEC

Books and Things
Box 214, Morin Heights, P.Q. J0R 1H0

ONTARIO

E. Lindsay Rogin Ltd. Children's Books & Toys
691 Ouellette Avenue, Windsor, N9A 4J4

A Different Drummer
513 Locust Street, Burlington, L7S 1V3

The Albion Bookshop
376 Old Kingston Rd., Highland Creek

Green Gables Books
40 Main Street North, Markham, L3P 1X5

Glengarry Bookstore
45 Main St. S., P.O. Box 819, Alexandria, K0C 1A0

The Children's Book Store
108A Avenue Rd., Toronto, M5R 2H3

The Gallery Shop, The Art Gallery of Ontario
317 Dundas St. W., Toronto, M5T 1G4

Longhouse Bookshop
630 Yonge Street, Toronto, M4Y 1Z8

SCM Book Room
333 Bloor St. W., Toronto, M5S 1W7

Storybook Corner
3 Bedford Park Avenue, Toronto, M5M 1H8

Books and More Books
41 Brock Street, Kingston, K7L 1R7

The Bookery of Ottawa
463 Sussex Drive, Ottawa, K1N 6Z4

MANITOBA

Child's Play: Toys for Children, Ltd.
100 Osborne Street, Winnipeg, R3L 1Y5

Growing Minds Ltd.
441 Portage Avenue, Winnipeg, R3B 2C9

Toad Hall Toys
250 McDermot Avenue, Winnipeg, R3B 0S5

SASKATCHEWAN

The Bookworm's Den
Grosvenor Park Shopping Centre, Saskatoon

ALBERTA

Aspen Books
1-10808 Whyte Avenue, Edmonton, T6E 2B3

The Village Bookshop
10212 - 140 Street, Edmonton, T5N 2L4

BRITISH COLUMBIA

The Cat & The Fiddle Bookshop
4529 West 10th Avenue, Vancouver, V6R 2J2

Duthie's Books for Children
915 Robson Street, Vancouver, V6Z 1A5

Hager Books
2176 West 41st Avenue, Vancouver, V6M 1Z1

THE TALE OF A STORY

Elisabeth Hopkins

CHILDREN'S BOOKS HAVE BEEN of great interest to me for the past seventy-nine years; that is as far back as I can remember. I could read when I was four years old and a year later I was reading books for pleasure. I read anything I could get hold of and was fond of the many well-illustrated books that were then available at low prices. Books for the Bairns and the Bouverie Series of books cost 1d each so were well within the range of the majority of our budgets. Much of what I read would now be frowned on, not by children, but by psychologists, teachers and other interested adults, parents excluded. The latter naturally want to share the tales they enjoyed in their youth with their offspring. They do not care if the book is sexist or whether the hero is a boy or girl; nor do children. Like the majority of children I identified myself with the hero, were he male or female. I thoroughly enjoyed a moral tale and *Grimm's Fairy Tales* did not frighten me as I realized the stories were not real. We had no horrors in our lives and it was exciting to read about them. It is strange that after centuries of fairy tales, there now seems to be a movement to have them banned.

For some years I was manager of a bookstore and became interested in books from another angle. Of course adults buy far more children's books than do the children themselves. I observed that the younger children, even if they could read, chose by the illustrations, whereas older children wanted to know about the book's contents and were always pleased if the scene was set in a place they knew. Unless they themselves painted or drew, illustrations meant little to them. Parents tended to look for old favourites of their childhood. Other adults were more choosy and were sometimes chauvinistic in their approach. Teachers were critical and viewed the matter from all points, but naturally their own tastes tended to influence them, irrespective of the worth of the book. I recall one customer, an elderly Canadian who wanted a book for a ten-year-old. I showed her a classic, published in the Everyman's Library. She gave it a brief look and said "Too English." I pointed out that though published in England it was written by an American about a little American boy, but this did not alter her

obvious prejudice, one that prevents our children from sometimes having the best of the arts.

When buying I tried not to let my preferences blind me, but I found it hard to accept books with grotesque or even hideous illustrations or with babyish or ungrammatical language. I could not see why lambs (not yet called "baby sheep") which are beautiful animals should be given enormous eyes, legs like stilts and outsized ears — caricatures in fact. I came to the sad conclusion that it was a reflection of the ugly world in which we live, peopled by those whose children are raised where there seems to be little of real beauty. But let us expose our children to all that there is and one way to do this is through books, well-written and illustrated. Every book written for children must perforce be educational, for they are learning and expanding their vocabularies. For this reason they should never be written down to, and what is written should be clear, concise and grammatically correct.

Those of us who can remember our childhood know that much of our time was spent in an imaginary world. One could easily pass from the real to the unreal. I used to envy the little girls in Mrs. Molesworth's delightful stories, "The Cuckoo Clock" and "The Tapestry Room," who had such wonderful adventures when they went through the thin veil of the prosaic real world into the mystical fairy one. Chilren lose this gift soon enough, so we should do nothing to discourage it.

Having these thoughts in mind, I was delighted when David Robinson of Talon Books asked me to write and illustrate a book for children. I had in the past entertained some of my small friends with stories I had written and illustrated for them. Although I was pleased with the idea I had also some trepidation. I had destroyed all that I had written in the past, so I had to start from scratch and learn all the technicalities. Fortunately I had David to teach and guide me. Living on a small island, as I do, I could not go to book stores to see how others approached the matter and I did not have the benefit of a public library. I thought all I had to do was write a story, do some illustrations and send them to the publisher to do the rest. I soon found there was more to making a book than that. Instructed by David and with help from experienced friends, I became absorbed in the craft. There was much to learn; the illustrations had to be done to exact measurements and there had to be the right number of them. The text had to be cut so that it would fit into the space allotted to it under the picture. I learnt what the expressions *bleeding* and *scripture* meant. I wanted the book to be entertaining, and from what I hear it has proved so, in spite of its moral bias. By stressing that the animals lived peacefully and omitting all reference to belligerency, I hoped that children might realize that one can obtain one's desires and needs by love and honesty without any fighting. I hoped, too, that the readers would be made aware of the fact that beasts are part of nature, as

we ourselves are, and that they should be treated with compassion, mercy and justice and not exploited for our amusement or pleasure.

Having decided on the fairy tale pattern I had to think of original characters, and a cougar won. I could not recall a cougar being the hero of a book for children. So *The Painted Cougar* was conceived and I got to work. I do not know now how I began or whether illustrations or the text came first; probably first one and then the other. But I had my cougar hero to work on and now had to send him on his adventures. For some years I had been painting beasts decorated with flowers and symbols. Sometimes they wore wrist watches, necklaces or other adornments. I felt I could use this fantasy on Leon, as I named the cougar. In his anxiety to please and win his lady love, he could have his body decorated with paintings of the various things, new and exciting to him, that he had seen on his journey from the desert to man's world. This gave me the opportunity of introducing a dragon, always a favourite with children, which with a kindly snake performed the beautifying. I gave the story an unexpected (I hope) ending with a slight moral tone.

Various alarms and excursions occurred when it went to the printers. Although I had many people read it and report on mistakes or omissions in the text or pictures, some crept in, and David would come rushing to the island and patiently point out what was wrong and wait for me to correct it. I am now much more tolerant of mistakes I find in books which have been carefully edited!

At last it was finished and the first copy was in my hands. To me the months spent on the book were instructive, fulfilling and satisfying, in spite of the mixed feelings of pride and unworthiness I experienced when I first saw it in print.

A GIRL IS FALLING

Theresa Moritz

This leg with silver stocking
and red toenails
I found while I was counting zinnias,
is no more a curiosity
than the gloved hand
on the neighbor's porch
or the ear the mailman found
and carries with him now
for listening.

They tell us
legs and arms and hips gather
at the subway's remoter stations
and torsoes are propped
in phone booths or with the mannequins
in display windows
and fingers bundled
three and four together
are distributed in boxes
emptied of their greeting cards.

A girl is falling
from the roof
of a high rise in the suburbs
and as she passes every story
she offers to the lookers-on
a hand a knee a face.
But her situation arouses
little interest.

THE FROZEN CHILD

I liked it when the frozen child
came to visit me.
We cut out ice box cookies
and from the freezer I would bring him
a finger or some toes
he dropped the last time he was here.

He could sit very well in a while
and always wiped up the water
that collected around his feet.
His favorite stories made him melt too fast
so we read about dancing snowmen
and birds preserved in ice for spring
and the perennial flowers buried alive
in the frozen ground.

I thought he must have come
to help me understand his accident
or to warn me of the coming Ice Age.
But yesterday on a frosted windowpane
he scratched a question mark,
and I did not let him in.

IN TUNE WITH TOMORROW

Christie Harris

WHILE GROWING UP ON A FRASER VALLEY farm, I liked going for the cows. Along the trails from the pasture, I could belt out bits from Tennyson and Sir Walter Scott without anyone but the cows hearing me. And who were they to call anyone else stupid?

My father was the storyteller in our family. Neighbours found amazing excuses to come round in the evenings or on Sunday afternoons. And although his tales usually started with "I mind the time . . . ," we all realized that they were more hilarious than true. At least, my mother used to shake her head over them and say, "What will people think of Ireland?"

Personally, I thought Ireland was great, filled as it obviously was with pranksters, ghosts, "gentle bushes" and deliciously shivery happenings. I also thought stories were great. Clearly, if they had any purpose, it was entertainment. Of course the stories in the Sunday School papers — for which I could hardly wait — did seem to feature worthier characters. But it took all kinds to make a world — all kinds of stories.

Much as I loved stories and enjoyed pouring words on to paper, and made my high school pocket money writing the local news for the weekly *Columbian*, I never thought of being a writer. Teachers said I should be a mathematician. Instead, I became a primary teacher. And now that I had an audience infinitely more responsive than the cows had been, I plunged into story-telling.

It was like a flash from Heaven the day it struck me that *I could tell my own stories*. Ideas flooded in so fast that I could scarcely wait for recess, noon and after school. It was hard on the school's foolscap supply; but at the end of two weeks, I had nine little nothings to offer the Vancouver *Province* for its weekend children's page. And when they took the lot, I knew I had found *my thing*.

By the time I was married and starting to raise my own audience, everybody was into radio. We were all trying to write scripts; and I, at least, was shooting mine in to the infant CBC with a lot more enthusiasm at my end than at theirs.

However, when Vancouver had to produce *A Child's Dream of the Coronation* for the Official Programme on the day of George VI's crowning, they commissioned me to write the book-and-lyrics for an hour-long juvenile musical fantasy.

After that, I went flat out for radio writing: adult and juvenile plays, humorous sketches, women's talks, school broadcasts, whatever-they-were-buying. And it was marvellous. Every domestic disaster could be turned magically into $25; and I was never really convinced that it was juggling a career with five children in a big, inconvenient old house in the country that was turning my hair white before I was thirty-five. Radio was so exciting that I might never have come round to books if Longmans hadn't asked me to turn an adventure serial into my first book, *Cariboo Trail*, published the year I turned fifty. Not unnaturally, my pioneer family on the Trail was Irish, as my pioneer family in the later *Forbidden Frontier* was. I knew how it was with Irish people. I could really see them and hear them as they moved through the plot. So I could make others see them. A basic in writing stories.

When I needed young characters, I could use my own children and the desk full of notes I was making on them and their friends — making because I couldn't resist jotting down the fascinating things they said and did. Children were such interesting people! They were even reluctantly co-operative. "We know you're just nosey, Mom," one of my daughters told me. "But we'll pretend it's because you're a literary lady, and tell you what you want to know."

Later, three of them really told me what I wanted to know about their growing-up. They gave me mountains of taped confessions to add to the notes in my desk. And we all pretended that *You Have to Draw the Line Somewhere*, *Confessions of a Toe-Hanger*, and *Let X Be Excitement* were just fiction. Why they told me the truth on those tapes was explained by my toe-hanging daughter one day when she found the confessing a bit rough. "The kids'll know if it's phoney," she told me. Another bit of wisdom I treasured; you have to be honest with children.

When I meet my young readers on tours, I find they delight in knowing that these family stories *are* the Awful Truth, remembered with humour. And there's no need to tell them about the tears I shed and the gasps I stifled, hearing the Awful Truth from those tapes and wishing I could have done my part over again, better. Yet even remorse is to be treasured; for when you're a writer, no matter what you're going through, part of you is always standing off there, observing how it *feels* to be going through that. Sooner or later, you're going to have a character filled with remorse, or fear, or delight. And you'd better know how it feels because "The kids'll know if it's phoney."

It's one thing to get into the skin of people you've lived with. It's something else again to get into the skin of people of another time, another culture. Yet many of my books deal with the Northwest Coast Indians of "Once in the days of very long ago, when things were different. . . . " I've always sensed that people

are much the same under different skins; it's the code they live by that makes them feel differently about the things that happen to them. Understanding the code of the Northwest Coast Indians, knowing their culture and their homeland involved a total immersion that started for me with a family move to Prince Rupert in 1958.

Then, a series for School Broadcasts plunged me into research; research led me to the tales collected by ethnologists at the turn of the century — tales that seemed to me to match the sophistication of Northwest Coast Indian art; and trying to understand those tales led me to knowledgeable Indian friends. Then, as always, natives were wonderfully generous in helping me to understand.

It was excitement about the magnificent art of Charles Edenshaw that inspired *Raven's Cry*, the true story of a line of Haida Eagle chiefs who were great illustrators of the tales as well as great chiefs. Before I started talking to the family on the Queen Charlotte Islands, I had many sessions with Bill Reid, the superb artist who had agreed to be art consultant and illustrator for the book. It was he who helped me to understand the tragic sense of shame that had overwhelmed a proud, artistically gifted people at the coming of the white man.

By the time I had heard the family stories, and had followed clues through old ships' logs in the archives, I had become so immersed in that world that I began to think I was tuning in on an old Haida spirit. I'd run into something I just could not find out about. I'd go to bed worrying about it. And, again and again, I'd wake up knowing what had happened, just as if someone had told me. When I'd check out the idea, again and again it seemed to be what *must* have happened. But when I mentioned the old Haida spirit to my family, my scientific son said, "Mom, you know that the subconscious is like a computer; feed in enough good data, and it's going to come up with some pretty good answers."

Well, maybe. But I rather liked the old spirit idea. And I like it even better now, when there are scientists who are not all that sure that there aren't spirit beings around us.

It was *Raven's Cry* that first startled me into the thought that the old Indian notions are very much in tune with today, maybe even more in tune with tomorrow. And that's great; it's the adults of tomorrow I'm writing for.

In that book there's the vision of Condohahtgha, the old shaman who went into a trance. His spirit self climbed up the sky ladder, looked down, and saw Haida villages wiped out long before they actually were wiped out by smallpox. I had a little trouble tracking down that story; people were clearly embarrassed about it. "Maybe it was just a dream," they would tell me. At the time, I was inclined to agree.

Then the book came out. And my youngest son, a student in the 60's, said, "Mom, my friends are very interested in that recorded case of astral travelling

— you know, out-of-body experience." They were interested, too, in the part at the end where Bill Reid had said he felt the ghost of Charles Edenshaw *making* him do his Haida art a certain way.

I realized something. Not only was this old Indian occult thing in tune with today; the old Indian reverence for nature was also very right for our ecologically-oriented youth.

The natives had claimed that plants had a spirit self as well as a physical self. So, if they needed to cut down a tree, they talked to it, explaining, apologizing — a practice that was scoffed at as superstitious nonsense. But now, isn't everybody talking to a tree? Aren't scientists wiring plants up to a polygraph and discovering that they can even read your mind?

There's even the odd scientist postulating an invisible world around us, a world of matter vibrating at such a high frequency that we can't tune in on it. But WHAT IF people living closer to nature, people with keener senses heightened by prayer and fasting, by hypnotic drums and dancing, actually were tuning in to ghosts and spirits who really were there? It's a likely enough WHAT IF to make it an exciting time to be working in Indian legends. For me, it adds a whole new dimension. *Once More Upon a Totem* has more spiritual depth than my earlier *Once Upon a Totem.*

But! I write about such things because *I'm* fascinated with them, not because I think children will be. Only after the fact have I discovered that children are just as fascinated as I am.

Maybe we share the "growing edge" my Atheneum editor, Jean Karl, mentions in *From Childhood to Childhood.* "Most good authors are people who need to explore in this way, who are never satisfied with the limits of truth as they have seen them, but who are always searching for the new that lies just beyond." That I believe. And if my "growing edge" ever begins to wither, I may not stop writing; but I'll certainly stop writing for children.

So what about looking at those old tales with Space Age eyes? I've had two sightings of what I know were UFOs. After the second — in that way a new thing suddenly hits something lurking down there in the subconscious — I thought, "The Sky Man of the legends really did come, from Space." In the Northwest Coast Indian versions, he came from the sky and carried off an Indian princess, returning her many years later under marvellous circumstances. And now, when I re-read several of these versions, I was agog over the Space clues I found in them. Why hadn't I thought of it before? But now that I had thought of it, *Sky Man on the Totem Pole?* was on its way. Again, I was writing it because I was fascinated with the idea, not because I thought children would be. Though they are.

Those legends have no truck with the Old World's epic battle between Good and Evil — a concept that could be a hangup from medieval Church thinking?

In the native tales, everything has potential for good or evil, depending on what *you* do. And that's an ethic today's children can identify with. They know that if we don't show enough respect for our seas and our rivers and our forests, something terrible *is* going to happen.

It's been suggested to me that I must be into Women's Lib too, the way I make women and girls so important in my *Mouse Woman* stories. But in that matrilineal society, women and girls were important; they carried the great bloodlines. And *Mouse Woman* may be for real. Who knows? Maybe she's still lurking around there, in that fourth dimension of matter, waiting to bring back proper order to the world.

In the old collections, there's never a special story about *Mouse Woman.* I'd been studying them for years before I fully realized that whenever a young person was tricked into trouble, or got himself or herself into trouble, this little character always turned up. I thought about her a lot, and I talked to the late Wilson Duff of the University of British Columbia about her before I agreed with him that she represented the Indian concept of making things equal. Children caught in an encounter with a Supernatural Being certainly needed a friend to keep things equal. And this Good Fairy of the Northwest Coast was such a perky, imperious little busybody that I could use her to bring back some of the fun and excitement I've always felt belonged in those stories.

After all, as I'd always known, stories were basically for entertainment. And they were for everybody: men, women and children. The Indians' tales had been for all ages. As my father's had been. And as I think mine are. I don't think I write only for children. Neither do other people. Although *Raven's Cry* wears a children's medal, the University of Alaska uses it as a textbook on Culture Contact. If a story can't capture the interest of adults, it's not likely to captivate their children.

On one of my tours, when someone asked me how many more books I was going to write, I said, "Oh, one of these days they'll find me slumped over my typewriter."

After the session, a boy came up to me and said, "When they find you slumped over your typewriter, you'll still be writing good stories."

He knew it was the stories that were important, not the storyteller. And perhaps that's all the writer of children's books really needs to remember.

HERSELF, WALKING

Tom Wayman

Why is she walking there
in June on the path
through the pine forest,
eyes on the soft earth
with its needles and cones,
looking for acorns,
chestnuts,
eagle down,
gull feathers,
her long skirt swaying
in the wind?

Where is she going
climbing the winter road
out of town, snow
sliding from the trees
in the weak sunshine,
herself warmed
by her walk
but her breath
rising, her hands
cold and moist
forming a snowball,
throwing it away
into a white field?

And what is she doing
at her kitchen table
on a stormy morning,
lights on since eight,
the rain drumming
on the house roof,
the woods and the dock
soaked with it,
while she,
sitting at her table,
working,
meanwhile goes walking
on the rain-swept rocks
by the turbulent,
difficult sea?

THE FLAME-LIGHTER WOMAN

Catherine Anthony Clark's Fantasies

J. Kieran Kealy

THOUGH CATHERINE ANTHONY CLARK is acknowledged as "Canada's first serious writer of fantasy and the only one who has produced a substantial body of work,"[1] most critics minimize the significance of her contribution to Canadian literature because of her apparent reluctance to provide a truly Tolkienian "subcreation,"[2] a clearly defined and totally separate fantasy world. Sheila Egoff's response to Clark's imaginary worlds is typical: "Clark seems doubtful about her own medium and is seldom willing to take more than two steps into the world of fantasy."

But then, should one expect more of a writer fettered by a culture which is simply too young to allow the creation of acceptable fantasy? As Egoff remarks:

> Canada lacks most of the requisites that provide a hospitable context for the production of fantasy. For one thing, there is no tradition of "faërie" comparable to the oral literature of older countries. Canadian writers in general have hardly sniffed at the fumes of fancy or the nonsensical.

The problem with such discussions is that they tend to judge a fantasy in terms of what it is *not* rather than allow it to be what it is. What I will examine in this paper is what one does find in Clark's work: a unique approach to the entire concept of fantasy, one which suggests that Canadian culture does not make fantasy impossible. Rather it provides influences (specifically, Indian legends) which produce a kind of fantasy which is rather different from that found in the European tradition.

The key to understanding Clark's approach can be found in the first sentence of her first book, *The Golden Pine Cone* (1950): "Not very long ago, and not very far away lived two children, Bren and Lucy, with their parents in a big log cabin." The brief introduction announces immediately that this fantasy will not exist in the dark past of fairy tales or myths, but in the still living tradition of Indian legends, a tradition in which it is often difficult to distinguish between the natural and the supernatural, the real and the fantastic, or as Clark suggests, between the Inner and the Outer Worlds. The fantasy, the magic, the influence of the supernatural are always there — in the *real* world — awaiting the imagi-

native, sensitive person. Thus Clark's refusal to write traditional fantasies allows her to explore the actual mythology of the lands in which her stories take place. But she does not turn to these legends simply because they are the most accessible or the most authentic remnants of Canadian mythology. Rather, she does so because they provide the most effective framework for presenting certain deeply felt beliefs about the community of man in a troubled world. Clark's six fantasies present a clear portrait of a utopian world in which each man must accept his social responsibilities and ultimately his place in the world. By transporting her protagonists to the land of Indian myth, Clark does not create a new world, but instead simply describes the magical world that actually exists within the beliefs of the Indian culture. In doing so, she may well be providing what is a distinctly Canadian fantasy, one which reaffirms the basic cultural traits that define Canada, at least as she envisions the country.

Perhaps the most obvious distinction to be made between Indian and European fantasies is their differing attitudes toward good and evil. Simply stated, Indian legends do not portray life as a constant struggle between absolutes. Egoff criticizes Clark's fantasies because they reflect this belief:

> There is never a gigantic struggle between good and evil — a theme that is at the root of many fantasies, such as Lewis's Narnia books, *The Tree That Sat Down* by Beverley Nichols, *The Doll's House* by Rumer Godden, and a host of others. It is the edge of darkness that gives the best fantasy much of its depth, meaning, and value.

But are such absolute distinctions necessary for "true" fantasy? Clark clearly does not think so, and I do not feel that this belief in any way diminishes the meaning that one can find in her tales. Rather than focus on "gigantic struggles" between good and evil, Clark chooses to concentrate on the dilemma of the individual. Again and again, she tells the tale of how an isolated, alienated person finally comes to recognize and accept his social responsibility, his place in his family or tribe. In this world, man is neither good nor evil. He is simply a fallible human being who must learn the value of belonging to his society.[3]

Nasookin, the "villain" of Clark's first book, *The Golden Pine Cone*, is a good example of her approach to the problem of good and evil. Nasookin is at first presented as a frightening demonic force with the power to bring chaos to his entire world, but Lucy, the child-heroine of the story, hears his drum song and knows immediately that he is not an ogre but a lonely man:

> "I do not know what makes me cry. I think it's the drum. The drum talks against your words — it has its own speech. And it keeps saying that you are sad and never at peace, for you have been a wicked man."

The implication is obvious: the drums sing the song of Nasookin's soul, a soul which obviously wishes to leave behind this life of evil:

> "Yes, it is a sad song after all," said Nasookin in a muffled voice. "But it is too late for me now, Little Squirrel."

But of course, it is not too late. Because of the courage and perseverance of the two children from the Outer World, Nasookin is redeemed. Ironically the culmination of *The Golden Pine Cone* is not the return of the magical pine cone, but the wedding of Nasookin and his beloved Onamara, a ceremony which symbolizes the return of order to a previously troubled world.[4]

Clark's portrait of Princess Onamara provides a clear example of what happens when one abandons all social responsibility. Doomed to live on a floating island when she betrays her family, she becomes, literally, heartless. When her heart is restored at the end of the story, she returns to her world, having learned the terrible loneliness suffered by the heartless.

> The ice-cold flesh of the Princess was growing warm; there was pink in her pale-brown cheeks. Standing there, laughing with joy, she was lovelier than she had ever been. And then she wept, thinking of the wasted years behind her, until her lover took her hand. Then she laughed again with pure happiness that loss and loneliness were all gone by.

In her second book, *The Sun Horse* (1951), Clark develops more fully the personalities of her protagonists. Mark is an orphan who has recently been forced to move to a new home in the wilds of British Columbia. Here he meets Giselle, a young girl who is trying to learn the fate of her father, a man who has apparently abandoned his entire family in his search for the legendary Sun Horse. Thus, both protagonists feel betrayed, obvious candidates for the kind of escape offered by the world of fantasy. But Mark and Giselle do not retreat or escape into some kind of dream world. Rather they consciously set forth on a quest to find Giselle's father, a journey which involves a courageous confrontation with the supernatural, the fantasy world. Clark's protagonists are never passive dreamers; they are active doers.

The precarious psychological state of these protagonists does allow them, however, to learn more from their adventure than do the rather innocuous brother and sister of *The Golden Pine Cone*. In addition, Clark's decision to make her protagonists more complex allows her to develop more fully her examination of the alienated man, for now the protagonists, too, must learn the value of becoming useful members of their families and their community. Initially, Mark and Giselle simply learn to respect, trust, and love one another. Ultimately, however, they come to appreciate the value of all social commitment, of caring for one's fellow man. This realization is symbolized by their rediscovery of their own

families. Giselle's father returns, and the family is once again together. Mark, too, finds that he is no longer an orphan; he has a place:

> The Gunnings were overjoyed to have their boy Mark safe back again. . . . Aunt Bessie got home in time to see Mark safe and sound, but she wept a good deal when she hugged him for she had given him up for dead. . . . Both uncle and aunt could not do enough for Mark. . . . Yes, they had loved him before, but now he was like their own son to them.

And yet, despite these rather sentimentalized reunions, *The Sun Horse* is far more than the story of the emotional growth of two disturbed children. It is also about the sacrifices that must be made to re-establish a stable community, to save man from his often destructive desires. Michael, the old sourdough who helps the children redeem Giselle's father, has consciously chosen to remain in Forgetful Valley. In his youth he had killed a man in revenge, and this remote valley is his self-imposed prison. Thus, the children must convince him not only of the value of others, but of his own worth. And the children do redeem this bitter man, through their love, but more importantly, through their selflessness. For Michael recognizes that there is something special about these two outsiders, something that evokes hope:

> "You see, Giselle, you and Mark are the only persons who have come to this country for an unselfish reason. You have a sort of magic of your own. I feel it and your father has begun to feel it. Perhaps you will win out in this plan. Nothing is hopeless — you make me feel that."

And this something special, this "sort of magic," does save both Michael and Mr. Martin. But it is a magic that comes from within, not from without, for the most consistent quality in all of Clark's heroes and heroines is their courage, their refusal to quit, whatever the odds might be. In Clark's world, the heroine does not wait for the sudden intervention of a miraculous fairy-godmother, nor does the hero carry a magical sword and wear a cloak of invulnerability. Like their counterparts in Indian legends, Mark and Giselle must fight their own battles. They defeat their adversary, the Thunderbird, only after an arduous trek to his nest, and their lives are protected not by some mystical force of good, but by a bat whom Giselle befriended on her first day in the Inner World. It is precisely this kind of courage that receives the praise of the most curious creature that the children meet in this wondrous world, the magical Flame-lighter Woman:

> "You two have shown more gumption than I expected. Grow up as you are now and you may amount to something. In my time, children were expected to act for themselves early and not to sit round waiting for things to be done for them. They helped themselves and worked. That's how the Great West opened up."

Although Clark's third fantasy, *The One-Winged Dragon* (1955), begins as

a rather straightforward account of the quest to restore a lost relative, in this case the mysterious Kwong Ho's daughter, it quickly strays from the actual quest and focuses instead on the two central figures, Michael and Jenni, and their growing understanding of themselves and their families because of their association with this other world. Michael and Jenni are clearly the most complex pair of adventurers in any of Clark's books. Michael has just moved to the country with a family burdened by a father who selfishly puts his writing above his family. Jenni, on the other hand, is one of those emotionally troubled younger children whose fear of being ugly and unloved causes them to be incredible brats. Thus, the "aliens" in *The One-Winged Dragon* are the children themselves, and the quest they undertake is more internal than external. Though they do rescue and return Kwong Ho's daughter Kuniang, they also discover themselves in the process. They change from troubled, isolated individuals into selfless, giving members of society. Like Mark and Giselle, they must first simply learn to get along with one another, but Jenni's overt paranoia makes even this relationship difficult to achieve. Fortunately, Michael immediately recognizes the root of Jenni's problem:

> And the lonely, frightened look he had seen on her face when they had quarreled came back to him. There was one thing that really frightened Jenni, and he knew inside him what it was. She was afraid that no one would ever love her. He couldn't help feeling sorry for Jenni; she was so often in trouble.

Within the fantasy of the Inner World, Jenni comes to recognize her problem, and as her relationship with the kindly Yatunga develops, she begins to admit her innermost fears:

> "I know I say crazy things, but I get the awfullest feeling sometimes that nobody loves me because I'm so ugly. Then I get mad and do bad things. I used to be bad at home because I was miserable and hated myself."

Like Michael in *The Golden Pine Cone*, Jenni must learn first to appreciate herself; only then can she rejoin the world about her. And the significant responsibilities of the quest help Jenni grow and gain confidence in herself. But her real growth is the result of the selfless love given to the child by Yatunga, Jenni's surrogate mother:

> This Indian woman loved her dead daughter so much, and Jenni wondered sadly if it really made any difference at home that she herself was gone. It was a dreary thing not to be loved and very dreary not to feel love. She had felt, without knowing it, that there was something wrong with herself. She was always mad and cross with people. People wouldn't be as she wanted; they had little time for her. Perhaps it made a difference being outside of time, as the Luck-Spirit told them they were. Oh, she could love now. She loved the affectionate Indian woman whose heart was so open.

Once she is outside of time, forced to look carefully at her life, Jenni sees how ridiculous it is always to demand that people be what she wants them to be. Once free of her selfish demands, she can both love and be loved.

In *The One-Winged Dragon*, Clark stresses once again the need for all isolated individuals to return to their societies, in particular their families. Kuniang is returned to her father, and the two children return to their homes, finally able both to give and to accept the love necessary to keep any family alive:

> Jenni was carried into the house, clinging to her father's neck; and then she was in her mother's arms with all the joyful family round her, kissing and exclaiming over her. The little girl knew then that she had her own place in the family — that the others had missed her and wept when she was gone. Yes, it was just as Yatunga had said — every child has his love-place in the lodge though much may not be said about it.

Michael's reunion is equally ecstatic, for his father has finally recognized his familial obligations. As Yatunga suggests, "It made a difference being outside of time."

In *The Silver Man* (1958), Clark once again concentrates on the psychological dilemma of her child adventurers. Gilbert Steyne, another orphan, becomes so disillusioned trying to fit into his Aunt Rhoda's household, an environment dominated by her Saturday bridge lunches, that he decides to escape. While awaiting the boat that will take him to his freedom, he wanders into a museum, where after admiring a grand Arctic fox and a Yukon mammoth, he is suddenly drawn mysteriously into a museum office, where he sees a crystal held in an eagle's claw:

> He bent over and picked up the crystal, turning it so that the rainy light of day streamed down on to the dew drop at its centre. The drop gleamed; it dazzled his eyes. They were full of flashes, as if the crystal were now all about him and he could not see. Then his breath was torn from him and he felt as if he were whirling through space. Everything was dark.

When he awakens he is on a forest trail, and the fantasy begins. Thus, for the only time in her career, Clark suggests the possibility that the fantasy is nothing but a dream. The Arctic fox and Yukon mammoth miraculously reappear in the Inner World, and when the fantasy ends, Gilbert is staring at the same crystal.

Whether the story is a dream or not does not really matter, but what this unique entry into the fantasy world does ensure is the reader's complete involvement in the development of Gilbert. It may or may not be his dream, but it is certainly his story. In order to make the focus on Gilbert even more intense, Clark has Gilbert go alone into this mysterious world. Once there, he is joined by two young girls: the enigmatic Fringa and the kind and generous Kawitha, sister of Kunshat, the Silver Man. The quest that these children undertake is a

familiar one: they must rescue the enchanted Kunshat and return him to his troubled family and tribe.

As in *The One-Winged Dragon*, however, the quest to the lost relative is not the primary one in *The Silver Man*, for Gilbert's most significant discovery is his realization of the enduring value of a truly selfless life. This theme is enunciated specifically by Uncle Barker[5] when he compares Fringa and Kawitha:

> The great bearded man looked keenly at Kawitha under his grizzled eyebrows. "Ai, you long for him. You have a loving heart, Kawitha. It is a great thing to have much love, though one suffers from it. Love has a magic, powerful enough."

Kawitha clearly possesses the magical quality talked about in Clark's first fantasy, and Uncle Barker realizes that Fringa does not possess it:

> "Perhaps Fringa was born without a heart — or with a small one. She cares nothing for our trouble.

One suspects that Clark is also gently comparing the love that she finds in the culture of the Indian with the culture of the White Man. But whatever Clark's designs might have been in her creation of these two characters, it is quite clear that Gil compares them, and in doing so learns a great deal about his own moral commitments. In perhaps one of the most truly heroic moments in all of Canadian children's literature, he gives up his life with Kawitha to save the life of her brother. And though the loss is bitterly felt, somehow the act brings with it a peace and serenity he has never known.

UNFORTUNATELY, MOST SERIOUS CRITICAL examinations of Catherine Clark's fantasies end with *The Silver Man*, the final two books being simply dismissed as "more of the same": the same two adventurers, the same Indian environment, and the same basic characters. But though there are obvious similiarities, there are also significant changes which occur. To ignore them is to ignore perhaps the most important development in Clark's literary career, for in these last two books Clark does not try to synthesize the European and Indian traditions. Finally realizing the basic incompatibility of the two cultures, Clark turns, happily one suspects, to the Indian culture and an environment that need not be populated by imps, goblins, water spirits, and frog skins.[6]

These final books also return to the far less complicated portraits of the adventuring children that one finds in her first two books. In fact, the central figure in *The Diamond Feather* (1962), is not a child at all, but an unnamed prospector who is simply referred to as the Frozen Man. Unlike the various enchanted men and women of earlier stories, this man has consciously abandoned his family and all his social responsibilities. It appears initially that he is merely a victim of

"silver lust" — the insatiable desire for wealth. But his motivation is far more complicated, for the reader soon learns that he has left his family because he feels trapped, oppressed by the responsibilities of taking care of them. He desperately desires to be free.[7] When his wife accuses him of being a totally selfish man, he realizes immediately the inherent truth of her accusation. When he leaves, he takes with him the diamond feather of the magical bird that once charmed his children and is the sole joy in his family's life and a constant reminder of his own deficiencies:

> "I got mad and I said to her, 'Then I'm going for keeps and what's more I'll take that darned Feather with me.' And I tore it off the wall and locked it up in the iron trunk with my ore samples."

But not long after he leaves, an avalanche buries the house, and when he returns he finds nothing. His punishment for his crime is to be chained to this place forever, a frozen man in a frozen world:

> "But I was chained here, you might say. Every time I went off the place something happened to me so I had to turn back. I knew something was working against me. This place got colder and colder and me with it."

With the warmth of human love missing, the man has become frozen; his insatiable desire for freedom binds him instead to the place where he abandoned his family.

What saves this torturned man is love or, more specifically, the love of Firelei, the tiny girl who, with her brother Jon, journeys to this enchanted world. The uniqueness of this little girl is recognized immediately by the Wise Owl, the first of the creatures that the children meet in this magical place. Because of the courage and love of the children, the Frozen Man is finally reunited with his own children. This reunion allows Clark to enunciate her belief that man must learn to forgive, to leave behind his hate and revenge. While the Frozen Man's children hate him, they too are prisoners, a state symbolically represented by their imprisonment in Whitebird Valley. They free themselves when they finally forgive their father and follow him to the land where their mother walks with the dead — the land of Heart's Desire. In death the family is finally reunited.

In *The Diamond Feather* Clark introduces her audience to a far more elaborate view of the community of man than that presented in her earlier works, for she now considers not only the living, but the dead as well. It is clear, for example, that the Frozen Man finally finds his serenity not in this world, but in the next. When Firelei finds it impossible to discover the reason why her friends had to die, the mystical Singer consoles her, and in doing so provides the reader with a simple but eloquent explanation of the place of death in the universal cosmos: "everything in its season." Omantha's response is more specific:

> "They are happy. They are free," said Omantha, softly. "They have gone to their mother. They had the courage to try and save their father, but his time and their time had come."

Freedom from the concerns of man comes only with death. It is this freedom that the Singer describes throughout the story, the belief that man is free only when he learns to recognize his place in this world and in the great world beyond:

> Now he sang with power and the people sat silent thinking of the beauty of the world; of budding Spring and burning Summer; of the changing colours of Fall and of the changeless death-white snow. He sang of the stars in their courses, of silver dawns and the day's burning close. And the song mounted and spoke to them of love and of loss, of joy, and deep rest. The whole of life flowed by.

CLARK'S PORTRAIT OF THE COMMUNITY of man culminates in her final book, *The Hunter and the Medicine Man* (1966). The story begins when two somewhat alienated children climb a mountain to escape, albeit briefly, from the oppressive housekeeper who is caring for them while their mother is in hospital. While on the mountain, they find a mysterious lake, and when a great fog shrouds the lake the fantasy begins. They have moved from the Outer to the Inner World.

In this story, however, Clark's main interest is not in the invading adventurers; she leaves the children as quickly as possible to focus on the true hero of the tale, the enigmatic Hunter, blood brother of the Indian chief, whose rescue is the object of the quest and the basis of the children's adventure. Totally disillusioned with man and his selfish ways, the Hunter has abandoned his tribe. When Richard, the young boy, suggests that "there's nothing wrong with the world but people," the Hunter quickly agrees. But through the intercession of the children and the kindly Mrs. Buck — the female equivalent of the prospector who appears in most of Clark's novels — the Hunter decides to return to man's world and save his brother, realizing, finally, that true peace must be earned. And the Hunter does find his peace, although (like the Frozen Man and his family) only in death. Through the Hunter's courage, the victory is won and now the children can return home. But this time the children do not move from a specific Inner World back to a specific Outer World. They do not awaken in a cave or a museum, suddenly discovering that their journey into fantasy is over. They simply ride over the mountain, knowing that Mrs. Buck is always on the other side awaiting their visits. As Mrs. Buck says, "You're one side of the mountain and I'm the other. We sure won't forget each other."

Thus, in her last book, Clark finally discards any pretense of presenting two separate worlds; she returns to the time of Indian legends, when there were no

distinctions between what was reality and what was fantasy. Here there is only one world, one in which magic is just across the mountain.

When the children return to their homes, they find that order has also been restored there — their mother has come home:

> "What's that in the yard?" she cried. "It's not the truck. Oh Rick! It's the *car*!"
>
> "Mum and Dad, they're home! Home!" cried Richard, and he pressed Heron in the flank. Side by side the children galloped up the lane between the pastures, shouting and hallooing as they rode towards the ranch-house and its open door.

This open door is a remarkably apt image for Clark to leave the reader with as she ends her career as a fantasist, for in a sense it suggests her own quest. Initially she may have tried to formulate a Canadian mythology which brought together the Indian and European traditions.[8] She once even tried to include the Chinese tradition. But she ultimately found that the tradition which most clearly reflected her own view about man and his possibilities was the one outside her own open door, the myths of her beloved British Columbia wilderness.

Catherine Clark's six fantasies preach a common sermon, one which is somewhat unusual in the world of fantasy and which may help in some way to explain the uniqueness of the Canadian culture that nurtured her stories. She demands that man be a doer, that he have the courage to confront his problems and achieve his goals. She does not allow the intercession of fairy-godmothers or ever-benevolent gods. Man must fight his own battles. Above all, she demands that man be selfless, that he care for his fellow man and realize his inherent duty to mankind. She not only chronicles the rewards given to those "special" people who are selfless, but she also suggests the bitter loneliness of those who are selfish, whether they are trapped on a silver island or frozen in an icy cabin. Finally, Clark demands that we recognize our place in the great cosmos, that we realize that "everything [has] its season." Once man realizes his place — his relative insignificance in the great scope of beings — perhaps then he will realize the ridiculousness of pride and join his fellow man. Her heroes do not aspire to be leaders or to find great treasures. Instead, they simply try to find their place — to realize that they belong to a community and have certain obligations to it. The children return to their families, the hunters to their tribes.

Catherine Clark's fantasies are not without faults. But I have tried to overlook these and concentrate on her very significant accomplishments. Above all, Clark is true to her own demands. She is a doer — a writer of six fantasies in a country with absolutely no tradition of fantasy. And she is a dreamer — a woman who sincerely believes that the world would be a better place if we left ourselves behind and moved toward others. But she is not a hopeless idealist; she wholly realizes the difficulty of the task. She reminds one of the marvelous Flame-lighter

Woman of *The Sun Horse*, who each night goes forth on her lonely quest to save mankind:

> "Three times is all I'm equal to," she croaked. "I have got rheumatism with the mud. But I'll find a way yet to make all flames burn as one flame. When I do, I shall learn the secret of men's souls. For souls burn like solitary candles. I could break a soul's shell if I could shatter a flame. For a moment souls can meet like flames but they go back to their solitary burning and I have not found the way to change it. If I could, there would be no more wars and no more hatred. Ah, me!"

NOTES

[1] Sheila Egoff, *The Republic of Childhood*, 2nd ed. (Toronto: Oxford, 1975), p. 70.

[2] J. R. R. Tolkien, "On Fairy-Stories," *The Tolkien Reader* (New York: Ballantine, 1966), pp. 3-84. See particularly Tolkien's discussion of the creation of Secondary Worlds, pp. 36-39.

[3] This emphasis on the fallible nature of man is clearly seen in the legends collected by George Clutesi. Son of Deer, for example, is initially presented as the heroic saviour of his world, but dies ingloriously because he kills without sufficient reason. See George Clutesi, *Son of Raven, Son of Deer: Fables of the Tse-Shant People* (Sidney, B.C.: Gray's, 1967).

[4] Compare this with the conclusions of most traditional fantasies, in which the emphasis is on the defeat of the antagonist rather than on his rehabilitation. Modern fantasists such as Tolkien and C. S. Lewis are clearly within such a tradition, for they present life as a struggle in which order can be restored only after the destruction of the forces of evil.

[5] Uncle Barker is a kindly prospector who befriends the children, a figure who appears in some form in all of Clark's fantasies.

[6] One need only examine the list of characters that Clark provides at the beginning of each book to discover *The Diamond Feather*'s obvious movement away from the influence of the European tradition. One simply does not find the assorted Squareheads and Frogskins that populated her earlier fantasies. Only the curious Rock-Puck bears any resemblance to the goblins and elves of the fairy tale, but Clark includes this figure for a very specific reason. He becomes an overt image of what can happen to Jon if he continues in his mischievous ways. When the Rock-Puck offends the Glass-Witch, he is imprisoned in a body of stone, thus becoming little more than a clumsy gargoyle. Thus Clark gives both Jon and the reader a concrete example of what happens to those who follow only their own selfish whims.

[7] Clark's obvious criticism of this inordinate desire to be free of all responsibilities contrasts sharply with the glorification of such figures in American children's books, the boy heroes of Mark Twain being the most obvious examples.

[8] Joan Selby investigates the influences on Clark's early fantasies in "Catherine Anthony Clark: Myth Maker," *British Columbia Library Quarterly*, Vol. 24, No. 3 (January 1961); and "The Creation of Fantasy: the Fiction of Catherine Anthony Clark," *Canadian Literature*, 11 (Winter 1962).

THE APPRENTICESHIP OF NOAH ADLER

Michael Greenstein

WITH ITS CRITICAL AND POPULAR SUCCESS as both novel and film, *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz* has eclipsed Richler's only other novel that deals entirely with the Montreal ghetto — *Son of a Smaller Hero* — and while most critics agree on the superiority of the later work, it is unfortunate that Richler's second novel has been written off instead of written about. To the charge that the earlier work lacks the aesthetic distance of the more fully developed novel, one can appeal only to the impact of immediacy in *Son of a Smaller Hero*.[1] To the charge that Noah Adler's indecisiveness demonstrates a lack of control, one can counter merely with an Empsonian defence of ambiguity. Does Richler provide an unambiguous statement at the end of *Duddy Kravitz*? If the less mature work does lack the development of Richler's later period, it at least offers a tighter unity because of the absence of excursions to New York and Toronto.

Richler employs the same satiric devices in both novels from the simple slogan or one-line advertisement, a form of graffiti, to the juxtaposition of the sacred and the profane, the lofty ideal with the vulgar reality, the sublime with the ridiculous. Melech's secret box which contains sacred scrolls and the letters and photographs of Helga provides the central example of satiric juxtaposition, but there are other instances. For example, Richler contrasts the Prudential insurance salesmen selling security with the psychological insecurities of so many of the characters. He plays off against each other the neon lights of the Queen Mary Road Jews and the guiding light that recalls Jacob Goldenberg's death for Leah, his daughter: "the gathering yellow fog of exploding yellow lights." This "light" imagery also plays a role in Melech's relationship to his "lost" children, his grandson and Helga's child. He dreams of Noah: "He could have been the brightness of my old years," and recalls the blond brightness of Helga, the dancer, and her blond son. But the most celebrated instance of satiric juxtaposition in *Son of a Smaller Hero* is the funeral with its cinematic montage, each member of the family commenting vulgarly on the religious prayer for the dead.

However, like *The Apprenticeship of Duddy Kravitz*, *Son of a Smaller Hero* is concerned with more serious matters than ethnic satire, namely, Noah Adler's initiation and self-discovery. Though older than Duddy, Noah shares the same premature aging that Duddy displays: "He was twenty years old, but his forehead was already wrinkled. His eyes, which were black, were sorrowful and deep and not without a feeling for comedy." These revealing eyes seem to be a common physiological and psychological trait among members of the Adler family. Noah has inherited his eyes from his grandfather whose "smouldering black eyes" stay solemn even when he laughs with his grandchildren. Melech's youngest son, Shloime, a year younger than his nephew Noah, has "two sullen, malicious eyes" half-concealed beneath drooping eyelids. During the course of the novel Noah must reject these members of the family whom he resembles physically, but not psychologically; yet he must go beyond mere rejection: to find himself he must see through them and replace their false values with his own definite values.

To follow Noah's process of self-discovery, one should consider the names of the Adler family, for, like the "eyes," they provide important clues and ironic commentary on the characters and their interrelationships. Adler is a Yiddish name for eagle, king of the predatory birds; the Adlers are predators to Noah who refers often to their cage from which he hopes to escape. Melech, king in Hebrew, "ruled all his own children by authority," identifying himself in the novel's final rhetorical question with King David: "Hadn't the Angel of Death passed over King David because he was at his prayers?" David's son was Solomon and *Shloime* means *Solomon*. Richler's ironic inversion is readily apparent: Solomon was known for his wisdom whereas Shloime goes against justice in the Panofsky robbery and commits arson when he sets fire to his father's office. The oldest son Wolf, another predator, wiggles his ears and spends most of his time in the den.

Indirectly Noah can be related to the Biblical Noah. At Wolf's funeral the self-righteous Uncle Itzik exclaims, "If there's another flood . . . Noah deserves to be dead," and if Richler does not provide the ark metaphor, Desmond Pacey does: "the ark Noah seeks out of the flood is integrity and freedom, and these, at the novel's end, he sets out to seek in Europe."[2] Richler does repeat the image of the drowning man in his boat during Noah's period of mourning for his father. "He held on to sleep the way a drowning man must cling to his share of driftwood. Each morning there was the feeling of his ship being pulled back into a whirlpool. Noah rowed madly with both oars. But the oars were broken." This *bateau ivre* reappears after his mother's heart attack: "The broken oars burst free of their locks. The boat itself broke up underneath him. And Noah, who did not call out for help, felt the waters close over him." Perhaps he has picked up the image from his mother's vision of the dark fog swirling beneath heavy seas.

After the flood the Biblical Noah is discovered in his drunken nakedness by one of his sons, but Richler inverts that story by allowing his inebriated Noah to uncover the truth about his father and his grandfather. As a witness to their psychological nakedness, he strips away the illusions surrounding his father's "heroic" act.[3]

The Adlers are related to one another not only in name and appearance, but also in behaviour, for there is considerable interplay among members of the family so that one member tends to identify with another: Noah is the son of a smaller hero who, in turn, is the son of a smaller hero. The problem of identity is central to the novel as Noah seeks to discover himself, and he does identify with his grandfather even though they have partly rejected each other. After the robbery at Panofsky's, Shloime confronts Noah: "We've got a lot in common, you know. We're both lone operators, eh? We both like *shiksas* — dames — and we both don't give a damn about eating kosher." Noah interrupts sharply: "We've got nothing in common." Though still doubtful of his directions in life at this time, Noah is right in refuting this attempted branding of him, rejecting his uncle's psychological kinship as well as his criminality in order to achieve individual freedom. However, when the recalcitrant switches his tactic of identification from himself to Melech, the identification is much more difficult for Noah to deny and he senses that he has come closer to the target of Noah's identity crisis. Whereas earlier Noah rejects any resemblance to his young uncle, now he simply stares at him, horrified, unable to respond. Just as Noah and his grandfather have reversed roles, it occurs to Noah that "Shloime was his father turned inside out." Like the "shifting of the ghetto sands," these shifting roles between grandfather and grandson, and between oldest and youngest sons, make it difficult for Noah to emerge from the Adler cage as a free individual.

Substitution of another member of the family for oneself is a means of self-deception or evasion of the problem of identity. The son does not become a man until he has stepped out of his father's shoes; the father cannot remain a man as long as he pins all of his hopes on his children. Melech's justice toward his children is nothing more than self-punishment: he takes the belt to Shloime only to punish himself and purge his guilt-ridden conscience; he wants to punish Noah because he had loved Helga and had deserted her. Son and grandson become scapegoats for him, and out of this confusion among members of the Adler family, Noah must forge his own identity. When Noah discovers the past relationship between his grandfather and Helga, he thinks that the old man did wrong to punish the family. By the end of the novel Noah realizes that his young uncle had been wrong in his identification of grandfather and grandson, for the harsh patriarch, in Noah's place, would have told his grandfather that his youngest son had started the fire. Noah, however, substitutes human mercy in

place of Melech's divine justice thereby cutting some of those familial ties which confine and confuse.

If Noah rejects identification with his uncle and his grandfather, he also refuses to replace his father after Wolf's death for his mother's sake. He "won't be another of her dead saints that she can take down off her shelves and dust like her bits of china." Noah refuses the roles that his relatives want to impose on him, unwilling to play the drunkard to satisfy his uncle's needs for him to be the family's alcoholic. Uncle Max thinks he can count on his nephew for political purposes since Noah is the son of a hero, but Noah responds by mimicking his father's gestures. "Standing in the darkness, he wiggled his ears and raised his eyebrows. Experimentally." Having mastered and negated the lupine role, Noah succeeds in his experimental parody, for he is able to sort out the interrelated lives of his family and arrive at an identity independent of the other Adlers. He will be neither martyr nor scapegoat; his father had been both.

An additional complication in these intermeshed lives involves the two women in Noah's life — his mother Leah and his lover Miriam, a French Canadian with a rather Hebraic name. For Noah the women became interchangeable, just as various men in the family are interchangeable, and ultimately he must reject both in order to gain freedom. They hold on to him tenaciously, presenting him with another dilemma: forced to choose between two women, he rejects both. Leah is the Biblical wife of Jacob; in the novel she is the daughter of Jacob Goldenberg whom she loves far more than her husband.[4] Miriam's cleaning up after him reminds Noah of his mother, and his relationship with her begins to duplicate the maternal one. Like Leah, Miriam needs security; she has no identity of her own, no inner strength, no vision. There is a dichotomy in her approach to living just as there is a dichotomy in Noah's existence: part of her wants the security that is Theo and another part of her wants love. She remembers that Noah had once said that the decision she had come to in choosing Noah in place of Theo had been no decision at all. Noah, on the contrary, weighs his choices throughout the novel and by the end makes his choice.

But before Noah can make the proper choice to arrive at his own identity, he must be able to distinguish right from wrong, and positive from negative within himself, his family, the ghetto, and the world beyond. When Noah first appears as the novel opens, he is outside of the ghetto in a rented room, yet the magnetic pull of his ghetto memory forces him to think of Aunt Rachel, his mother, his father, and his grandfather. Outside he feels empty, lonely, and isolated; inside he finds the atmosphere stifling and imprisoning. Divided between the two

worlds, a tightrope walker, he must distinguish and choose the boundaries for his own existence to liberate himself from the imbroglio of family relationships.

Richler turns immediately from Noah to a description of the ghetto, a labyrinth through which the Adlers wander aimlessly and out of which Noah must emerge having selected the proper path. Although it has no real walls and no true dimensions, it exists, and it is up to Noah to discern what is real on either side of these illusionary walls. The tripartite ghetto has its own distinctions according to vertical social mobility: the Queen Mary Road Jews, the Park Avenue Jews, and the St. Lawrence Blvd. Jews, each group reflecting the three generations of the Adler family and stages of Noah's development. These class differences appear at the cemetery. "A green iron fence separated the synagogue lot from the lots of other congregations and societies. The Workman's Circle lot was located on lower land. Marshland. Distinctions did not end at the grave after all." By leaving the ghetto Noah is able to gain the proper perspective to understand the dimensions, distinctions, and deceptions in his Jewish background.

As soon as Richler completes his description of the ghetto, he returns to Noah's room on Dorchester Street and delineates the boundaries of rectangular downtown Montreal which also define and make distinctions. Once he leaves the ghetto, Noah becomes perplexed (Richler's rapid structural transitions mirroring his character's wavering state of mind): "He had expected that by moving away from home something wonderful would happen whereby he would end up a bigger and freer man. Instead, there was only this anguishing. . . . At home his indignation had nourished him. Being wretched, and in opposition, had organized his suffering. But that world, against which he had rebelled, was no longer his. Seen from a distance, it seemed full of tender possibilities, anachronistic but beautiful. . . . All the dictums of the ghetto seemed unworthy of contempt in retrospect." Noah remains ambivalent as a Jew and a Canadian when he tells his grandfather: "everything is falling apart around you. Your sons are Canadians. I am not even that. . . . I'm sort of between things." Noah has to reject his negative views, his opposition to his environment, and substitute positive commitment in order to become a man who overcomes confusion.

Throughout the novel Noah recognizes the need to combat his self-destructive, nihilistic tendencies. "It's not enough to rebel, he thought. To destroy. It is necessary to say yes to something." "Noah had renounced a world with which he had at least been familiar and no new world had as yet replaced it. He was hungering for an anger or a community or a tradition to which he could relate his experience." This quest for the positive and renunciation of the negative recur after his father's death when he spends time with his mother's side of the family in Ste Agathe.

> Ste Agathe had been a revelation. A shock. The people, the laws, that he had rebelled against had been replaced by other, less conspicuously false, laws and

> people while he had been away. That shifting of the ghetto sands seemed terribly unfair to him. If the standard man can be defined by his possessions, then rob his house and you steal his identity. Noah had supposed himself not to be a standard man. But his house had been robbed and his identity had been lost. He was shaken. Not only because he felt a need to redefine himself, but because he realized, at last, that all this time he had been defining himself Against. Even death was something he did Not Want. He avoided Panofsky. That man knew what he wanted. What he wanted was positive and required a bigger reply than No.

This passage marks a transition in Noah's search, for he is able to find the "positive" in an individual whom he respects. Before leaving for Europe, Noah discovers the positive answers to Miriam's earlier questions thereby solving his dilemma.

> He could tell her that he wanted freedom and that innocent day at Lac Gandon and the first days of their love and many more evenings with Panofsky and the music of Vivaldi and more men as tall as Aaron and living with the truth and maybe, sometime soon, a wiser Noah in another cottage near a stream with a less neurotic Miriam. Oh, he wanted plenty. I'm free, he thought.

Perhaps Noah's realization suggests Richler's view of the proper way of life for the ethnic community: the Jew should not define himself through negative insecurities and defences in response to anti-semitism. As Noah says, "there is a certain kind of Jew who needs a *Goy* badly," the way his grandfather "needs the *Goyim*." Instead, Richler advocates the replacement of false dimensions with positive commitment to ethical, aesthetic, and scholarly traditions.

If Noah's major philosophic change is from negativism to a positive affirmation, his second conversion is from relativism to independence. Originally he remarks, "Nothing is absolute any longer, Mr. Panofsky. There is a choice of beliefs and a choice of truths to go with them. If you choose not to choose then there is no truth at all. There are only points of view." This relativism or subjectivism is in direct opposition to Melech's absolutism with all of its stern answers. By the end of the novel Noah wants to abandon his previous position and deny relatives and relativism. "He wanted some knowledge of himself that was independent of others." Through independence and affirmation Noah sees the distinctions, makes his choices accordingly, and gains his identity.

The shift from relativism to existential independence, in place of confused interdependence, occurs in Noah's belief in God, a theological and ethical problem posed by the novel's epigraph, "If God did not exist, everything would be lawful." He contemplates Dostoievski's statement: "He began to understand that God had been created by man out of necessity. No God, no ethic — freedom. Freedom was too much for man. I was wrong to worry about God, he thought. I don't believe in Him so He doesn't exist. My grandfather believes in Him so He does exist." This relativism brings him to an existential position: "I

did not make my mother to suffer or my father bewildered, or my grandfather hard. I should have had the right to begin with my birth. . . . It's all absurd, but here I am." Later he distorts the epigraph: "If God weren't dead I guess he'd be editing *Time* today." Creating his being out of virtual nothingness, Noah dismisses the theology as well as the ethics of his immediate forefathers.

Noah's humanity, love, and mercy supplant his grandfather's sense of divinity, justice, and punishment. For the elder, what is lawful (in Dostoievski's hypothesis) is absolutely clear because of his firm belief in God. The first and last sections of the novel end with almost the same words: "Each man creates God in his own image. Melech's God, who was stern, just, and without mercy, would reward him and punish the boy. Melech could count on that." So, for him, everything is lawful or full of law *because* God exists; nevertheless, when frustrated, he admits: "There is no justice in this world. God don't listen always. Not like He should, anyway." Retributively he is punished by his grandson's love. Whereas earlier their love had been severed by an indelible slap, reminiscent of the slap Duddy Kravitz receives from his father, Noah kisses his grandfather at their final encounter. "After he had gone Melech touched his cheek and felt that kiss like a burn. He touched his cheek and felt that he had been punished." The novel comes full circle as Noah's love punishes and defeats his grandfather's injustice.

STRUCTURALLY, RICHLER DIVIDES THE NOVEL according to the seasons. The stifling heat at the opening suggests the ghetto's claustrophobic atmosphere, and autumn in the second section is likened to the family's threats and Melech's laws which are "like autumn leaves that, once flung into the wind, scattered and turned to dust." "Autumn had come swiftly to the ghetto. The leaves . . . tumbled downwards dead." Section Three begins with a description of Montreal's frozen winters followed by spring thaw, while Section Four returns to the summer of Wolf Adler's funeral. "Ah, it was a fine day. You can have your slap-dash of an autumn day with insanely bright leaves falling at your feet, you can have the dreams of your loose spring evenings that end up being just dreams, you can even have all the snows of winter, but give me a white day with a blue sky and a dazzling yellow sun." These seasonal descriptions provide the atmosphere for Richler's Montreal, natural beauty contrasting with the sterility of coal and cast iron inside the ghetto. Like Simcha Kravitz but unlike A. M. Klein's "Jewboy" in "Autobiographical" who "Dreamed pavement into pleasant Bible-land," Melech Adler looks down from his balcony and frowns at the weeds struggling up through fractures in the sidewalk. When Noah returns to visit his mother, he notices that her Japanese gardens are not thriving in the sun. "The rubber plants, shrivelled, had been bleached brown. The soil had turned to dust."

This contrast between seasonal, natural beauty and the ugliness of the ghetto is spelled out musically in Vivaldi's *Four Seasons*. "The first time Noah had been to a concert the orchestra had played *The Four Seasons* by Vivaldi and he had been so struck by it that he felt something like pain. He had not supposed that men were capable of such beauty. He had been startled. So he walked out wondering into the night, not knowing what to make of his discovery. All those stale lies that he had inherited from others, all those cautionary tales, and those dreadful things, facts, that he had collected, knowledge, all that passed away, rejected, dwarfed by the entry of beauty into his consciousness." This aesthetic revelation of true beauty contrasts with the revelation of false beauty in the lives of the Goldenbergs.

The passing of the seasons also points to the importance of time, for if the ghetto can be defined according to its illusionary spatial borders, it can also be defined in temporal terms. The walls of the ghetto are the habit of atavism, while Queen Mary Road with its well-to-do Jews rejects history: it is a street without a past.

Memory plays an important role as Richler resorts to flashbacks to portray Noah's past. Noah remembers a Friday evening long ago at the hall of a local youth group where the speaker had been an angry Polish Jew with bad memories; his parents had been killed in the concentration camps and he had been "swindled by memory." Noah listens to the speaker beside his friend Kogan whom he has already committed to memory, like other ghetto children who are ghosts of the past. Melech lives in the past because of his strict adherence to the Judaic heritage, but this is undercut by his secretive past with Helga, the dancer, "Dancing away from him, like the years." He never forgets his God whereas his grandson believes that in order to be liberated from God one must *forget* Him, but then wonders whether one can forget. Noah's mother also lives in the past as she repeatedly recalls the light at her father's death. The relationship between Theo and Miriam is founded on mistaken memories before the war. "Memory swindled them. That wretched night took on glamour in retrospect." Richler repeats the same phrase that he had used earlier to refer to the Polish Jew at the youth gathering and later to refer to Wolf's death. Memory is a swindler, for it can rob the present of its truth and substitute a false past which acts as a crutch to support those who cannot cope with the present. When Miriam leaves Theo, she "expected that there would be a sadness shared, or a kind exchange for the sake of memory," and when she lives with Noah in Ste Adele her insecurity about the present forces her to think about the past. "The time of beauty and the wild years too, Chuck and Theo, Paul, were all stale memories. She dipped into these memories the way other women dip into their knitting-bags." Soon she starts "to dip more critically into her memories." As Miriam reverts to the past, Noah sees her as passée, and asks himself, "What do you do with used people?" Thus, the

past is a false escape from the present, and the future, though hopeful for Noah, remains a question mark at the conclusion of the novel.

In the end does Noah manage to break free from all of those confining and restricting forces — the walls of the ghetto, the cage that the Adlers inhabit, the padlocked box, and the string that tightens around his heart? During a rainstorm up in the Laurentians Noah senses the freedom away from the prison of the ghetto as he imagines himself to be a horse galloping to the top of the highest hill, his own Ararat, and braying louder than thunder. But his answer is silent, for ironically, he keeps secrets from those in the family who previously had attempted to withhold the truth from him. He internalizes the secrets of the padlocked box: first, he does not reveal to his mother the truth that his father died looking for money; second, he conceals from Melech the fact that Shloime set fire to the offices; and third, he does not inform Max that his secretary Miss Holmes — whom Max trusts absolutely — has been using him all along. He eats out of her hand as long as she keeps sugar in it.[5] This St. Urbain "horseman" with blinders is a different breed from Noah whose clear sight penetrates the façade and welter of his family to gain a new vision of himself.

NOTES

[1] These criticisms have been made by the *TLS*, July 29, 1955; by George Woodcock in the "Introduction" to the New Canadian Library Edition of *Son of a Smaller Hero*, reprinted in *Mordecai Richler* (Canadian Writers), pp. 23-29; and by Hugo McPherson in *Literary History of Canada*, ed. Carl Klinck (Toronto: University of Toronto Press, 1965), p. 714.

[2] Desmond Pacey, *Creative Writing in Canada* (Toronto: Ryerson, 1952), pp. 265-66. Compare the image with D. G. Jones' list in *Butterfly on Rock*.

[3] The heroism may be judged by comparing the act with that in Adele Wiseman's *The Sacrifice* when Isaac rushes into the burning synagogue to save the Torah and later questions the meaning of "heroism." *The Sacrifice* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1968), p. 212.

[4] A parallel stereotype may be found in Leonard Cohen's *The Favourite Game* where the son must flee from a domineering, widowed mother.

[5] The reader is able to recall Noah's first encounter with Miss Holmes in the Café Minuit, though may not immediately recognize her. More troublesome is the introduction of Jerry Selby in the Bar Vendôme and his reappearance later. If Miriam had been his intimate secretary, she should have recognized him; otherwise why does Richler bother to mention the name of the minor character?

R.R.1, TRURO

Ron Miles

The grey-haired man behind
the plow keeps falling
down because his harness
is too short. The horse
is cursed for lack of
sympathy, the ground
for being humped and bored.

Inside the former mansion
dust-lined glassware shoulders
to the edge of chests and
added shelving. Mrs. Archibald
regrets — although she, disappearing,
cackles — that we missed
the tidal bore.

The loungers' television purples
into blue; the shower stammers
and is cold; the mattress sags
in four directions.

But in the morning Mrs.
Archibald, six dollars
pocketed, will dust
wash vacuum air the
room and pay her taxes
while the black-eyed cat exudes
another thin-toothed yawn

and we, too fat to blink
at faults, too black to praise
this thin existence
heave our luggage through
another groaning doorway,
entering wind as brisk
as theft.

review articles

A SCHEME IS NOT A VISION

Stephen Scobie

DENNIS LEE, *Savage Fields: An Essay in Literature and Cosmology*. Anansi, $12.95; paper $5.95.

MY INITIAL, and somewhat frivolous, reaction to Dennis Lee's *Savage Fields: An Essay in Literature and Cosmology* was to see it as a kind of "Son of *Survival*." It has the same Anansi format, lots of short chapters with snappy titles, little rows of asterisks between every second paragraph, all the trappings of pop philosophy and an Instant Theory: just add hot air and stir.

This flippancy is unfair, for both Atwood and Lee are serious writers with serious things to say: but the comparison does nevertheless point to similarities in both the strengths and the weakneses of the two books. Both of them make exciting reading: they are original, controversial, and thought-provoking. Taking the trouble to disagree with Atwood or Lee is a more worthwhile critical activity than nodding along with the bland banalities of many other critics.

But *Survival* and *Savage Fields* share the same faults too. Both of them present a Theory, or a System, which is so simultaneously overgeneralized and oversimplified that its value, even as a provisional theoretical construct, is severely compromised. (Lee's introductory chapter attempts to outline a total cosmology and philosophical world-view in a mere nine pages!) And both of them, despite repeated protestations to the contrary, twist and distort their literary evidence to make it fit into the categories their theories have established.

Lee begins by setting up an image of "two fluctuating fields of force," which he calls "world" and "earth." This dichotomy corresponds only roughly to what we traditionally call "civilization" and "nature": Lee is at great pains to insist that "world" and "earth" are continually interacting and indeed co-extensive with each other. The image of two overlapping fields of force allows him to escape the static image of two separate entities. (It is interesting to note that when a literary critic these days wants a really *authoritative* image, he turns to science, especially to physics.)

The image of the fields is an attractive one, and in many ways a useful one. With its affinity to the Structuralist emphasis on relations between things rather than on things themselves, it offers a possible model for the analysis of so-called "post-modernist" writing, which is an art of process rather than of product.

One wonders immediately, however, about the *exclusive* nature of the image. Why *only* these two fields, "world" and "earth"? Couldn't the model of the fields of force be applied in many other ways, to avoid, for instance, the heretical division of "form" and "content" into separate categories?

And, much more seriously, why "savage" fields? For Lee, the essential character of the interaction of these two fields is conflict. "The first fact of life is that the beings which make up world and

those which make up earth are engaged in war against each other." " 'To be' is to be in strife." Here Lee seems to have been carried away by the cuteness of his own title. Indeed, he admits late in the book that "I knew the title before I knew what the title meant." The word "savage" (which, unlike "fields," is not at all scientific or objective) determined from the start the nature of the fields that Lee would see. This initial and fatal preconception is, I believe, the fundamental misconception of the whole book.

It would obviously be futile to deny that the world as we know it contains a vast amount of strife, violence, destruction, and agony. But to declare that such strife is the *only* reality, that it is the factor which determines *all* other factors of human experience, is an act of such extreme pessimism that it, in effect, throws in the towel at the start of round one. No wonder Lee's vision leads only to "destructive madness, lobotomy, and suicide": his initial assumption surrenders to such nihilism without even a show of resistance.

Although the destruction which Lee sees as the ultimate consequence of his world-view ought, theoretically, to emanate as much from "earth" as from "world," in fact he sees it mainly in terms of the latter — mainly, that is, in terms of human consciousness. From one point of view, *Savage Fields* is an attempt to provide a philosophical justification for the ecological movement: man is, by definition, a polluter. In Lee, we see the Puritan guilty conscience of a disillusioned liberal run wild: not far beneath the aphoristic surface is a good old-fashioned breast-beating hysteria.

In theory, the system of *Savage Fields* is amoral: earth earths and world worlds, and that's all there is to it. But, as I have suggested, the moral bias of the book in practice is very much against "world." Human consciousness is seen as a destructive force. Thus there is no distinction, in Lee's system, between a man who chops down a tree to build a fire to save his wife and children from freezing, a man who chops down a tree to make money and doesn't give a damn about what he's doing to the environment, and a man who chops down a tree to get wood for a violin. Lee's system would force us to see all three as aspects of "world," and as "strife," "assault" against "earth." Such a conclusion is manifestly absurd.

As a general philosophical theory, then, *Savage Fields* seems to me to be simplistic, contradictory, and inadequate. But one might be prepared to adjust to the shortcomings of the system if it were to provide a framework and a vocabulary for an accurate account of two such seminal and difficult books as *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* and *Beautiful Losers.* Although Lee says that his book is "only incidentally a work of literary criticism," it is nevertheless on the strength and accuracy of that criticism that it must ultimately stand or fall.

In my view, it falls. Lee's accounts of Ondaatje and Cohen contain some brilliant insights, and many individual remarks which illuminate moments in the texts — but in each case, the general drift of the argument is, I believe, a distortion of the book that is actually there in front of him, misreadings so fundamental that their value as any kind of evidence in support of Lee's more general claims is nil.

Lee sees *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* as a book whose "subject... is the strife of world and earth," and he sees Billy as "an instrument of murder, a citizen of world." It is certainly true that the book is about violence, and many of Lee's comments on the ways in which violence suffuses the most seemingly innocent images are excellent. But his view of Billy as the chief exponent and illustration of the destructive nature of "world" leads

him into an almost ludicrous distortion of the character Ondaatje presents.

At one point, Lee says of Billy, "That is why he murders so casually, almost absent-mindedly, out of the periphery of his vision." Like "savage fields," it's a fine phrase; the only thing wrong is that it's not true. At no stage in the book is there an incident in which Billy kills in this way. In fact, it is almost a commonplace of Ondaatje criticism to point out that Billy throughout the book is seen as victim, not killer. All the major killings in the book — Tom O'Folliard, Charlie Bowdre, Billy himself — are perpetrated by Pat Garrett. The closest Billy comes to being a cold-blooded killer is his shooting of the cat Ferns: an act of mercy killing, performed at the request of Sally Chisum, and conducted, not casually, not absent-mindedly, not out of the periphery of vision, but with intense awareness and concentration.

Lee's argument for Billy as the personification of destructive "world" is based on the poem about "the moral of newspapers or gun." Lee says that "Billy kills by adopting" that ethos, and "Because Billy embraces that ideology, he can 'walk off' nonchalantly as the bodies he has shot writhe and die." This is just so much nonsense.

Lee's quotation of Ondaatje is misleadingly selective. He begins his quotation conveniently *after* the line "so if I had a newsman's brain I'd say. . . ." What Lee presents as a definitive account of Billy's ideology is in fact, in the poem, a hypothesis, a speculative "if I had . . . then I would." Two further points follow from this.

The first is that the context into which Ondaatje sets the poem makes it quite clear that Billy does *not* have a "newsman's brain," that he does *not* "eliminate much," that he does *not* "walk off see none of the thrashing." The poem is immediately followed by Billy's intense recollection of Charlie Bowdre's death, coupled to the image of the "headless hen": and just two pages later we encounter the chicken in "After shooting Gregory." In this latter poem Billy does, for the one and only time in the book, try to be the kind of killer Lee says he is — and he can't do it. He "was about to walk away / when this chicken" bizarrely and comically prevents him. Given the association of the chicken with Billy's memory of Charlie Bowdre's death, we can surely conclude that it is a fundamental element within Billy's own character which is preventing him from adopting "the moral of newspaper and gun." Lee's version of the character may be true of the legendary Billy, the black-hearted villain of melodramatic fiction: but it bears no relation at all to what Ondaatje's poetry says.

The second point is that, while Billy does not and cannot act in this mechanistic and cold-blooded way, he does nevertheless understand it, and is fascinated by it. He may watch "the stomach of clocks" for hours, but he emerges "living." This fascination is natural enough: Billy has to know his enemy, and the character who *does* fulfill all the attributes which Lee mistakenly gives to Billy is, of course, Pat Garrett. (Lee, incredibly, makes no distinction between Billy and Pat — just as he makes none between Sally and Angie — further examples of the coarsening effect of his reductive categories.)

Lee's failure to see that Billy understands Pat but is not the same as him is part of a larger failure. Billy, he says, "seems to possess no inner life at all, to move through life as a self-less automaton." It is at moments like this that one wonders which book Lee has been reading: it certainly doesn't appear to be Ondaatje's. For Billy does of course possess an inner life: that of the artist, that of the consciousness which perceives and gives expression to the contradictions of his experience. Ondaatje makes this clear

throughout the book, starting in the most obvious place of all: the title.

It is, I concede, common practice to refer to *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid: Left-Handed Poems* by the convenient short title, *Billy the Kid*, as Lee does on all but three occasions. But in Lee's case the omission of "collected works," with its suggestions of Billy as in some sense the author, or at very least the persona, of the whole book, is symptomatic. Lee never sees Billy as the source of consciousness in the book, and never allows the possibility to emerge that he is in any way an artist.

The reason for this is that artists don't belong in savage fields (as I hinted at earlier in my question about the violin carver). The artist, above all others, is the exemplary figure of the man who brings "world" and "earth" into harmony with each other; in the artist's imagination, and in the delight of his audiences, the contradictions of savage fields are resolved and transcended. There is no strife. The fields are not savage.

But Lee, stubbornly clinging to his system, cannot admit this possibility. Therefore he attempts to reduce Billy to the same destructive level as Pat Garrett. As a result, he misreads the character, distorts the whole book, and sacrifices the values of accurate criticism to the sterile pessimism of his inadequate theory.

Lee's treatment of *Beautiful Losers* is, if anything, even more misleading than that of *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, and it is especially disturbing to see the extent to which early reviewers welcomed his assault on Cohen's novel. Sam Solecki in *The Canadian Forum* saw Lee's criticism as "consistently intelligent and satisfying," naturally, since he also claims that *Beautiful Losers* is "very definitely a minor novel." Robin Skelton in *Books in Canada* also finds Lee's criticism "perceptive," and claims that "his analysis of the reasons for the failure of Cohen's novel as a work of art are [*sic*] particularly instructive." To be fair to Lee, it was not his intention to encourage such reactions; he still sees *Beautiful Losers* as a great though flawed masterpiece. But his astonishing dismissal of the final seventy pages leaves the door open for all those who can't be bothered to face the total grandeur of Cohen's accomplishment.

Lee gets off to a bad start with his assertion that *Beautiful Losers* presents a myth of Canadian history in which Catherine Tekakwitha marks the Fall. "Catherine's virginity," he says, "was an act of blasphemy," and he uses the story of the spilt wine to illustrate "the infection of her new sensibility."

Douglas Barbour, in his important essay "Down With History" (reprinted in Michael Gnarowski's *Leonard Cohen: the Artist and his Critics*) has established the anti-historical stance of Cohen's novel. The book's whole structure is directed against the concept of linear time; history is an oppressive force which has reduced the narrator to a "pitiful hunchback." It seems strange, then, that Lee should try to reinstate a linear myth of paradise, fall, and redemption. That just isn't the way the book works.

But of course Lee is wrong about Catherine. If her virginity were a "blasphemy," then she would never occupy the central position she does in the novel's quest. She could never be seen as an aspect of Isis, as a bringer of apocalypse.

In fact, Catherine in her highly conscious rejection of sexuality is fully as sexual a character as either F. or Edith. To Catherine, after all, the Andacwandet, or Fuck-Cure, is "acceptable": it is a mode of existence which she understands, but has knowingly rejected. (Lee, in an incredible piece of Orwellian doublethink, contrives to see this statement by Catherine as a distortion by the narrator of Catherine's "real" opinion — as if

somehow there were a "real" version, outside of what Cohen tells us, that would correspond to Lee's mistaken interpretation.)

Catherine approaches sexuality with a single-minded absolutism which acts as a disrupting force in every social situation she encounters, whether in her own village, at the polite French dinner table, or in the Jesuit mission. Everywhere she goes, she produces a fruitful hysteria, the breaking of systems into stems. Lee sees the story of the spilt wine as "blasphemy"; Cohen's word for it is "apocalyptic."

Lee, however, cannot take seriously the idea of apocalypse, for to do so would mean taking seriously the book's ending. And, like the idea of the artist, the idea of apocalypse cannot exist in savage fields. So Lee sets out on an elaborately perverse destruction of Books Two and Three.

His argument seems to be that the undermining of F.'s character in Book Two somehow invalidates the vision of Book One. Quite the contrary is in fact true. Book One has been concerned with the transformation of its central character into a "beautiful loser": someone who is beautiful *because* he is a loser, who by losing all traces of personal power and even identity is able to become "disarmed and empty, an instrument of Grace," and thus move into an apocalyptic transcendence of time and history. But the title is plural: F. also must be made into a beautiful loser. Now, F.'s character all the way through has been that of the winner, the master of every game he plays. So the only way for F. to transcend his limitations, to become as he advises his pupil not a magician but magic itself, is for his whole character, style, and personality to be destroyed. This is what happens in Book Two; Lee describes the process quite accurately, but he entirely misses its point. It is not the invalidation of Book One, but its extension, its confirmation, its consummation. (For F. to stay as he is, for F. never to become a beautiful loser: *that* would invalidate Book One.) Without the assault on F. in Book Two, Book Three would not be possible.

My argument here is not as full as I would like to make it. To counter Lee, I really need to put forward a complete alternative interpretation of the novel, and that would go far beyond the bounds of a review article. I can only refer the reader to my account of *Beautiful Losers* in *Leonard Cohen*, which will I hope make clear my own reading of the novel. Lee's reading leads him to see *Beautiful Losers* as a fractured failure, in which Book Three makes no sense; I would argue that my view allows us to see *Beautiful Losers* as a successful unity, crowned by Book Three. My view accounts for the structure of the novel as it actually stands; Lee seems to want Cohen to have written a different novel, and, not finding it, Lee is forced to dismiss the novel that Cohen actually wrote.

It is worth noting what Lee would have us leave out when he claims that it is "finally a waste of time" to read the final seventy pages: F.'s "Invocation to History"; the account of Catherine's mortifications; the associations of Catherine with "ordinary eternal machinery"; the praise of the Jesuits for their heroic choice of "Possible Miracle" against "History"; Catherine's sublime dying prayer, "Oh my Lord, play with me"; the image of the System Theatre's neon sign breaking "system" into "stem"; F.'s vision of the newsreel invading the feature; and all of Book Three. It is an incredible list, the heart of the novel: without it, *Beautiful Losers* doesn't make any sense at all. Lee's suggestion is like a critic casually proposing that we can do without the Fifth Act of a Shakespearean

tragedy: it's not criticism at all, it's vandalism.

"No one," writes Dennis Lee, "is asking *Beautiful Losers* to have a happy ending." We may well ask, why not? Why should any critic make presuppositions about the directions an artist's vision may lead him in? The only reason would be if he were a critic stuck with a system that doesn't allow for the possibility of happy endings. "Joy," says Leonard Cohen (on one of the pages which Lee would delete). "Didn't I promise it? Didn't you believe I would deliver?

This has been a polemical review, and my intention has been to mount an all-out assault against what I believe to be an ill-considered book; but I would like to return in closing to my initial comment that Dennis Lee is a writer worth disagreeing with. Despite *Savage Fields*, I retain a great respect for Dennis Lee, not only as a poet, but also as a critic (I think his earlier essays, such as "Cadence, Country, Silence" and "Running and Dwelling: homage to Al Purdy" are brilliant). But there has always been in Lee's work a hint of intellectual rigidity, of allowing himself to be trapped too easily into limited choices, either/or dichotomies. Any student of Leonard Cohen should know that "A scheme is not a vision," and that systems are valuable only when broken into stems. If Lee can loosen up a little, and allow his ideas more light and air, out of unsavage fields something yet might grow.

HISTORY-MAKING

Hilda Thomas

MILTON ACORN, *Jackpine Sonnets*. Steel Rail.
N. BRIAN DAVIS, ed., *The Poetry of the Canadian People 1720-1920*. NC Press.
DAWN FRASER, *Echoes From Labor's War*. Introduction by David Frank and Donald Macgillivray. New Hogtown Press.
RICHARD WRIGHT and ROBIN ENDRES, eds., *Eight Men Speak*. Introduction by Robin Endres. New Howtown Press.

NORTHROP FRYE PRESIDES over the critical garrison against which Milton Acorn hurls many of his verbal polemics. It may seen odd, therefore, to invoke his authority in a review of Acorn's *Jackpine Sonnets*. Some words of Frye's though, seem particularly apt:

> Every good lyrical poet has a certain structure of imagery as typical of him as his handwriting, held together by certain recurring metaphors, and sooner or later he will produce one or more poems that seem to be at the centre of that structure.... The poet himself often recognizes such a poem by making it the title poem of a collection. They are not necessarily his best poems, but they often are, and in a Canadian poet they display those distinctive themes ... which reveal his reaction to his natural and social environment. Nobody but a genuine poet ever produces such a poem, and they cannot be faked or imitated or voluntarily constructed.

Milton Acorn is a genuine poet. The title poem of his collection *I've Tasted My Blood* which in 1970 earned him the Canadian Poetry Award and the title "The People's Poet" attests to the validity of Northrop Frye's contention. In his earlier volumes, *In Love and Anger* (1956) and *Against a League of Liars* (1960), and in *The Island Means Minago* (1975) for which he won the Governor General's Award for poetry, the official mark of recognition, Acorn has

consistently displayed "those distinctive themes ... which reveal his reaction to his natural and social environment." As a Marxist and a revolutionary, Acorn himself would certainly want to include the word "political" along with, or perhaps in place of, the social in defining his themes. For Acorn is determined to confront in his poetry what Miriam Waddington calls the "denied realities" — to "reclaim and bring to the surface the cast-off and denied elements in our national life."

In *Jackpine Sonnets* Acorn pursues his dominant revolutionary theme in such poems as "The Craft of Poetry's the Art of War," "To a Goddam Boss" (How can you buy me now in these times when it's sung / How I ripped lyric fragments from the devil's bloody tongue?) and the brilliant "Pigs," which in its opening stanza uses the primary colours and naive images of a child's drawing to bring into vivid and shocking focus the historical insight of the last couplet:

> Truck's painted red, sun yellow, pigs quite pink
> From sunburn — I wouldn't be surprised:
> It being precious little they get
> Of wind and sun. Now here's this jolly trip.
> Never mind ... They don't feel burnt yet
> And never will — the way things are set.
>
> So far they've been well kept by the man;
> Confined, but otherwise done much good by
> Nourishing meals, delivered right on time.
> Now comes this surprise ... A world to scan
> While they zip through it. There's another sky
> Higher and brighter than above their pen.
>
> Filling their eyes with nearness and distance;
> Two of them stand up, almost like men —
> Balancing by forelegs on top of the cab;
> Like the Cabot Brothers, gazing wide ahead.
> It's for this they were bred, born, doctored, fed.

The volume also includes poems of a more personal nature — although Acorn would rightly object to the implied separation of the personal and the political. "Sonnet Written Coldly Lest I Cry," for instance, about the murder of poet Patricia Lowther, demonstrates the fusion of the two in Acorn's work. In fact all the poems, even the most introspective like "The Wake-Up Raven," are characterized by images of violence, of fear and death, of "agonies, insults and injuries —" as in the poem whose title might serve as Acorn's poetic credo: "!Use the Whole Environment for a Medium!" There are also attacks on other poets and critics. One poem entitled "Shoot Yourself or Shit Yourself" is addressed to "Friar Northbush" who "would'ev dressed us all True Tory Blue / Masqued goalies waving archetypal symbols — ."

What distinguishes *Jackpine Sonnets* from Acorn's earlier volumes is his untypical insistence, emphasized in the title, on the formal aspect of his work — his attempt, chaotic in expression and determinedly polemical in tone, at a poetics. This is not to say that Acorn has neglected form in the past. As he declares immodestly in the "Tirade by Way of Introduction,"

> Previously my books have been noted for a variety of stylistic types. I doubt if through all those years I wrote more than three poems altogether in the same mode. Practically all were examples of formal elegance, used in free fashion.

True (or nearly true) enough. But in addressing himself so belligerently to the subject of technique, and in giving the discussion such a prominent place in the collection, Acorn distracts the reader from the themes of his poems, and invites the response which has typified Canadian criticism of separating form and content and treating content as essentially irrelevant — the very attitude which Acorn castigates in "Shoot Yourself or Shit Yourself" as "negation / For cause of class, all which motivates / Poets to soar and swoop amazed."

That this un-Miltonic splashing about

in the shallows of literary criticism is not profoundly meant may be deduced from the brief excursion into the subject of prime numbers — "the thirteen-line problem" — about which Acorn says:

> Mad fantasies like these are mental exercises a poet goes through to impress some idea on his mind. Many forget the original intent and concentrate on the fantasies.

What must be taken seriously, though, is Acorn's very real concern with craftsmanship, with the search for a form which can be "loaded" with the burden of his savage and passionately political themes. Again Frye (*pace*) has defined this problem, if from a very different perspective:

> the poet's quest is for form, not content. The poet who tries to make content the informing principle of his poetry can write only versified rhetoric, and versified rhetoric has a moral but not an imaginative significance. . . .

Frye goes on to say that

> A sonnet has form only if it really is fourteen lines long: a ten-line sonnet padded out to fourteen is still a part of chaos, waiting for the creative word. I mean by form the shaping principle of the individual poem, which is derived from the shaping principles of poetry itself.

With the conception of form as shaping principle Acorn would undoubtedly agree. And it scarcely matters whether his short, intricately-patterned lyrics can properly be called sonnets. (Ezra Pound would have it that the sonnet form was found by some chap who set out to write a canzone and got stuck in the middle. Milton Acorn's Jackpine sonnets, in contrast, might be described as having come unstuck in the middle.) What matters is the dialectical play between form and content, between the technical devices of rhythm, internal and end rhyme, assonance, and metaphorical language, the last of which Frye identifies as the most important poetic principle. In his experiments with form, Acorn is striving for the mode which is best suited to express the dynamic tensions of the Canadian scene: a form that will serve in the realization of the long-suppressed tradition of radical dissent. Jackpine sonnet will do well enough as a name, if Acorn's description of it as a "realisant" is adopted: "It has a basic form, yes, but grows to any shape that suits the light, suits the winds, suits itself."

The antecedents of the tradition of radical dissent which is finding expression in poets like Acorn are, for the most part, of historical interest only. This is not to deny the value of publications like *The Poetry of the Canadian People 1720-1920*, *Eight Men Speak*, and *Echoes From Labor's War*, all of which appeared in 1976. Brian Davis, editor of *The Poetry of the Canadian People*, has taken his cue from Edward Hartley Dewart who in 1864 published the first anthology of Canadian poetry, *Selections from the Canadian Poets*, but with a somewhat altered intent. Where Dewart saw "A national literature" as "an essential element in the formation of national character," Davis sees "The literature of a class" as "an important element in the formation of that class's character." In speaking of "the duality of political thought which produced . . . a literature of conservatism on the one hand, and a suppressed literature of dissenting radicalism on the other," Miriam Waddington comments that "these dualities have often remained nebulous and confused, and it has been hard to understand precisely where to locate them." The distorted emphasis in Canadian literary criticism on mythic or "apocalyptic" interpretation in preference to a historic approach, on form at the expense of content, should not be attributed, as it is by Davis, to conscious political motives. The critics, after all, are as much products of the conservative tradition as are the dramatists and poets, and throughout our

history it is that tradition that has triumphed. The crux of the problem may be located, if not precisely, then at least with some hope of shedding light on the subject, in the failure of the Mackenzie-Papineau Rebellion of 1837.

Mackenzie, a Scot who emigrated to Canada in 1820, was undoubtedly aware of the violent struggle then going on in England for freedom of the press, under the leadership of journalists like Richard Carlile and William Cobbett. Mackenzie was certainly in line with the impulse of rational enlightenment in his desire to overthrow the feudal system of land tenure which at that time impeded the development of industry in Canada, and prevented even those simple improvements such as water mills and foundries in the rural communities. The failure of the rebellion which he led had the effect of retarding the political and economic development of Canada for at least a generation, and of inhibiting the growth of that autodidactic artisan culture which had already matured in England. In *The Making of the English Working Class*, E. P. Thompson observes:

> This was the culture — with its eager disputations around the booksellers' stalls, in the taverns, workshops, and coffee-houses — which Shelley saluted in his 'Song to the Men of England' and within which the genius of Dickens matured.

It was in a similar climate of radical ferment that Milton wrote. Under the entrenched rule of a conservative merchant class, no such culture developed, or could develop, in Canada.

Confederation served to consolidate the conservative rule. As F. W. Watt remarks,

> It has long been recognized that the creation of the Dominion of Canada in 1867 was primarily a conservative act — conservative in the sense of attempting to preserve in the new political entity the character, traditions, and advantages of its colonial components, and to avoid a revolutionary rupture with the circumstances of the past.

Confederation had the further effect of intensifying the split between the founding nations, and of preventing the possibility of a "fruitful collision" between the two cultures. Malcolm Ross describes Canadians as "bifocal." The question is whether we are also binocular — capable of seeing, albeit with double vision, two cultures and two classes through our prescribed lenses.

Frank Watt offers a detailed and sympathetic survey of the "spirit of protest and dissent which, sometimes deliberately, resisted the main current, and which as a consequence of the necessities of nation-building was almost, but never entirely, stifled." That it was not completely lost from view is attested to by the poems collected together in Brian Davis' anthology. Davis draws his material from radical journals such as the *Colonial Advocate*, the *Ontario Workman*, and the *Western Labor News*, from the *Labor Reform Songster* of 1892, and from collections of folk songs and individual volumes like Wilfred Gribble's *Rhymes of Revolt*. The quality of the selections is, naturally, uneven. The best of them are bold and direct, belonging to or growing out of the folk tradition. The worst are doggerel, versified rhetoric in which even the moral significance is obscured by the turgid language. This unevenness is not the problem, however. There is some sifting to be done, and as W. A. Deacon suggested fifty years ago, it is a problem for criticism, not an excuse for ignoring the material. But the volume is oddly arranged and carelessly documented. In the Introduction, Davis is loud in his criticism of the academic establishment for having "studiously ignored the poetry of the Canadian people," and for having lent themselves to "the continued care and upkeep of a largely imitative and often subservient culture." But it is clear that

Davis has drawn heavily on the work of scholars like Marius Barbeau, Helen Creighton, and Edith Fowke, whose contributions he does not adequately acknowledge in the text; he is also, evidently, indebted to *Primary Sources in Canadian Working Class History 1860-1930* which he mentions without naming either the authors (R. G. Hann, G. S. Kealey, L. Kealey, and P. Warrian) or the publisher (Dumont Press Graphix and Jimuel Briggs Society). It is impossible not to sympathize with Brian Davis in his attempt to "make available for the first time a record ... of our own cultural achievements" in the interest of "building a new, more egalitarian society." But this record must be seen in its historical context, and it certainly deserves more careful scholarship than Brian Davis has brought to the task.

Echoes From Labor's War by Dawn Fraser, a reprint of verses first published in 1926, is well introduced by David Frank and Donald Macgillivray. The editors, like Davis, believe that "Literary historians have paid too much attention to the 'official' poets in our history and have ignored the work of the popular local poets like Fraser, who belong to an entirely different tradition." This tradition is "animated by ideals of morality, by a sense of class and community, and by an aspiration for social and economic reform." Fraser's verse, though occasionally sentimental and self-conscious, is no blunt instrument. His attacks on the bosses who, it must be admitted, were as absurd as they were vicious in their treatment of the Cape Breton miners of the 20's, catch the idiom of the people in their direct, humorous language. At his best, as in "He Starved, He Starved, I Tell You," Fraser remains very firmly rooted in the oral tradition — a tradition which is still alive in Cape Breton today. The historical background provided by the editors of *Echoes From Labor's War* makes a real contribution to a neglected area in Canadian cultural history.

In *Eight Men Speak*, Robin Endres makes an even more important contribution to the recent endeavour to "encourage historians of Canadian radical movements to make cultural history an integral part of their research and analysis." S. Jamieson, writing of the neglect by Canadian historians of trade union history, called it a "conspiracy of silence." Endres suggests that critics like Frye and his "student and popularizer, Margaret Atwood" are guilty of a (perhaps unconscious) conspiracy to exclude radical culture from critical consideration in the interest of the continued dominance of their own bourgeois ideology. This charge must be taken seriously, especially with regard to Canadian drama, if only because of the blank ignorance on the part of most students of the existence of a radical dramatic literature, and the lack of critical studies of Canadian playwrights. George Ryga, for example, is often treated as if he were the magical progeny of the stony fields from which he sprang, without literary antecedents of any kind (and certainly not *national* antecedents!).

In tracing the development of the Canadian Workers Theatre Movement and its origins in the international political theatre of the 20's and 30's, Endres relates theatrical techniques to themes, and shows how the influence of the agit-prop tradition is still evident in Canada today. Her essay raises a whole series of questions for study. The plays themselves are less likely to be seen as material for future productions. The most impressive is the title piece, which dramatizes the attempted murder of Communist Party leader Tim Buck by prison guards who fired into his cell in Kingston Penitentiary, where Buck was imprisoned under the infamous Section 98. A factual report of this incident can be found in the

Report of the Royal Commission to Investigate the Penal System of Canada (Ottawa, 1938). The play takes the form of a trial, using to good effect the various techniques of agitprop theatre. That it cannot be performed today is as much a comment on the suppression of Canadian labour history as on the literary merit of the work. In describing the efforts made by the Canadian government of the day to prevent the play's being produced, Endres provides a convincing demonstration of why, in the words of Frank Watt, "The tradition in Canadian dramatic writing has never been continuous." Of the other plays in *Eight Men Speak*, Mary Reynolds' "And the Answer Is" has a feel for language and character that leads one to ask what happened to this promising writer. Dorothy Livesay's "Joe Derry" sheds an interesting sidelight on her recently published autobiographical work. But although as Stanley Ryerson says on the dust jacket of *Eight Men Speak*, "the themes aren't obsolete," these "scripts and polemics" can do no more than revive in us the desire to recover a past of which we have been largely deprived.

That process of rediscovery is of immense importance, not because it introduces into Canadian literary criticism a hitherto missing element of ideology. On the contrary, what it does is to make visible for the first time the unrecognized ideology which has constituted the myth of Canadian literature throughout our history, and which has at once generated and been affirmed by a critical approach itself assimilated to the same myth. Roland Barthes in his *Mythologies* suggests that myth "has the task of giving historical intention a natural justification, and making contingency appear eternal. *Now this process is exactly that of bourgeois ideology.*" He goes on to say that

> just as bourgeois ideology is defined by the abandonment of the name 'bourgeois', myth

> is constituted by the loss of the historical quality of things.... The world enters language as a dialectical relation between activities, between human actions; it comes out of myth as a harmonious display of essences. A conjuring trick has taken place; it has turned reality inside out, it has emptied it of history and has removed from things their human meaning so as to make them signify a human insignificance. The function of myth is to empty reality: it is, literally, a ceaseless flowing out, a haemhorrhage, or perhaps an evaporation, in short a perceptible absence.

In Barthes' definition, "*myth is depoliticized speech*" which imposes a "second-order language, a metalanguage" between the object named and its reality in terms of human action: a language of images designed to preserve the world by giving to what is contingent and historically determined the appearance of being natural, essential, eternal.

A dilemma arises here in that the language of bourgeois ideology embraces all that is generally understood by the term literature. It is "rich, multiform, supple":

> The oppressed *makes* the world, he has only an active, transitive (political) language; the oppressor conserves it, his language is plenary, intransitive, gestural, theatrical: it is Myth.

Left-wing myth, by contrast (and Barthes is explicit that "The Left" is also a mask which generates its own metalanguage), because it "defines itself in relation to the oppressed, whether proletarian or colonized" must either borrow the language of the oppressor, or confine itself to the language of the oppressed, which is "poor, monotonous, immediate":

> This essential barrenness produces rare, threadbare myths: either transient, or clumsily indiscreet; by their very being, they label themselves as myths, and point to their masks.... One can say that in a sense, Left-wing myth is always an artificial myth, a reconstituted myth: hence its clumsiness.

Barthes identifies a number of "rhetorical forms" as being characteristic of bourgeois myth. Among them are "The Privation of History" (that is, abstracting the object from its historical context), "Identification" (the inability to conceive of the Other, or, at best, the placing of the Other in the realm of the exotic), and "Tautology" (the solution offered by Margaret Atwood's "Victor-Victim" schema: "Tautology is a faint at the right moment, a saving aphasia"). These concepts may afford a useful insight into such questions as Why are there so many isolated figures in Canadian fiction? Why so many first person narrators, many of them women, who are traditionally regarded as non-persons? Why so few Indians, heroes, lovers? There may be, as Barthes suggests, "isoglosses of a myth," but neither the seasons nor the geography of Canada, though they account for much that is present in our literature, are sufficient to account for what is absent.

Barthes' "Myth Today" was written over two decades ago. That his approach to literature, and that of other neo-Marxist semiologists, has had so little impact on Canadian literary criticism may be in part because of the unavailability of material like that included in *Eight Men Speak*, *Echoes From Labor's War*, and *The Poetry of the Canadian People*, a problem which continues to frustrate Canadian scholars. It is more likely, though, that as Frye says in the Conclusion to the first edition of *Literary History of Canada*, "Cultural history ... has its own rhythms"; "there must be a period of a certain magnitude ... in which a social imagination can take root and establish a tradition." That Canada as a nation never fully accomplished its bourgeois revolution, and hence failed to escape the bonds of a colonized tradition, may help to explain why "There are no Canadian writers of whom we can say ... that their readers can grow up inside their work without ever being aware of a cir-

cumference." This same historical peculiarity may account for the absence of a self-confident opposition to that tradition.

Frye's 1964 assessment of Canadian literature when viewed through Barthes' improved binoculars takes on the appearance of an elegant but vanishing dream — a bush garden, perhaps, but a garden nonetheless, in which there is no room for the irreducible Other. Frye is quick to point out that "new conditions give the old ones a new importance, as what vanishes in one form reappears in another." What is now appearing, however, is not what Frye envisioned: a post-Canadian culture in which "the interplay of sense impressions is so complicated, and exhilarating, that the reader receives no sense impression at all." It is rather those formerly denied realities which are asserting themselves in the work of poets like Milton Acorn. This new thrust is well described by Barthes in *Writing Degree Zero*, again written in the 50's:

> There is ... in every present mode of writing a double postulation: there is the impetus of a break and the impetus of a coming to power, there is the very shape of every revolutionary situation, the fundamental ambiguity of which is that Revolution must of necessity borrow from what it wants to destroy, the very image of what it wants to possess. Like modern art in its entirety, literary writing carries at the same time the alienation of History and the dream of History; as a Necessity, it testifies to the division of languages which is inseparable from the division of classes; as Freedom, it is the consciousness of this division and the very effort which seeks to surmount it.

As Victor Hopwood says in the *Literary History of Canada*, "Canadian consciousness ... was born literate and historical." It is from that very historical consciousness, from the sense that history is made by men and women, that the conservative tradition strove to alienate us. Milton Acorn (can that really be his name?) offers proof that it was not altogether successful:

> I cannot say I never looked back. From then on I looked front and sideways, up and down, back and outside, inside too. Never front and centre. Front and centre is a bourgeois concept. But from that day forward I knew who I was.

CRITICS & PUBLISHERS

John Lennox

JOHN MOSS, *Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel: The Ancestral Present.* McClelland & Stewart, $6.95.

AS A FOUNDER AND EDITOR of the *Journal of Canadian Fiction* and as the author of *Patterns of Isolation*, John Moss has established himself as a perceptive, energetic and controversial critic of the Canadian novel. One of the criticisms levelled at *Patterns of Isolation* was that it subordinated the individuality of the works under examination to the interests of Moss's thesis. In *Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel*, Moss is extremely anxious to abjure the reductive tendency of broad critical study and at several points he reiterates that "this is not a thematic study. Sex and violence provide organizing principles, not an hypothesis." Unfortunately, this repeated disavowal of thematic structuring and intention may alienate rather than convince many readers. Moss's approach involves three stages — first, the examination of individual works in and of them-

selves; second, the positioning of each work within a larger, synthesizing pattern; third, the formulation, based on the larger pattern, of consequent characteristics of the Canadian literary and cultural imagination. These three stages are interdependent, but are often brought together by Moss with discriminating intensity.

The preface and first chapter of *Sex and Violence* are involved in a definition of what is meant by the title. According to Moss, sex in the Canadian novel "relates more readily to personal identity" and "has no meaning, implies no judgement." Violence "lends itself to sweeping moral visions" and "demands a moral response to the conflict that generates it." While sex and violence are universal in fiction, Moss argues that the remarkably high incidence of both is distinctive to the Canadian novel. The range of possibilities falling within the purviews of sex and violence is broad. Sex encompasses everything from puberty, through heterosexuality and homosexuality, to pornography. Violence means anything from "battered egos to genocide." Literary violence, Moss suggests, is related to our historical experience while the importance of sex in our fiction has its origins in the history and influence of popular literature. Together, sex and violence "give us an eloquent vision of our collective identity as Canadians."

Implicitly present as *éminences grises* in Moss's preface and first chapter is the work of three critics — Ronald Sutherland's *Second Image*, Margaret Atwood's *Survival* and Leslie Fielder's *Love and Death in the American Novel.* Moss contradicts *Second Image* when he warns of his intention to show later how "Canadian literature is an English language literature, quite separate from Quebecois literature or from the various ethnic literatures of this country." In contrast to what is suggested in *Survival*, Moss argues that "violence marks the struggle for life and against death" and allows the novelist to discover "the moral dimensions of his universe." Violence and sex together are constructive in providing either for "visions of moral identity" or for an examination of moral identity. In contradistinction to Fiedler's view of the American novel, Moss states that the Canadian novel "is virtually barren of the classic theme of love and death in tandem, fused as one dynamic theme." Love and death as literary themes are possible only in an established society. Sex and violence are the themes of a culture "where the quality and the existence of the society are both in doubt." Thus, the Quebecois novel is characterized by love and death whereas the Canadian novel is preoccupied with sex and violence. This last distinction is theoretically interesting, but not sufficient to my reading of *La Guerre, Yes Sir!*, *Mad Shadows*, and *Kamouraska*, all of which are used as examples in Moss's distinction. Constant throughout the preface and first chapter is the sustained connection between literature and society. Moss concludes by saying that "there almost certainly is a higher incidence of sex and violence in the Canadian novel than elsewhere, probably because in no other tradition does community consciousness coincide with preoccupations of the contemporary imagination in quite the same way, to generate these responses."

Subsequent chapters deal either with a single work or several works grouped and studied in relation to a particular aspect of the sex and violence motif. In addition, the thesis of the study often gives way to a discussion of the form or technique of individual novels. The second chapter, "Rites of Passage," deals with the role of sexuality in the depiction of young protagonists created by writers like Alice Munro, Clark Blaise, John Glassco and John Metcalf. As the chapters unfold,

Moss develops his study through the use of a critical spectrum which moves from works in which sex dominates to those in which violence is most important. His first close reading comes with his third chapter which examines sexuality in *Lives of Girls and Women*. This is a fine interpretation deepened by what Moss acknowledges as a shock of recognition and by the fascinating linking of the persona of Del with Alice Munro. The next chapter focusses on Margaret Laurence's Manawaka works, particularly *The Diviners*, in terms of the way Laurence handles "the conflict between roles imposed by gender and what we sense is our essential self somewhere deep within us, surging randomly to the surface." One chapter discusses novels in which sexual triangles predominate for different thematic and formal purposes. Another chapter argues that the Deptford trilogy is exemplary of fiction where "violence obtrudes on sexuality." *Surfacing* and *St. Urbain's Horseman* are examined to show the difference between quests for identity and quests for self. Moss goes on to talk about the fusion of sex and violence in works which he describes as experimental. Then, in separate chapters devoted to each of these experimental novels — *Beautiful Losers*, *The Disinherited* and *The New Ancestors*—he discusses how the first two fuse sex and violence, while the third treats them in juxtaposition. Works at the violent extreme of Moss's critical spectrum are examined in chapters entitled "Violence and the Moral Vision" and "Genocide: The White Man's Burden." Among the works studied in these chapters, it is Wiebe's *The Temptations of Big Bear* which seems to hold for Moss the greatest fascination and challenge. His distinction between moral and spiritual vision in Wiebe's novel is succinctly expressed. In the penultimate chapter, the articulation of identity and moral consciousness is examined in relation to humour in the fiction of Robert Kroetsch and Leo Simpson.

The final chapter, "Gathering the Canadian Identity," is broad and controversial in its synthesis. It is persuasive in its situating of the Canadian novel in a third-world context, in its endorsement of Commonwealth literary studies and in its discussion of voice or language in Canadian fiction. It is vague in its generalized enumeration of the development of unspecified forms and conventions influenced by the new subject-matter connected with Canada. It is zealous in its description of the need for the contemporary Canadian literary critic to demand of himself "a social responsibility, even sometimes at the expense of his literary vision." It is most contentious in arguing for the existence of two entirely separate literatures in this country — Canadian and Quebecois. To argue for a characteristic preponderance of sex and violence in the Canadian (English) novel through intensive examination of specific texts is one thing. Quite another is to argue, without a similar intensive examination of the same motifs in the fiction of Quebec, that "Canadian literature does not include the literature of Quebec written in French — except through wishful thinking and tremendous cultural naiveté."

John Moss is a skilled and intelligent reader of our literature. His thesis is used to select and organize rather than interpret the works he deals with. Moss may be admonished for his socio-literary observations, particularly in the last chapter, and for his view of the critic as "guru, guide and impressario [*sic*]." There is, however, a persistence in the way we implicitly ask our literary critics to interpret our imaginative culture and then just as persistently tell them that, having attempted to do so, they have presumed or erred or failed.

The book's physical details provide the author and readers with reason to be

alarmed about the attitudes of editors and publishers. Presumably McClelland & Stewart felt that *Sex and Violence in the Canadian Novel* would be an event of some importance in Canadian literary studies. Why, then, is this book so slipshod in its physical presentation? There is an inexcusable proliferation of typos — careless, egregious or simply funny. Some provide unintentional comic diversion. Examples — the synopsis of one story describes a young girl's "public hairs"; the examination of *Fifth Business* mentions the short reign of "King Edward IV"; the protagonist of Atwood's *Edible Woman* is "Marion McAlpine"; the protagonists of *Surfacing* and *St. Urbain's Horseman* search "for whom they are." And the proof-readers have left the critic bereft of defences in their verification of "a single critical approach that is as mutiform as the literature it considers." In addition, the Index is indefensibly awry. For example, Jack Ludwig's *Above Ground* is listed on pages 21, 31, 38, 39 in the Index, whereas the actual references are found on pages 26, 36, 43. However, one cannot thereby conclude that the Index references are consistently five pages behind where they are actually located in the text. Charles Yale Harrison is listed on pages 230 and 231 in the Index, whereas in the study itself he is mentioned on pages 232 and 233. This inaccuracy may be the result of computer typesetting, but even if this were the case, where were the publisher's proof-readers? Such errors and inconsistencies serve the reader badly and the writer far worse. What was the commitment within the editorial department of one of our senior publishing houses in the production of this book?

Editorial standards are also implicated in the need for some clarifying and simplifying of the book's prose style which occasionally becomes gluey in phrases like, "It is one of those novels which might readily spawn an autochthonic proliferation of commentary." Other editing might have helped to temper what appear to be Freudian slips which are delightfully appropriate to the nature of the study, but not altogether supportive of its seriousness. Example — "Wander through Washington, D.C. and marvel at the neoclassical erections."

This book provides a valuable, intelligent and controversial examination of the contemporary Canadian novel by an extremely close and perceptive reader. He and his readers deserve far better treatment at the hands of his publishers both in the quality and professionalism of physical production and in serious editorial responsibility. A corrected edition is required immediately and McClelland & Stewart should move quickly to get it in press.

HAUNTED BY "CAN LIT"

Linda Leith

DAVID STAINES, ed., *The Canadian Imagination: Dimensions of a Literary Culture.* Harvard University Press, $10.00.

SOME OF THE MOST TELLING impressions created by this collection of essays on Canadian literature are unintentional. The editor, David Staines, and the eight eminent contributors presumably intended us to learn something from all the information about our literary culture that we are showered with in this

volume, and although the book makes no pretence of being comprehensive it would indeed be quite possible to glean from it a fair idea of most of the significant developments in English and (to a lesser extent) French-Canadian poetry, prose, and drama.

Why is it then that one can finish reading the collection with a most curiously lopsided impression of what is most important in our cultural life? Why is it, for example, that ghosts and the supernatural come to assume such an inordinately major role? When one sets the book down one knows full well with one part of one's being that there have been scores of worthy writers in Canada. How does it happen, then, that instead of any comprehensive view, one finds one has become secretly convinced that only a tiny clique of literati — notably Northrop Frye, Margaret Atwood, Earle Birney and, perhaps, Douglas Bush and Marshall McLuhan — deserve any serious attention?

One might, of course, want to argue that these writers have some special importance, but nowhere does anyone *argue* that in this volume: rather it remains a sly but potent impression created — not by any one contributor in particular — but by the number of times certain names and ideas recur.

It all begins unambiguously enough — distressingly so — as David Staines in the opening sentences of his Introduction informs us that the Dominion of Canada was formed in 1867 under the British North America Act, that Newfoundland joined the dominion only in 1949, and that at the same time Canada is old as a place of European settlement. This, and subsequent references to Vikings, Canadian geography, "A mari usque ad mare" and regionalism are soon explained: the volume (although "of im-

portance to Canadians") is addressed primarily to a "foreign audience." Staines, who introduced a course on Canadian literature at Harvard, in 1976 organized a lecture series to supplement that course. Northrop Frye, Margaret Atwood, Brian Parker, Marine Leland and Marshall McLuhan all presented lectures that provided the basis for the volume, and Peter Buitenhuis, Douglas Bush and George Woodcock wrote complementary studies at Staines' invitation.

So we now know why we are given so much basic information about things Canadian, even if it remains distracting. One may also be permitted to wonder how necessary it really is. While there are undoubtedly untold millions of Americans (and Canadians, for that matter) who do not know the date of the BNA Act, etc., surely most of those who get as far as reading *The Canadian Imagination* are unlikely to want or need to find elementary facts about history and geography in a book on Canadian literature.

Staines is not the only one who may be faulted for being too informative. There appears generally to be a prevailing assumption among the contributors that they are writing for a readership that knows practically nothing about Canada and its culture. This assumption would on its own not be a disadvantage, but it becomes so when the result, as too often in this volume, is that analysis makes far too much room for facts about writers, for lists of works, and for detailed plot summaries. The sheer weight of all the information included between the covers of the volume is partly the reason why it leaves so little real impression and why the occasional striking comment acquires all the more significance: so too the colour of a drab suit of clothes may go unremarked if it happens to have vividly coloured buttons.

"Haunted by Lack of Ghosts" is Northrop Frye's opening study of patterns in the imagery of Canadian poetry. It is a fascinating essay. Frye explains that he used the last line of Birney's poem "Can.Lit." as his title because there are gods here in Canada — natural gods — and that we have offended them by the way in which we have treated nature. Canada, he says interestingly, finds the environment less impressive than oppressive: "It is not only that nature is so big and the winters so cold, but also that there is a lurking feeling that if anything did speak to the poet from nature it would speak only to condemn." We can make no contact with the gods of this land because of what we are, and what we did. However, there is, according to Frye, a new link being forged between man and his environment in Canada by some of the recent poets (Newlove, Musgrave) who write of attitudes appropriate to people who really belong here, who are immigrants no longer.

In 1945 *Poetry* published a review of E. J. Pratt's *Collected Poems* which asserted that the poet's work was both dull and a hundred years out of date. Peter Buitenhuis sets out here to defend the poet against this accusation by arguing that it is only in an anti-historical age of poetry such as our own that such a charge would ever have been laid. Unlike other modern poets, Pratt was rooted in history and in an awareness of his country's past, and if even Buitenhuis will admit there was something "slightly anachronistic" about the poet's imagination, he will nonetheless insist on the virtues rather than the faults of such a perspective. Quoting Birney's "Can.Lit.," Buitenhuis then comments: "Pratt suffered from no lack of ghosts, and he was able over the years to create a usable past for the contemporary Canadian imagination."

It's not that Frye and Buitenhuis are arguing along similar lines (although in some ways they are), but rather that there are uncanny connections between

their essays in ways that acquire added significance through repetition. The use of Birney's poem is the most striking of these connections, but by no means the only one. The sheer number of times that the names Frye, Pratt and Atwood are mentioned in these essays is extraordinary.

Frye, too, has mentioned Pratt, but to identify him with the earlier poetry that saw nature as oppressive and, notably, to comment that Margaret Atwood has inherited Pratt's instinct for what is imaginatively central in the Canadian sensibility. (On the basis of this volume it might well be argued that Birney should share in that honour.) Atwood's book, *Survival*, Frye suggests, has become very influential partly through its inspired choice of a title: "the word 'survival' in itself implies a discontinuous series of crises, each to be met on its own terms, each having to face the imminent threat of not surviving." Later in his essay he remarks that "Even in Pratt, society is held together only by the emergencies of 'survival'."

Buitenhuis refers not only to Atwood, but also to Frye:

> There is a good deal of the survivor instinct in Pratt's work, but it is not often the grim and desperate affair that Atwood makes it out to be. In one of Pratt's most typical poems, "The Truant," survival becomes a joyful as well as a defiant necessity. The poem's purpose is to show the undying spirit of man when confronted by the ultimate tyrant, the Panjandrum, who represents himself as God, but is merely, as Northrop Frye has noted, "the mechanical power of the universe."

Almost immediately afterwards Buitenhuis quotes at some length from Frye's introduction to the second edition of Pratt's *Collected Poems,* supporting his own contention that Pratt was an original, unperturbed by the poetic trends of his day.

The third essay, George Woodcock's "Possessing the Land: Notes on Canadian Fiction," is for various reasons disappointing for those perusing it with an eye to discovering new insights into its subject, but most rewarding for any who, sensitized by the connections between Frye's essay and Buitenhuis', have started noting recurrences.

Woodcock, first of all, quotes Frye twice in his opening three pages, and then again a few pages later on. (He also refers to Atwood on several occasions.) Two of these quotations are taken from the *Literary History of Canada*, a work that Woodcock has obviously relied on heavily in what turns out largely to be a listing and description of prose fictions written in Canada and by Canadians. The main argument of the essay is that Canadian fiction has in the main bypassed realism:

> Canadians, faced with the wilderness on one side and a dangerously powerful neighbour on the other, had little doubt as to the actual nature of their predicament; what they needed was the combination of mythology and ideology that would enable them to emerge from mere escapism and present a countervision more real than actuality.

And, he goes on, since the later 1920's there has developed a genuine Canadian twentieth-century romanticism.

Debatable as this is (Atwood disagrees completely), it is thought-provoking, a fact that makes for all the more frustration when one discovers that Woodcock practically abandons it as an idea when discussing the specific works.

The romanticism he writes of uses "fantasy and dreams as paths to reality," accepts "myth as the structure that subsumes history," and "in its ultimate degree of the fantastic" recognizes and unites with satire, its opposite. In many ways Woodcock too is on the track of the "ghosts" mentioned by Frye and Buitenhuis.

Margaret Atwood's essay follows: "Canadian Monsters: Some Aspects of the Supernatural in Canadian Fiction," and

the opening sentence begins: "I first became interested in Canadian monsters, not, as you might suspect, through politics, but through my own attempts to write ghost stories. . . ." The impression that, in terms of its concerns, this collection of essays forms an integral work is confirmed.

Unlike Woodcock, Atwood considers that the mainstream of Canadian literature has been "solidly social-realistic," on the whole confining itself to ordinary life on middle earth, and she suggests two reasons for this:

> The first is that the Canadian fiction tradition developed largely in the twentieth century, not the romantic nineteenth. The second is that in a cultural colony a lot of effort must go into simply naming and describing observed realities, into making the visible real even for those who actually live there. Not much energy is left over for exploring other, invisible realms.

Her obvious differences with Woodcock notwithstanding, Atwood too is clearly thinking along some of the same lines as the earlier contributors to the volume: she proceeds to quote from what she all-too-appropriately describes as Earle Birney's "much-quoted" poem "Can.Lit." as well as from Irving Layton's "From Colony to Nation," and to ask if this ghostless, unmagical, prosaic image is (or ever was) really true to Canada or its literature. The balance of her essay shows her doing her bit to bring forward some examples to prove the existence of a supernatural or magical undercurrent in Canadian literature. Again it is disappointing to find her shying away from comments and conclusions, mainly confining herself to descriptions of her exotic literary finds.

While not quite so tightly interwoven as those in the first half of the volume, the four concluding essays have, with one notable exception, by no means escaped the incestuous influence that Can. Lit. seems to exert over its commentators.

Douglas Bush, writing on Stephen Leacock, does his generally worthy essay no good when he gives in to the temptation to claim an admittedly tiny thread of personal connection with Leacock (via James Wetherell, principal of Strathroy Collegiate Institute while Leacock was a student there, and possibly provincial Inspector of Schools who once commended Bush). One ends by liking Bush nonetheless, as he is so anxious to attribute the inclusion of such trivial reminiscences to the garrulousness of a self-indulgent old age. (But what is Peter Buitenhuis' excuse? After referring to Pratt simply as Pratt in his opening pages, and after discussing the role played by Victoria College in the nurturing of many strong teachers, critics and writers such as Pratt himself, Frye, and Atwood, he self-consciously mentions "It was at Victoria College, as a fledgling assistant professor of English, that I first met Ned Pratt.")

The sixth essay, and the one that immediately follows the one by Bush, is Brian Parker's "Is There a Canadian Drama?" "I have," Parker begins, "borrowed my title from Douglas Bush" — specifically from Bush's 1929 article in the *Commonweal* entitled "Is There a Canadian Literature?" Parker goes on to quote what he considers to be Bush's crucial remark from the conclusion to that article: "The best Canadian writing is moving away from the local and parochial to the local and universal, and it can be increasingly judged by other than domestic standards." A sketch of the development of Canadian theatre, and specific discussions of Michel Tremblay's *Forever Yours, Marie-Lou*, James Reaney's *Colours in the Dark*, and George Ryga's *The Ecstasy of Rita Joe* follow, as Parker argues that there is indeed a particularly Canadian drama of good quality.

In the interesting theoretical part of his discussion he refers significantly both to Frye's view that, coming on the world

scene so late, Canada is inevitably committed to a modern international art style (which he characterizes as spatial rather than linear, imaginative rather than rational), and to Marshall McLuhan's theory of a modern sensibility so changed by electronic technology and speed of communication that it sees things always in terms of simultaneous pattern. Parker also, in the same context, refers to Harry Levin's comments in his address to the Canadian Comparative Literature Association in 1972, in which Levin pointed out that a lack of a specific national identity may, in fact, be culturally enriching.

This latter remark leads us directly to the last essay in the collection, "Canada: The Borderline Case," in which McLuhan argues that in the new world of today our very lack of a solid identity is an advantage. The big powers, he writes, have seen their identities perforated; Canadians have learned to live without such strongly marked characteristics; *ergo* Canadians are now better off: "the interface is where the action is."

It may well be possible to argue this case convincingly, but McLuhan's arguments are never sustained well enough to support the ideas he throws out, and his essay degenerates into a series of rather foolish comments on the differences between Europeans and Americans, and on the in-between-ness of Canadians.

There is a loose thread in this cultural mesh, and, hardly surprisingly, it is Marine Leland's discussion of "Québec Literature in its American Context." Here alone one looks in vain for the kind of connections that are so remarkable among the other contributions to the volume. Here alone one finds no hankering after absent ghosts — nor even McLuhan's attempt at creating a virtue out of necessity — since here alone the ghosts are both ever-present and known to be so.

Although Leland does make a not very enlightening attempt to situate Québec literature in the American context early on in her essay, she soon leaves that rather unprofitable subject aside. Instead she devotes the bulk of her attention to a survey of Québec literature in its own cultural and political context. Many of her comments are of considerable interest, but why is it that not a single contemporary Québec writer is named, let alone discussed? The names Lemelin and Roy alone grace her analysis of the post-1945 period. Shortage of space was not the problem: she indulges in a fairly extensive (and surely misplaced) discussion of the impact that the Cégep system has had on the province's cultural development.

She concludes that Québec literature is indeed isolated. The poets, novelists and playwrights of French Canada, she maintains, all appear free from other contemporary literatures: the literary influence of France diminished after the second World War; that of the United States and the Latin American countries is practically non-existent; and English and French Canadian literatures have exerted no influence on each other.

Her title, it thus turns out, is misleading: Québec literature *has* no American context worth discussing. Leland herself is well aware of this, and one is led to wonder whether the title was not Staines' idea rather than her own.

We are left with a picture of the literary life of Québec that has nothing to do with the cosiness of the literary life of English Canada and that shares none of the latter's concerns with absent ghosts. So, in its entirety, *The Canadian Imagination* leaves us with a more accurate impression of the literary culture of Canada than David Staines had any right to expect could be created from a volume that in many ways promises more than it delivers. It will surely reveal more to its foreign readership than only literary dimensions.

books in review

CRAWFORD'S FAIRIES

ISABELLA VALANCY CRAWFORD, *Fairy Tales of Isabella Valancy Crawford*, edited by Penny Petrone. Borealis Press.

THE SHINY PINK AND WHITE paper cover of this collection of fairy tales — quaintly lettered, prettily illustrated, and flimsy — is appropriate to the contents: six quaint, pretty, flimsy stories. Where did Penny Petrone find them? Unlike her earlier *Selected Stories of Isabella Valancy Crawford* (University of Ottawa Press), this book contains no editorial material. The reader is left to wonder whether these tales were dug out of the trunkful of manuscripts that stood before Katherine Hale as she composed her volume on Crawford for the Makers of Canadian Literature series (1923) or whether they have been unearthed from the morgues of newspapers and the other ephemeral publications from which the poet Crawford earned sketchy payments for her prose potboilers.

Whatever their provenance, these stories might better have been left in peace and obscurity. They are unlikely to interest anyone except the most devoted Crawford enthusiasts, and even these are unlikely to find in them much sustenance for their enthusiasm. In her poetry, Crawford had several "best" styles. She could write lushly passionate but reassuringly precise descriptions of nature; quirky, provocative expressions of complex thoughts and emotional states; carefully inoffensive but exuberantly comic pioneer dialect poems ("Old Spookses' Pass," "Old Spense," "The Deacon and His Daughter"). She sometimes approached Blakeian mysticism, as in the brotherly invitation of Evil to Good that concludes "Gisli, the Chieftain." She could be effectively laconic:

> "... the flesh that I wore chanced to be
> Less of my friend than my enemy.
>
> "So bury it deeply — strong foe, weak friend —
> And bury it cheaply, — and there its end!"
>
> ("His Clay")

But in these principally flat and ornately verbose stories, little of her intelligence, her verbal flair, or her humour is apparent.

Of the six, "The Waterlily" is the most satisfying as a story. The fairy Roseblush has been abducted by Prince Crystalcoat of the water-beetles. Her admirer, the fairy Goldenball, sets out to find and rescue her with the blessing of Oberon and Titania, here a boringly dignified pair of fairy royals of the type scornfully described by a T. H. White character: "people with bluebells for hats, who spend the time sitting on toadstools" (these two occupy a velvet-covered mushroom dais). Goldenball locates Roseblush easily, so there isn't much suspense. But there are some charmingly though tritely-described pictures: the absurd but complacent gossiping beaux of the beetle court; the magnificent waterlily glowing with the magic light of its fairy captive as it emits her musical lament. And there is an effectively abrupt shift to human perspective when a good little girl enlisted by Goldenball plucks the enchanted waterlilly and villainous Crystalcoat is cut down to size: "an ugly black beetle ran out of the heart of the flower, and gave her chubby wrist a vicious nip."

Next I would rank "The Vain Owl and the Elf," not for its plot but for a walk-on character, Swift the squirrel, a more obliging than ardent suitor of his cousin Jettie. His character is amusingly revealed as Jettie begs help from an elf to escape her engagement to a pompous owl. Swift is broken-hearted, she says.

> "Oh, certainly," replied Swift, turning his head quite over his shoulder, in order to observe the elegant markings of the fur on his back.

Swift is likely to kill himself, she says.

> "Most decidedly, adorable Jettie!" remarked Swift politely.

Moved more by his own love of mischief than belief in Swift's suicidal passion, the elf distracts the poor, unlovely owl into lifelong barn servitude by playing on his vanity.

Vanity is also the moral pivot of the two least storylike tales in the book. "The Rose and the Rainbow" is a fable on the theme of Rupert Brooke's "Heaven," involving a number of self-ful envisioners of celestial delights. The rose defines the moral, a Hans Christian Andersen favourite: "in this world everyone sees with his own heart and wishes, and is all the world to himself." And vanity is explicitly condemned in the poem appended to "The Rival Roses," though it is hard to see how the catastrophe of the frail tale was invoked by it, unless one believes in a fanatically puritanical Providence. (A bad misprint, "due *need*" for "due *meed*," further confuses the issue.)

The two remaining tales are thin, wish-fulfilling fantasies — one about a romance between a bewitched butterfly prince and a queen of violets, the other of a shipwrecked child tended by fairies who sound (and look, in Susan Ross's delicate drawings) scarcely big enough to splint her eyelash, should she break one.

Of course there is a qualitative difference between weak stories by an able writer and weak stories by an inept one. These are a cut above the ones ordinarily displayed on supermarket shelves. The book is also several cuts bigger. As someone once remarked, children are often given huge books with large print

when they tend to have short arms and 20:20 vision. Perhaps children who can get by the archaic *aughts* and *naughts* will mildly enjoy hearing the Crawford tales read by long-armed grandparents with Victorian tastes and failing eyesight. But they could do better. So could Isabella Valancy Crawford.

FRANCES FRAZER

NARNAUK & BADGER

CHRISTIE HARRIS, *Mouse Woman and the Mischief-Makers.* McClelland & Stewart, $7.95.
MARIA CAMPBELL, *Little Badger and the Fire Spirit.* McClelland & Stewart, $7.95.

READERS FAMILIAR with the work of Christie Harris are well aware of her interest in the lore of the Northwest Coast Indians and, in particular, her affection for Mouse Woman, a supernatural being whom she first discovered in Boaz' collection of Tsimshian myths and who has become the central figure of her last two books, *Mouse Woman and the Vanished Princesses* and *Mouse Woman and the Mischief-Makers.*

This second collection of tales, chronicling Mouse Woman's encounters with a series of both human and supernatural mischief-makers, is not as successful as the first, perhaps because only four of the seven tales appear to be derived from sources which do, in fact, include this attractive little narnauk. Ms. Harris seems to have exhausted the potential of the character in the first collection, and thus is forced to invent shrewish wives and magical talking blankets to fill out the tales. This is nowhere more obvious than in the last tale, which purports to relate Mouse Woman's own childhood. In the original text, the Mouse Woman, no relation to the kindly grandmother figure of the Boaz texts, is not forgiven for her transgressions, and dies. Thus Ms. Harris not only distorts the substance and meaning of the original legends, but more importantly in terms of examination of the text as an independent entity, she is forced by the nature of the collection to include a central figure who often does very little to enhance the narrative flow of individual stories. Thus the Mouse Woman, so enchanting and attractive in the first collection, becomes a bit of a burden to the storyteller in this text.

Both collections, finally, include illustrations by Douglas Tait, and the full page etchings in *Mouse Woman and the Mischief-Makers* are perhaps even more evocative than those in the first collection.

Unlike Christie Harris' adaptation of various Indian legends, Maria Campbell's *Little Badger* simply celebrates one of the proud legends of her people. This generously illustrated text tells the delightfully simple story of how a blind Indian boy, Little Badger, bring fire to his people. But beyond the tale itself, Ms. Campbell also tries to establish the context in which such tales are passed on, for this is a tale told to a little Indian girl, Ahsinee, by her grandfather Mooshoon on her eighth birthday.

In her first book, a brutally frank autobiography called *Half-Breed*, Maria Campbell explored a life which included drug addiction, prostitution, and a nervous breakdown. She ended her history by saying that she no longer favoured armed revolution, but believed that one day, very soon, people would set aside their differences and come together, because ultimately they would see that it is the only answer. In her first children's book, Ms. Campbell reasserts this same belief in love and in the community, returning to the legends that first instilled that optimism when she was a child.

Little Badger succeeds in his quest because he is drawn magnetically forward by the beating of the drum of his friend, Grey Coyote. But when he does come

forth from the Fire Spirit's cave with both fire and sight (inspiration), he suddenly realizes that the drum that drove him onward was his own heart and the heart of all men — the pulse of the world, the music of the universe.

In her first children's book, beautifully illustrated by Vancouver artist David MacLagan, Maria Campbell presents one of the most moving adaptations of Indian legend to appear in recent years. Let us hope, like Ahsinee, that there are many more stories to tell.

J. KIERAN KEALY

A SINGER'S WORLD

GEORGES DOR, *Si Tu Savais*. Les Editions de l'Homme, $5.00.

THIS AUTOBIOGRAPHY by a popular singer, a balladeer, with a preface by the admirable Gaston Miron, is the appealing and artless account of the life of a really nice guy whose family, had his Irish great-grandparents landed in Boston rather than Quebec, would have merged into the American scene with no further ado.

But they did land in Quebec, becoming part of the French community, their children and grandchildren marrying among the local population in small towns. In 1931, Georges Dor (the Irish name Dore lost its final vowel) was born, to become among other things a "poète-chansonnier." The word "poète" is important, for Georges Dor is more than a singer. He has not only written and published poetry, but also novels; he is now running a summer theatre. Although he confesses to being "bilingue par atavisme," he is a long way from being another Beckett, and Miron makes it quite clear, with the daggered elegance of which only French is capable, that he is not a great musician either. He does not pretend to be; he speaks to the heart, and if the music is as banal as "Tipperary," it does not lessen its appeal.

For Francophones, the story will be the cheerful and perceptive account of a local boy from a small town making good in the big city. For Anglophones the interest is wider. Those of us who live a long way from Eastern Canada forget, sometimes, that there are pleasanter manifestations of the Quebec spirit than Pierre Trudeau's intellectual arrogance, and that the parallels between the average man's life in Quebec and that in the rest of the country are curiously close. Like thousands of other Canadians from small towns, Georges Dor worked at a variety of jobs all around the province before he emerged from CBC to earn his living exclusively as an entertainer. Like thousands of others, he enjoyed his childhood, his schooling and his exploration as a young man of a big city and the North. Like thousands of others, he married a wife who is a real partner (she ran an art gallery for several years) and they have children. An ordinary North American success story, in fact. The charm of the account lies partly in these resemblances, and partly in the very real differences. Georges Dor himself is conscious of being caught between his "américanité" and his "québécitude."

Without becoming too ponderous about the political scene, one has to take it into account in explaining the success of the many "chansonniers" who have no real counterparts in the rest of the country. I can't imagine, at the moment, people wildly acclaiming a song about working on the Deas Lake railroad and longing to be back in Vancouver (Earle Birney's poem "Eagle Island" is the nearest I know to that kind of nostalgia). The closest analogy in modern terms which springs to mind — omitting Homer, the ollaves, and the troubadours — is the nineteenth-century English music-hall, where audience and singer alike shared, rather

closely, basic conceptions, experiences and a sense of humour, creating the feeling of intimacy which springs from an unconscious acceptance of a familiar identity. But the songs coming from Quebec mean more than this, for they reveal identity.

The whole explosion of literature in Quebec during the last twenty years can only be understood in terms of political, economic, and intellectual factors. It would be simplistic to say that, because Wolfe won and Montcalm lost, none of the philosophic ideas of the eighteenth century, which became part of the American and the French traditions, were absorbed into Quebec. But the persistence of the influence of a seventeenth-century Church, protected later on by the BNA act, did produce a situation which has no counterpart in other Canadian provinces, in England, in France, or in the United States. The social and intellectual isolation of schools and colleges (French-speaking) which persisted until after the Second World War has meant that the present generation of Québécois are having to deal with the phenomenon of three or four revolutions at the same time — the anti-clerical, the industrial, the technological, the Marxist, the Maoist. A yeasty combination, a heady ferment which any community would find difficult to digest.

Inevitably, the search for identity, itself part of the modern anguish, becomes crucial for Quebec, and the song-writers respond in their way to a public need to define, positively, what one is. They express, for the inarticulate, what the latter yearn to hear but cannot easily say for themselves. As Florenz Ziegfeld remarked in a similar connection, they are showing the people their dreams. It hardly matters whether the poetry is good or not, whether the music is original; the importance lies in the bond between singer and audience.

Georges Dor's "américanité," which we all share in a sense — our music, our language, our clothes — does not protect him, sadly, from the effects of a rather terrifying parochialism. One can sympathize with his experiences in France — a culture as foreign to him as to anyone from an up-country town in B.C. — but one regrets that his world seems to contain no contact with the rest of Canada except through CBC colleagues in Montreal, and indeed, no curiosity about it. Both he and we are the losers, for the country can ill afford to be ignorant about its moderate and civilized citizens who will all ultimately be swallowed up in the American dream if they insist on destroying their own. Perhaps a spell at CBC Vancouver, if he would return to broadcasting, would help Georges Dor expand his vision.

G. V. DOWNES

LES LIEUX COMMUNS DE LA CRITIQUE

BOUCHARD, DENIS, *Une lecture d'Anne Hébert. La recherche d'une mythologie.* Collection "Littérature"; Montréal: Hurtubise HMH.

BOUCHER, JEAN-PIERRE, *Instantanés de la condition québécoise.* Collection "Littérature"; Montréal: Hurtubise HMH.

Mélanges de civilisation canadienne-française offerts au professeur Paul Wyczynski. "Cahiers du Centre de recherche en civilisation canadienne-française"; Editions de l'Université d'Ottawa.

CES DERNIERES ANNEES les études consacrées à la littérature québécoise, issues principalement des miliex universitaires, ont augmenté à la mesure de la production littéraire elle-même. Mais en même temps que l'on constate le dynamisme des études québécoises, il faut déplorer une stagnation et un immobilisme dans les critères et les méthodes qui leur servent d'appui. Je citerai, entre autres, les derniers essais de Jean-Pierre Boucher et de

Denis Bouchard, qui sous des aspects, parfois, de modernité, rééditent les lieux communs du discours sur la littérature.

Boucher présente onze articles consacrés à autant d'auteurs: des extraits de Nelligan, Laberge, Ringuet, Roy, Langevin, Bessette, Miron, Ferron, Aquin et Ducharme servent d'illustrations à ce qu'il appelle "la condition québécoise." Alors que son sujet se prêtait à une réflexion et à une prise de position épistémologique à la fois sur le texte et sur la société, Boucher écarte toute question de méthode ou de théorie et préfère plutôt répéter les stéréotypes de la critique traditionnelle endossant ainsi ses présupposés idéologiques.

L'oeuvre littéraire est définie comme l'expression d'une réalité, tantôt collective ("Alain est un personnage typique et exprime un aspect fondamental de notre âme collective"), tantôt individuelle ("Laberge décrit donc avec minutie une scène qu'il a dû longuement observer en plusieurs occasions"). La forme de l'oeuvre de la même manière est présentée comme un reflet direct de la réalité: le sonnet de Nelligan désigne l'enfermement psychologique et social de sa collectivité; dans *Bonheur d'occasion* "Le temps des verbes, passé simple, imparfait, présent, illustre le triomphe de l'immobilisme"; l'utilisation de la première personne grammaticale dans *Le libraire* symbolise la volonté de puissance de la nouvelle bourgeoisie québécoise des années 1960; le jeu de mots chez Ducharme indique notre dangereuse tentation de fuite hors du réel; etc. . . . Tous ces rapprochements entre le texte et la société sont la plupart du temps fort hasardeux parce que, comme l'admet l'auteur lui-même, "la jonction entre ces structures formelles et les structures sociales est ressentie intuitivement, avec tous les risques d'erreurs que cela entraîne, plutôt que démontrée scientifiquement." Au lieu d'établir le réseau symbolique dans lequel l'extrait qu'il étudie s'inscrit, c'est-à-dire de le siteur dans la structure propre au texte pour montrer ensuite la fonction de celui-ci dans la société qui l'accepte et le classe, Boucher passe directement de l'extrait à une interprétation sociologique empirique et gratuite.

S'il emprunte parfois un vocabulaire propre aux sciences du texte (narrateur, point de vue) il ne tient pas compte du sens que l'on a donné à ces notions. En identifiant par exemple le narrateur à l'auteur, il fait disparaître la pertinence de cette opposition et du même coup toute l'efficacité méthodologique du concept. De même le personnage du récit n'est pas défini comme un signe mais comme un être vivant: Boucher trace le portrait moral et psychologique d'Alain (*Poussière sur la ville*),) de Jodoin (*Le libraire*), de Mille Mille (*Le nez qui voque*); il parle de leur nature, des aspects de leur personnalité, il juge et critique leur comportement. Mille Mille et le narrateur de *Prochain épisode* sont traités de rêveurs, d'incapables et d'impuissants, complices de notre échec collectif. Boucher reprend à son compte la thèse de Léandre Bergeron qui accusait le héros d'Aquin d'être contre-révolutionnaire.

La prémisse dont découle ce discours moralisateur c'est le principe de réalité, le souci de conformité à "la réalité telle qu'elle est." Selon le critique le danger qui guette le sujet c'est "l'incapacité chronique d'affronter le réel, de le maîtriser, de l'organiser," car l'homme doit sa survie "à sa capacité d'adaptation au réel." Mais de quel réel s'agit-il? De celui que produit la *doxa*, l'opinion commune, le gros bon sens poujadiste et anti-intellectuel qui privilégie les énoncés prosaïques et tautologiques:

> J'ai choisi délibérément d'écrire dans une langue simple, dépourvue autant qu'il se peut du jargon pseudo-scientifique souvent à la mode. Si j'écris, c'est pour être lu.

La bête noire du critique c'est celui qui n'écrit pas comme tout le monde: par exemple Nelligan "désignant par un ridicule 'cohortes bovines' ce que tout le monde nomme un troupeau de vaches ou de boeufs"; Miron a la faveur de l'auteur parce que lui parle d'une "poignée de porte arrachée"; y a-t-il quelque chose de plus concret, de plus réel? Pour être réaliste il faut être prosaïque. Pour être réaliste il faut aussi énoncer des évidences (ex.: "Cette rive est basse. Au sens concret, elle est donc de peu de hauteur"), et reproduire les idées reçues sur notre passé, l'aliénation collective du Québécois et son "incapacité chronique d'affronter le réel."

Sur ce plan Denis Bouchard, dans son essai sur Anne Hébert, ne le cède en rien à son collègue; il semble puiser ses réflexions aux mêmes lieux communs. Lui aussi s'en réfère constamment à "l'âme québécoise" et à "notre psychisme collectif." On retrouve la même conception romantique de la littérature comme expression de l'être national. Bouchard définit par exemple *Le Tombeau des rois* en ces termes:

> Ce recueil est une sorte de système mythique de tous nos démons assemblés de force dans un carnaval souterrain où ils sont forcés de se soumettre à l'épreuve de l'autocritique. Les poèmes se lisent comme des voix trouvant leur unité ultime dans notre collectivité qui les entend pour la première fois.

L'oeuvre serait la révélation du refoulé collectif; ailleurs Bouchard n'hésite pas à déclarer que "Anne Hébert s'efface en tant qu'individu pour se transmuer en la voix du Québec."

Je ne m'attarderai pas davantage sur cette étude ayant dit ailleurs dans *Les lettres québécoises*, ce que j'en pensais, j'ajouterai simplement qu'il s'agit d'un essai divisé en quatre parties: les deux premières, consacrées à la poésie, étudient "la présence de Saint-Denys Garneau dans l'oeuvre" et nous livrent une analyse du *Tombeau des rois*, tandis que dans les deux suivantes Bouchard aborde les récits (*Le Torrent*, *Les chambres de bois*, *Les Enfants du sabbat*). Enfin une longue bibliographie, qui s'avérera un instrument utile pour celui qui voudra faire l'histoire de la réception des textes de cet auteur, termine ce travail. (On ajoutera à cette liste les références suivantes qui ont échappé à notre critique: pour *Kamouraska*, *Times Literary Supplement*, 2 avril 1971 et *La Presse*, 2 mai 1971; pour *Les enfants du sabbat*, les articles de Pierre Vallières dans *Le Jour*, 13 septembre 1975 et 31 octobre 1975. Une correction: p. 234, il faut lire 1975 au lieu de 1976.)

Les analyses de Bouchard et Boucher ne dépareraient pas le recueil de *Mélanges* que les Editions de l'Université d'Ottawa dédient à Paul Wyczynski pour célébrer ses vingt-cinq années d'enseignement et de recherches au Canada, on y retrouve quelquefois le même esprit.

Textes de création, textes de critique et travaux d'histoire littéraire se succèdent ici dans le désordre qu'impose la distribution alphabétique des collaborateurs. Dans la première catégorie de textes on lira des poèmes de Cécile Cloutier et de Félix-Antoine Savard, une narration de Louise Maheux-Forcier inspirée des *Chants de Maldoror* et une farce bourgeoise de Gérard Bessette écrite dans un moment où le romancier dut se prendre pour Feydeau.

La catégorie critique est de loin la mieux représentée. Adoptant l'approche thématique qu'on leur connaît, Eva Kushner résume la poétique de Gilles Hénault et Jean-Louis Major, disant son attachement à la poésie du pays, regrette que celle-ci s'essouffle chez Claude Péfontaine. Deux critiques tentent de réhabiliter des textes injustement négligés selon eux: *La Minuit* de Savard que Jacques Blais récupère en faisant la preuve de la cohérence et du foisonne-

ment herméneutique du texte et la poésie patriotique de Crémazie qu'Odette Condemine s'applique à revaloriser malgré le désaveu du poète. Antoine Sirois et Jack Warwick poursuivent leur recherche en littérature canadienne comparée, le premier s'arrêtant à l'image du Mont Royal et le second au mythe du Nord dans les romans canadiens et québécois. Il faut situer aussi dans la perspective comparatiste l'essai de Bernard Julien qui rapproche le *Ti-Coq* de Gélinas d'une pièce de Dumas père. Avec un regard plus sociocritique Maurice Lemire observe la société de 1850 à travers *Charles Guérin* et Pierre Pagé nous dit que la langue du texte littéraire varie en fonction de son destinataire. Quant à Réjean Robidoux qui nous parle de la vocation de l'écrivain chez Gabrielle Roy, et P.-H. Lemieux qui retrace l'évolution de la conscience chez Philippe Aubert de Gaspé père, ils nous ramènent à une lecture biographique de l'oeuvre.

La troisième catégorie d'articles consacrés à des sujets d'histoire littéraire est sans doute celle qui convient le mieux à cet hommage. John Hare vient confirmer l'authenticité des mémoires d'un "obscur aventurier québécois," Robert Chevalier, réécrits par Lesage en 1732; David Hayne propose un nouveau critère de périodisation en littérature québécoise; Paul Gay montre l'influence du pape Pie XII et de Chopin sur un poème de Gustave Lamarche et Pierre Savard fait l'inventaire des récits de voyages en Europe de Québécois (connus et inconnus) depuis 1850.

Comme on le voit par la diversité des approches et des sujets, ce recueil s'adresse à plusieurs lecteurs. Cependant tous se retrouveront à la même enseigne du confort intellectuel que nous procurent ces savantes études qui ne posent jamais la question du rôle et de la fonction de la littérature, ni des conditions de l'analyse littéraire. Tout se passe comme si l'intervention des sciences humaines (linguistique, psychanalyse, sociologie marxiste) n'avait rien modifié aux études de littérature; aucun dialogue par exemple (sauf chez Major) avec les mouvements contemporains qui tentent de faire avancer cette réflexion. On croirait que la critique universitaire n'a pas encore connu sa révolution tranquille.

JACQUES MICHON

CANLIT ABROAD

V. TEODORESCU and P. NEGOSANU, *Intelegand zapada* [Anthology of English Canadian Poetry]. Editura Univers (Bucharest).

AL. ANDRITOIU and U. SCHIOPU, *Antologie de poezie canadiana de limba franceza* [Anthology of French Canadian Poetry]. Editura Minerva. (Bucharest).

AN INCREASING AWARENESS of Canadian poetry is slowly producing a number of translations into German, Spanish, Italian, Russian, Dutch, Polish, Greek and even Romanian. Two recent anthologies coming from Romania explicitly confirm this statement. The English Canadian poets and poems included in the first anthology, *Intelegand zapada* (translated, the title would be "Understanding the snow": exactly what that means is anybody's guess), are the personal choice of V. Teodorescu, a well known poet and translator, and of P. Negosanu, an equally well known writer and translator of English literature. Quality seems guaranteed. Even the package is promising with attractive layout and graphics.

The poets are presented in chronological order and the five page introduction offers a panoramic view about English-Canadian poetry, written for the curious reader who knows nothing about the Canlit scene. I am aware that no anthology can ever be complete. Nevertheless, I should have liked to see poems by Pratt, Le Pan, Avison, Fiamengo, and several others. In spite of this objection,

the general quality of the translations is good and the language has the lively immediacy of living Romanian, and, when appropriate, a refreshing colloquial sound. Some poems are left as more-or-less raw literal equivalents. But more often, the editors have translated regular rhyme into blank verse, slant rhyme, or occasional rhyming patterns that would approximate in Romanian its normal frequency of rhyme. A comparison with the original poems will reveal a style that is natural, smooth and unpretentious. The translations also contain that felicitous union of image and thought. Somehow, miraculously, Teodorescu and Negosanu have captured the essence of the Canadian soul and reproduced sensitively the intricate combination of feeling and music which characterizes the original works. *Intelegand zapada* is a valuable anthology, one that shows a great deal of hard work and dedication.

Some one hundred and fifty years of French-Canadian poetry are compressed into the second anthology — *Antologie de poezie canadiana de limba franceza* — edited and translated by Al. Andritoiu and U. Schiopu. Meritoriously, the authors found room not only for the more established poets but also for young poets as well. In a work of this range and size, certain omissions are understandable. However, omission of such poets as Jacques Brault, Claude Péloquin or Michel van Schendel are to be regretted.

The anthology opens with an excellent analysis of French Canadian poetics, discussing the links between the historical evolution and the aspirations of the French Canadian people. The second part of the anthology contains a well-balanced selection of poems, ranging chronologically from François-Xavier Garneau to André Payette. In addition, each poet is preceeded by a brief but precise bio-bibliographical note. The translations are uniformly readable despite the different style and moods in the originals, and the rhythm and rhymes are accurately reflected (Romanian permits transposing some poems almost literally, and the transpositions here often vibrate with nearly the same intensity as the originals). There are a few curious renderings — curious not so much for their relative accuracy, but because they sound like Romanian words or expressions taken out of an idiomatic dictionary. For the most part, however, the poems are creatively translated and present a faithful and full-spectrum picture of French-Canadian sensibility.

NICHOLAS CATANOY

RETURNS AND DISTANCES

PATRICK ANDERSON, *Return to Canada.* McClelland & Stewart. $4.95, paper. *A Visiting Distance.* Borealis.

PATRICK ANDERSON'S LAST BOOK to be published in Canada, *The Colour as Naked*, appeared in 1953. Already, after a decade of residence (1940 to 1950) during which he became a Canadian citizen, he had returned to England, and for many years he stayed away from Canada. He made a first return visit in 1971, though England still remains his place of residence. But Canada is once again a place of publication for him. After twenty-three years in which he did not publish a volume of poetry anywhere, two of his books of verse have appeared here within a few months of each other: *A Visiting Distance*, published by Borealis Press late in 1976, and *Return to Canada*, published by McClelland & Stewart in the spring of 1977.

The double event is made all the more curious by the ethically strange fact that the books largely duplicate each other. We have become used to writers like

Earle Birney inserting favourite poems from past collections into new volumes, but always after an interval that has allowed the original volume to go out of production. In the case of Anderson's books, quite a number of the best poems appear in the two volumes almost simultaneously; nevertheless, the general level of *Return to Canada* is notably higher than that of *A Visiting Distance*, which contains a much larger proportion of the kind of second-drawer poems which do not quite come off in terms of total response but which poets are often reluctant to abandon because they are technically competent and a good deal of work has gone into them. Since so much of the good work is duplicated, I would advise readers who are curious about this figure from our literary past to buy merely *Return to Canada*; it is the better value, in design and in content.

Patrick Anderson has always been a difficult writer to place in terms of traditions. Undoubtedly he has a place in Canadian literary history. For about four years — from 1942 to 1946 — he played a catalytic role as the energizing force in the circle which published *Preview* and which prolonged the Montreal movement in poetry that had begun in the 1930's with Smith, Scott and Klein. It would be inexact to say that he introduced the tradition of the English 1930's into Canada, as has sometimes been suggested; A. J. M. Smith had published in *New Verse* and Dorothy Livesay was writing "socially conscious" poems influenced by Day Lewis and Spender years before Anderson appeared in Montreal. But, because he came after the later 1930's, during which poets like Dylan Thomas, George Barker and the *Twentieth Century Verse* group moved into prominence in London, Anderson did bring an enriched tradition with him, and so he was an important visitor at a time when Canadian poetry was moving into its modernist phase, which it did by escaping (insofar as quasi-political terms apply in such a context) from colonialism into cosmopolitanism before finally attaining a degree of national self-definition. The cosmopolitanism took two directions; while the *First Statement* group of Layton, Dudek and Souster loosely represented the American strain derived from Pound and Williams, Anderson more than any other single figure was the dedicated transmitter of the British-European strain that was projected mainly through *Preview*. This crucial historical role has made him seem a more effective poet than he actually was, for at that time he appeared to overshadow poets like P. K. Page who have since shown themselves to posses more authentically original talents.

While it is very easy to define Anderson's catalytic function and his emphatic historic role during a brief but important phase in Canadian poetry, it is much more difficult — particularly three decades after those heady times — to come to terms with Anderson as a poet. We have so long been used to thinking of him in terms of the handful of poems reproduced in A. J. M. Smith's *Book of Canadian Poetry*, and especially of his medium-long — and possibly best — piece, "Poem on Canada," that to encounter his work spread over two volumes with a total of 260 pages, including many poems that have not seen print before, forces a new assessment. How good a poet has he ever been? And where does he really belong?

They are both hard questions to answer. The publisher's blurb for *A Visiting Distance* described him as a "mid-Atlantic poet," arousing the absurd vision of a hermit versifying on an ocean raft to the tune of Mother Carey's chickens. A trans-Atlantic man might be a better description of Anderson, for he has had a curious double career on the two sides of the ocean, as a prose writer in Britain (for none of his travel books and autobiogra-

phies has been published in Canada) and a poet here (for none of his books of verse has been published in Britain where his poetic reputation has always been minuscule). There is not very much evidence to suggest what Canada meant to him in the years of absence during the 1950's and most of the 1960's, but he tells us in the Preface to *Return to Canada* that "I began writing again when I learned that there still were Canadians, both old and young, interested in my work." Leaving aside the oddity of this confessed motivation, let us be content for the present to remark on the reciprocal process of catalysis that appears to have been at work. Originally in the 1940's Canada seems to have stimulated Anderson to his first significant work (for having been in the thick of English poetry publication in 1940 when Anderson left I can vouch that he had published nothing significant in Britain); Anderson in turn stimulated other poets in Canada; and now, years later, the process swings back and Canada stimulates him to poetry once again. However, all this may be simplified for his audience in Anderson's Preface, since a significantly large number of the poems Anderson prints in his two new volumes have nothing at all to do with Canada, being English countryside verse of a very traditional kind. At the same time, there is no doubt that his period in Canada thirty years ago does have great personal significance for Anderson in the 1970's, rather as a lost land like that which le Grand Meaulnes sought in Alain-Fournier's novel.

But leaving aside Anderson's personal myth and his paradoxical sense of identity with a country he voluntarily left 27 years ago and to which he has not chosen to return permanently, one is impressed — on considering his work — with the acute self-definition that occurs in a poem

originally written in 1944 about his first days on the North American continent ("Train Whistle: Vermont"), where he describes himself as "an Englishman full of words." Full of words indeed, for one of Anderson's weakening faults is a failure — more pronounced in his recent poems — to recognize when he has said enough. In *A Visiting Distance* particularly, there are whole groups of poems in which one has the sense of prolixity running on like an eloquent tap as the poet ruminates and reflects and aphorizes very intelligently, but without any real intuitive discipline.

And here, I think, we are near the essence of Anderson's work. It is often brilliant, but in the manner of a verse-writing Paganini, all virtuoso effect, all mental skill, and sometimes this is precisely what is needed by the occasion. This is why his "Poem on Canada" — which is reproduced in its entirety in *Return to Canada* — was such a stimulating and such a historically important work; no Canadian poet had yet found the sheer intellectual effrontery to write a virtuoso piece of this kind about Canada, full of strident baroque images, occasional flashing insights, and splendidly orotund rhetoric.

> For see, she says, the salmon pointing home
> from the vast sea, the petalled plethora
> and unplumbed darkness of the sea, she says;
> gliding along their silvery intuitions
> like current in its cables, volt upon volt,
> to flash at last, sparking the mountain falls
> of Restigouche — spawning a silver million.

A dazzling end indeed — and such pyrotechnics were needed in Canada then, but now there is a feeling of excess in phrases like "the petalled plethora" and in the image of salmon gliding "like current in its cables, volt upon volt."

Anderson came with a mental carpet bag filled with fashionable devices from the English 1930's and early critics were easily led to compare him with Dylan Thomas and W. H. Auden. But the only poets who really resembled Dylan were those who shared his background of Welsh chapel rhetoric, from which Anderson's past was distant, and there never have been authentic Audenists other than Auden. It is true that Anderson wrote some poems that read like pastiches of Auden (like "Song from a Play") and Thomas (like "Capital Square") as many other poets did thirty-five years ago, but he has wisely weeded most of these out of his new collections, and what emerges is probably as near as we shall get to the authentic Anderson in his various moods.

It is the work of a travelling minor English poet, who writes some acute observational poems on the places he speeds through and the places where he roosts a while. His long pseudo-philosophic pieces about the condition of man tend to run down into twentieth-century renderings of Young's *Night Thoughts*, and he is at his best in poems where he recounts and comments with a certain irony on what he has seen: poems about people like "Aunt Hildegarde" ("Be assured that her lonely dress / is contemptuous of loneliness") or about animals like "Fox" and "Monkey in Malaya" ("fling on my heart your long-arm'd love! / your mushroom-coloured ears and black / attenuate hands and athlete's back / and round head like woollen ball, / and sigh, and be no weight at all.") or about scenes, like "The Pine: Christieville" (though here one is forced into an uncomfortable comparison with A. J. M. Smith's "The Lonely Land," which is a similar but far sparer and better poem).

Reading Anderson's poems as they are now collected — the lively young pieces of the 1940's and the more sombre pieces of the late 1960's and 1970's — one is impressed by a quality of intellectual virtuosity, of deliberation, of versatile craftsmanship that can range among formal patterns, accompanied by an inability to

fuse feeling and artifice as a consummate poet does. Casting back for resemblances, I am reminded not of Thomas and Auden with whom Anderson has so often been compared in Canada, nor of the Canadian poets with whom he was connected, but rather of English writers of the 1920's — like Aldous Huxley and the male Sitwells — who developed intellectual themes in polished verse, with well turned conceits, but who never quite satisfied as poets. One such writer, Humbert Wolfe, now almost forgotten but then fashionable, wrote a stanza that has always stayed in my mind.

> Spring, like the Chinese
> Sculptor's art
> Has all of beauty
> Save the heart.

It struck me that this applied far more exactly to Humbert Wolfe's poetry than to either spring or Chinese art. He was in fact defining a flaw in mannerism, and he himself was a mannerist. So, in my reading, is Patrick Anderson.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

MARKING TIME

R. GORDON HEPWORTH, *The Making of a Chief*. The Sono Nis Press.

AS A YOUNG DOCTOR just out from England in the mid-1950's, R. Gordon Hepworth practised for a year on a small prairie Indian reservation. *The Making of a Chief* is a novel based on his experiences. As fiction, it is flawed in several fundamental ways; on the other hand, it is an interesting failure since its theme involves a knowledgeable and forthright attack on Canada's official policies towards the native people.

The thrust of the attack is aimed at the inadequacy of health care facilities on the reserve and the maladministration of the services in general. Certainly, the band at Squibb Reserve is not without blame for its misfortunes. Diseases caused by indiscriminate fornication, adultery, drunkenness, and poor hygiene are among the many problems the authorities — Catholic priests and Indian Health Service personnel — must cope with. Still, notwithstanding the almost wilful acquiescence by the hereditary chiefs of the band to the hopeless situation, the larger share of the blame falls squarely on the Whites. With a few pitiful exceptions (and these cowed by the customary timidity of bureaucrats before their superiors), they connive steadily to worsen matters by denying the Indians proper medical attention.

It is an old tale of arrogance, procrastination and powerlessness. The root of the problem, of course, lies in the evils of a system which is out of date and self-perpetuating. For example, according to its treaty with Ottawa the band had been promised only the maintenance of a "medicine chest" for its immediate health needs. But times, and attitudes, change. Having watched his mother die because an emergency operation was not performed, the young chief of the band, Albert Running Up Hill, is determined to get his people a better deal. Naturally, he meets quick opposition from those government administrators whose only interest is the status quo, that is, control of the purse-strings and the continued passivity of the Indians. In the words of the rather cynical narrator of the story (not the author): "Time was the only remedy. . . . to sedate the passion of the Indians."

Ironically, the young chief is "made" in two contradictory senses. First, he learns to distrust White promises and through shrewd politicking with the civil servants gains self-respect and the admiration of his people. But, second, he is made a pawn in these skirmishes, by his wily foes, and ultimately is outmanoeu-

vred. Yet at the end he has shown Indian and White alike what non-violent pressure can provide — a still sub-standard but greatly improved treatment centre.

Clearly Hepworth sympathises with Albert's struggle. But his method of storytelling undermines his point of view. He uses a doctor-administrator as his omniscient narrator, a man who appears to see and hear all but who keeps a deliberately low profile in order to retain the confidence of his superiors. The device might have worked had the narrator been kept studiously neutral, but in the end he is seen to be a crafty opponent of Albert. His cynicism has been alluded to; in fact, throughout the story, the reader comes to find his personality more and more distasteful for, despite his profession, he places more faith in red tape than the Hippocratic Oath. In short, he is an unreliable narrator, particularly when he feigns ignorance of events he should have known about until the concluding chapters.

Obviously, this narrative fault tends to lessen the impact of the story. The heavily episodic nature of the plot (and the burden of repetitive intrigues) are also flaws. The authenticity of Hepworth's descriptions of life on the reserve is likewise marred by several melodramatic characterizations: Albert appears the more "white" the more he is thwarted by "black" officials such as the incompetent Dr. Hawke and the sly Father Creevy. On the other hand, some of the minor characters are well drawn, especially Meade, the agent, and Miss Purgass, the public health nurse. Their dedication to duty, under difficult circumstances, is seldom appreciated on Squibb Reserve.

In a "Preface" to the novel, J. Michael Yates reminds the reader that even a cursory glance at the media is convincing evidence that the Indian "wars" of the past "are happening still." Whether at Wounded Knee or beneath the Peace Tower in Ottawa, the confrontations break out with increasing frequency, like a rash on the body politic. Of course governments are not solely to blame for fostering racism. Nevertheless, it does appear that the slow, painful integration of Indians into Canadian society is hindered by the reservation system which treats them as unwanted children, and impedes their efforts to achieve full equality before the law in the land of their birth.

ERIC THOMPSON

IN A HIGH CLEAN STYLE

IRVING LAYTON, *For My Brother Jesus.* McClelland & Stewart. $4.95.
DENNIS LEE, *The Death of Harold Ladoo.* Kanchenjunga Press, n.p.
C. H. GERVAIS, Poems for American Daughters. Porcupine's Quill. $2.95.

THERE IS ALWAYS a temptation in a review like this one, where one is considering several books, to give grades or prizes, to rank the books in a hierarchical order. I am trying to resist this temptation, because these three books have little in common with one another. Let's see if I succeed.

For My Brother Jesus. What to say of this amazing, provocative, annoying and prickly book? Layton's purpose is set out clearly in the Foreword: to reclaim Jesus for the Jews and to expose the fundamental lie of Christianity, a lie which gave aid and comfort to antisemitism through the ages. With the zeal of the freshly converted, Layton is curiously like the man who went off into the woods and came back having reinvented the typewriter. I mean that seeing Jesus as a great Jewish prophet is not a new idea and seeing Christianity as the prime force

in history for antisemitism is not either. The Second Vatican Council may have been moving too late and doing too little when phrases like "the perfidious Jews" were finally striken from the liturgy, but the recognition of guilt was there.

Fortunately, many of the poems in the collection seem to have little to do with the polemical stance of the Foreword and can be simply read as distinguished additions to the Layton canon. Such poems as "Ulysses in Spetsai" and "Seduction of and by a Civilized Frenchwoman" show Layton's sharp acidulous eye probing at its best, and especially in "Seduction," his manipulation of languages in a kind of tumbling acrobatic verbal rush destroys verbal pretension with clear-eyed wit.

He switches mood in "For My Distant Woman," a delicate love poem —

> as the sun's semen enters the crimson flowering
> and often, as now, like the first heavy gout of rain
> that makes it toss and shiver on its tender stem.

Then he uses grimly jocular rhyme in "Fiasco", turns tender again in the nostalgic "On Revisiting Poros After an Absence of Ten Years", rips into Christian hypocrisy and false piety in other poems and rushes on.

The word "runt" occurs often in these polemical poems. It seems for me to sum up his mordant vision of a contemporary landscape peopled by pygmies, a world given over to pimps, life-haters, feeble androgynes, the quoters of other men's words. The longer poem "The Arch" says it all in the final image of a broken ruin looking like a "faded grin."

Layton never stands still. There have been twenty-five volumes of poems and the singing never stops.

Dennis Lee's *The Death of Harold Ladoo* is one long poem, an elegy, a eulogy, a diary, a love letter, a cry of

pain, an attempt at exorcism. I am tempted to say *confessional*, but am too conscious of how patronizing that term has come to be, and how far short it falls in describing this poem's painful honesty. In wry bitter self-condemning mockery, Lee tells the story of his friendship with Harold Ladoo, young Trinidad-born novelist, who came to Canada in 1968 and who was murdered during a visit to Trinidad in 1973.

Lee creates a mask of self-denigration to good effect. His persona insists on seeing himself as a typical white liberal academic, living in a life-denying urban landscape. I say "persona" because although Lee continually signals that this is no mere book, that he is writing truth, not fiction, he does create characters in a pattern of attraction-repulsion which I find definitely histrionic. In keeping with his mask of self-contempt and loss, Lee uses a diction which is spare, dry and minimal, befitting the pervasive tone of loss and grief.

The Death of Harold Ladoo appears, at first glance, to be a radical shift in subject and style for Lee. From the public voice of *Civil Elegies* to the private chant of this present book seems a long way to go. Yet there are similarities: for one, the use of the self-mocking mask, and the strong and persistent sense of an erosive death-seeking in contemporary society.

C. H. Gervais' *Poems For American Daughters* is a very small book. (I seem, unconsciously, innocently, to have fallen into the grading trap. I have arranged my review from the thickest to the thinnest. Yet I insist that I make no brief for less or more quality. Each of these books deserves our passionate attention on its own merits.) There are only twenty-four poems in this book, all of them short lyrics.

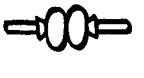
But I feel that it is an important book. I have watched Gervais's progress from the mid-Sixties, from the private, personal *Sister Saint Anne* through *Other Marriage Vows*, and *A Sympathy Orchestra* up to *Bittersweet*, his largest and most comprehensive collection in 1972. With each book, his grasp on technique was more sure and his subjects less personal, more external, in a steadily widening perspective. *Poems For American Daughters* represents an intensification rather than a "breakthrough."

The "American Daughters" appear in a found poem from the *New York Times Book Review*, but they are also the people living in Canada near the American border, brought up on American radio and tv, seeing American movies, dreaming in American.

Gervais makes real magic out of this familiar territory. In "Charles Atlas" he lifts a crude ad out of the back of a comic book and turns it into enduring myth. But in "His Father," and "Good News" and "That Friday Night" he uses what appear to be vividly actual "case histories," focusing in on some telling point until the whole person comes alive for us. Often he uses the metaphor of photography as if (for example in his love poems) he wanted to preserve and fix the passing moment.

What else are poems for? Lee ended his long poem with the phrase "In a high clean style." Layton, Lee and Gervais have each, individually, achieved this. Their poems open our eyes, radically alter our perspective, shake us from our comfort.

EUGENE MCNAMARA



ED. NOTE: *All of Baba's Children*, by Myrna Kostash, is published by Hurtig of Edmonton, not M & S, as given in *CL* No. 77.

A VARIETY OF VOICES

SUSAN MUSGRAVE, *The Impstone*. McClelland and Stewart.
IAN YOUNG, *Common-or-Garden Gods*. Catalyst.
DAVID BERRY, *Pocket Pool*. Peppermint Press.

THE EFFECT OF Susan Musgrave's poetry in *The Impstone* is soothing, even though the subject is largely death. In simple, subdued, mellifluous language, the reader is invited to flow, to escape into cool fantasies of the unconscious life, to experience its purity. So there is numbing frequency in the use of particular motifs — animals, the moon, the sea, fish, blood, bones, skull, skeleton and dust. One is lulled and rocked and longs for something hard or harsh on which this smoothly morbid landscape might falter. But for Musgrave, "death is the same/ in all languages." The poems are open and direct, almost to a fault; they lack surprise and idiosyncrasy; they deepen too slowly as products of a long singular simmering in one place — three years in the Queen Charlotte Islands.

This fact and its artistic results prompt a serious question. Is there wisdom in setting up a life this way? Whatever happened to poetry of the common life? However accurate Musgrave's responses to specialized isolation may be, they attest to an over-focussed sensibility, in danger of cutting itself off.

While her style strikes an appropriately contemporary low key — short lines and plain diction — Musgrave's preoccupations seem romantic, but in no new or modern way. One does not find the elaborate passions of the Romantics themselves, nor the driven quality and compulsion to theorize that Lawrence had, nor the tortured brilliance of, say, a Plath. However, Musgrave does make something of the male as predator; an incantation

to death recalls the alignment, of her poetic self at least, with the slightly older American generation of "extremist" poets, and there is a telling quote from Berryman. Derivative poetry is the last thing one wants to advocate, but given Musgrave's subject matter and her fragile, rather conventionalized approach to it, she does risk some unfavourable comparison.

Her talent is exemplified in particular poems. "Chiaroscuro" conveys an instinctive identification with the symbols of the North Pacific Coast: moss, stone, fungus, water. She seems entirely convincing when she asks "How could I live/ south of anywhere — ." A piece called "The Impstone" belongs to this area of Musgrave's imagination and is an intriguing fable of civilization's evolution, or devolution, extending the "stone" metaphor naturally but significantly. On the other hand, her use of "frog" elsewhere as emblematic of evil, danger, perhaps even as an animal familiar, seems arbitrary and confusing. If this creature has to do with actual myth, then poetic use of it is still obscure. Fortunately, other collaborations with presumably indigenous myth or legend do produce a kind of meditative verity.

There is in *The Impstone* some promise of a strident tone that gets away with the corny line, entered and slightly altered, trades moon child for witch hag, grieves unprettily over female victimization, is bitter and blunt about childbirth. Potentially, this poet has the snap of satire. Too often, though, anger evaporates and we're left with anti-climax. This happens also to strong images which dissipate either into the same beguiling flow of overworked words, or into split purpose. Buried in abstractions, or the muted parts of poems, are some gems: someone is "struggling like a/ crowded room to/ recover silence;" or this: "Only the dead/ can . . . leave you at the/ crossroads/ scribbling in their dust." Certain poems manage a persuasive combination of personal history and mythic strength: "Skookumchuck," for example, claims an affinity felt with Emily Carr which is no doubt genuine.

Finally, several pieces have the force of real incident. In "Recovery," there are people: Frances, the nurse, the judge, and references to a traumatic experience that allow this work to achieve poetic signal from a depth of suffering. "Juggernaut" also reveals figures from the past who have somehow contributed to present disintegration. This dimension of the painful and personal, these acts of confronting rather than romantically diluting may be a rich poetic vein for a poet of acute sensitivity and feeling and, it is hoped, a fuller technical range, to mine further.

By contrast to Musgrave's perhaps over-conscious efforts to be serious, Ian Young's poems in *Common-or-Garden Gods* seem at peace with themselves, and none-the-less communicative. The personality emerging from this writing is one with a talent for enriched living and careful listening. As one poem puts it, "no renunciation/ but a following through." Consequently, there is a stimulating mixture of expression to be sampled, and much of it is sensual.

One of the dominant moods is a kind of sun-shot melancholy, a nostalgia (which combines both appreciation and anticipation) for friends or lovers gone, "for Billy, for Mac, for Craig and Chris, for the night train,/ for the best of it." Some poems are characterized quietly by an implicit knowledge that though a moment of joy be marked by nature, by the garden tortoises who "come out, blinking, slow/ only on sunny days/ for visiting lovers," it may be too exquisite to last. Young is good at catching kinds of ecstasy. In fact the love poem, so difficult to write, is enticingly done in this book,

"Letter to Bellingham" for example. This is partially due to a kind of haiku-like reticence; just the right touch is maintained. Some longer poems trace the history of a relationship, highlighting, amazingly, those aspects which do translate, without themselves being destroyed. Often, too, the vigour of passion is regarded as a species of noble "lion strength."

The characteristic of sharing is very strong; the poet is generous, his poems open and inviting. Often, the invitation is to male homosexual love, as when he regrets "the hazy vision/ of well-married men/ living with wives/ they hardly know." Generally, it is to delicious enjoyments of many kinds. Young offers a sensibility delightful to know, as in "Sky/ Eyes," and "Fireflies," which deftly build and interweave to compose their totality.

Unhappiness is also freely transmitted. Odd, uneasy thoughts, feelings and encounters, are followed with precision. "Rob, Polishing His Motorbike" presents the problem of perceiving — how one sees a friend, how he sees himself, how to write it. While there is sadness and emptiness in this poet's world, there is also acceptance, and it is never naive:

> We love one another and have something in common though we don't speak of it, but fall, slowly, into categories the world will remember us by.

"Yuletide Story," from which these lines come, has an autobiographical tone that is masterly. Frequently, Ian Young conveys the mystery of ordinary experience often relating to filming or photography, sometimes to words themselves. He is a very rewarding poet to read, offering interest, pleasure, and a sense of glowing life.

David Berry's caustic little poems in *Pocket Pool* have a directly conversational tone, but a variety of voices. We are spoken to by Jack the Ripper, John the Baptist, Theodoric, Judas Iscariot, and various exponents of ancient Eastern wisdom, to name but a few. One might regard the book as a collection of the "detritus," to use one of Berry's own words, from civilization. The problem seems to be what, if any, of this debris is worth salvaging? Value judgments are not made. Subjects are given equal time and cleverness of expression, whether literary parody or dream lunacy. Frequently cliché is used with darkly comic effect. Jack the Ripper ends a very touching attempt to elicit our sympathy with the line "There's No Rest For The Wicked." There are often ludicrous images — the "fat lady of the sonnets" has "Teeth like tombstones" — and accurate ones — "Even the self-inflicted wounds are harmless/ here, like cutting yourself with paper:/ you can cut yourself to pieces, smiling." Other metaphorical uses run from the disturbingly and/or humorously surrealistic to the merely silly.

Enjoyed cynicism plays a significant role. It may be the only pure emotion left. "Killing Spiders" is one of several poems making a nasty point about automatic voraciousness, and elsewhere the mouth seems to be the only properly functioning organ, or location for the only sensation we know, to be bitterly savoured: "Life is long, decay's a transient,/ thing only the taste lingers, dissolves." Many poems end in a combination of disappointment and indifference: the accident victim of "Lady in the Gutter" is efficiently, callously dealt with; the persona of "Make Mine Sarsaparilla" gives up on the Hun-like Scouts of his boyhood memories when he realizes they have "drifted into obvious occupations" such as chopping meat for Dominion stores. "Love In The Kitchen" details a bored predictability that is uncomfortably realistic. With such unrewarding observations, the poet is left to make his patterns. They are sharp, negative, and hilarious at once, constructed

with a quick twist of the kaleidoscope from scraps of life: private, public, past, present, conscious, unconscious. Book and print are tiny; the result is pointed but fleeting; you feel it sting, but can't remember why.

The disillusioned satiric centre of the book may be found in many telling lines: "Tired of sacrificing himself/ at other people's expense/ he proclaims himself/ an apostle of lost causes," "knowing you are/ not renewable," but "from birth a silent/ turning into stone." For man in his obsolescence, "there is an eternity of dying." Even Judas Iscariot's flippancy only accentuates the bleakness of a life. Finally, and most depressingly, there is futility. The "last survivor" is left to admit that "Everything bred without him."

The conclusion of *Pocket Pool*, with its Oriental riddles, might have supplied some saving sanity and resolution as a balance to Berry's prickly version of life, but really, we remain with stunned obvious answers to seemingly non-sensical puzzles. Perhaps because the book's sardonic tone is already well established, these final parables don't provide enough of the release possible with true Zen illogicality, and we're left with a kind of hollow laughter.

PATRICIA KEENEY SMITH

MAINSTREAM CURRENTS

RONALD SUTHERLAND, *The New Hero: Essays in Comparative Quebec/Canadian Literature*. Macmillan, $5.95. *Where Do the MacDonalds Bury Their Dead?*. Paperjacks, $2.50.

BOTH THE TITLE and the subtitle of *The New Hero* are somewhat misleading: "The New Hero" is simply the lead article, and the book as a whole (97 pages of text) is a mixed bag of literary/cultural criticism, in which the literary segments are not heavily comparative, though Sutherland's criticisms of individual authors are much enhanced by his ability to put them into bicultural contexts. The essays on Quebec authors in particular are good introductions for Anglo-Canadian readers, though it seems less likely that Quebec readers would benefit from, say, his rather sketchy Robertson Davies essay.

"The New Hero" itself is both the most substantial and the most comparative of these pieces; I found it more speculative than definitive, however, as the "new heroes" come from a small sample of novels over a very short time, and are, arguably, individual aberrations for the "norm" of Canadian heroism (if what that is has yet been clearly determined), rather than a genuinely new development. "The new hero ... has suddenly exploded from the pages of Canadian fiction," though he has been "lurking" in earlier works, "playing a secondary role":

> Now he is the main character playing the dominant role, and he is not the end-product of a long struggle with himself. He is strong, self-reliant, self-trusting, confident, and highly individualistic, but unlike the legendary American hero of similar traits, he is not the self-righteous exponent of established national values. He is respected, however grudgingly at times, without being respectable in the conventional sense. Actually, he seems to operate outside the scope of respectability. Undoubtedly he reflects changes now taking place in Canadian society....

This more assertive new hero is contrasted with the "prêtres manqués" of earlier stories, who blame themselves for their misfortunes and wallow in their own weaknesses. Sutherland's chief examples are in contrasting pairs: Sinclair Ross's Doc Hunter (*Sawbones Memorial*) so much more self-confident than Philip Bentley; Adele Wiseman's Hoda (*Crackpot*) so much more individualistic than

Abraham (*The Sacrifice*); André Langevin's Pierrot (*Une Chaîne dans le parc*) so much more self-reliant than Doctor Alain Dubois (*Poussière sur la ville*). Sutherland is too modest to note that, in a kind of self-fulfillment of his prophecy, he has himself created a "new hero" — Ti-Mac from *Where Do the MacDonalds Bury Their Dead?*

The MacDonalds is as full of local (Montreal) colour as if decades of Canadian-written anonymously North American novels had to be atoned for in one fell swoop, and as burdened by cultural allegory as if the case for biculturalism rested upon the strong but average shoulders of his New Hero, as it does even upon his bicultural nickname. The macho melodrama which sweeps him up would seem almost irrelevant to the book's themes were it not that (and with no Atwood copout, either) only the Americans are the sickies. A pop thriller, a good fast read in itself, has been grafted onto a rather sentimental story about an oversexed, but very decent (Scots) Canadian, "operat[ing] outside the scope of respectability," and his equally decent (French) Canadian friends. Ti-Mac is colour-blind when in America, where he has the nicest black and American friends (only the *whites* are sickies.) All this in turn is grafted onto an Information Canada bulletin about why the Quebecois want independence — but clearly, if we all got along as well with them as Ti-Mac, they might well *not* want it. There is enough French and joual in the book to make its Anglo readers happy that they took French in 'igh school, without being enough to inconvenience them if they didn't take it in college. There is an awful lot of sex, jolly at the time, but as one thinks back on it, really very discreet. Such screwing, drinking and fighting heroes, male chauvinist pigs of the nicer

sort, are better drawn by far in the novels of Robert Kroetsch, whose New Heroes are more reflective, self-aware and three-dimensional than Ti-Mac and just as virile and jolly.

Sutherland's essay on *Fifth Business* unfortunately attempts to cast Dunstan, too, as a New Hero. No doubt he is, in some ways, but the analogy between him and the heroes discussed in the earlier essay can only be drawn at the price of radically overestimating the self-confidence he has acquired by his "middle years," and underestimating the extent to which his integration is a process not to be completed this side of Zürich: *precisely* "the end product of a long struggle with himself." Likewise, making Dunstan's character a kind of metonym for the new shape of Canadian identity, though evidently true in very general terms, is stretched past the point of usefulness when Dunstan's self-investigations are paralleled to "a new spirit of inquiry, a desire to probe ... the darker aspects of the Canadian totality."

Fifth Business, being written in the first person, is described as "another offshoot of the ancient monologue form," to examples of which Sutherland dedicates what I consider to be the most substantial and fascinating essay in this volume, that on Yvon Deschamps. Sutherland considers Deschamps' monologues as both literature and cultural commentary, and here shows clearly and provocatively the links between them. He is detailed and informative about Deschamps' forms and structures and particularly helpful on Deschamps' language: joual used in satire. The essay is only marred by a very odd introduction, where all first-person narratives are pooled together in one "phenomenon" of monologue, alleged to appeal especially to Canadians (of both cultures). First person narratives of an explicitly "written" character — e.g. *As for Me and My House*, *Fifth Business*, and *Prochain Episode*, are not distinguished, as monologues, from texts like *Huckleberry Finn*, which may indeed have some affinity to spoken tradition, and might thus provide some useful analogue to the almost wholly oral monologues of Quebec.

The other three writers Sutherland discusses are Grove and (in one essay) Langevin and Bessette. The inquiry into whether Grove was a realist, as he himself maintained, or a naturalist, as the standard critical definitions would suggest, proceeds rather schematically to opt for the latter, and concludes (more interestingly) with a tribute to Grove as a cultural thinker. The Langevin-Bessette essay tries, perhaps rashly, to establish "distinctly Canadian" motifs, but is withal a useful and informative introduction to these authors. The account of Bessette's *La Bagarre* makes one wonder if perhaps Ti-Mac did not take some of his origins from there. If so, it would be almost the only example of a bicultural *influence* that I could extrapolate from the contents of this book.

The remaining essays include an agreeable survey of chiefly Anglo-Canadian war novels and two more culturally oriented pieces, "Tabernacles à douze étages" and (the concluding essay) "The Mainstream." These latter two incline towards liberal humanist rallying cries — "even more communication" — and towards cultural optimism. One is grateful for the details, selected by a keen as well as human eye, one is approving (inevitably) of the sentiments, and yet sometimes skeptical of the prognosis.

"The Mainstream" is also more comparative than any other essay except "The New Hero." Sutherland adds the somewhat uneasy metaphor of the title to the rapidly growing collection of metaphors for two literatures in one land, to which his original "ellipse" was such a notable contribution. "Mainstream" seems

to signify not what Canadian literature is, as one would suppose from normal usage, but what by Sutherland's political syllogisms it ought to be and is perhaps becoming: two literatures mutually aware, and taking each other into account. So that trickle of authors who, like Hugh MacLennan (affirmatively) or Hubert Aquin (negatively) are already thinking biculturally, constitute, proleptically, the mainstream. This is surely ideological wish-fulfillment blurring, with a rash though praiseworthy optimism, the terms of literary criticism.

P. MERIVALE

INTERLACED PLOTTING

MARGOT NORTHEY, *The Haunted Wilderness: the Gothic and Grotesque in Canadian Fiction.* University of Toronto Press, $4.95.

THAT CANADIAN literature is composed of two languages, each of which participates in major Western cultures, and has enjoyed contributions from Ukrainian, German, and Icelandic, marks it *sui generis* as an object of comparative study. That its literature is of a minor character, when viewed against the traditions of English, French, and American literature, makes it difficult to evaluate, for the critical attitudes that these three literatures have generated cast such a shade over our literature that great tact is required to assert what is native and what is not. This, of course, is not a new problem, nor is it exclusively a literary one. At the risk of echoing Northrop Frye's query, "Where is here?," as a way of indicating the context of our literary situation, it should be said that an adequate criticism of Canadian literature depends upon how it is placed, and it must be located at once in a North American and European zone of significance so that, paradox as it may appear, its native contours may emerge. Canadian criticism by nature faces an ambiguous task, and its basic gesture must be circumspect.

The achievement of Margot Northey's monograph, *The Haunted Wilderness,* when measured against some recent studies of English-Canadian fiction, is the relatively modest role that the adjective "Canadian" plays. By refusing, furthermore to isolate a dominant theme designed to assert a central Canadian cultural point of view, the book is assured of further distinction. As the sub-title implies, Northey has chosen a type of fiction that has not often claimed critical attention, inasmuch as the relationship between the gothic and the grotesque and a "national experience" do not come quickly to hand. For the sake of convenience, the book is divided into two sections, addressing nineteenth- and twentieth-century fiction respectively. Each section is provided with brief considerations of a methodological character, and a series of characteristic examples drawn from English and French (with a rare exception, in translation, alas) are analysed.

The major critical problem that the book raises is reflected in the use of "gothic" and "grotesque" as literary terms. As she declares in the introduction:

> Both terms involve a subjective and often symbolic vision of experience which invokes feelings of fear or horror, although the grotesque may frequently have a comic side as well. Both suggest distortions in characterization, although the grotesque leans to visual ugliness and bizarre juxtapositions, whereas the gothic may only give two-dimension portraits with emphasis on a few exaggerated qualities. Both the gothic and the grotesque present mysterious, non-rational levels of experience, whether one chooses to call these the dark side of the soul, the night side of life, or the impulses of the id; both react against the conventional ordering of reality, seeking in strange ways a truth beyond the accepted surface

of life. Sin and death are the dominant themes of both.

Although the author hastens to qualify these qualifications by indicating that gothic was the mode of the nineteenth century, and grotesque the contemporary mode, the definition is so inclusive of both that one wants to know why the need for two terms. Analysis of the two kinds of fiction indicates, moreover, that both modes serve different purposes. While the gothic is not as revolutionary as English examples imply, the pattern seems to be one of virtue and goodness triumphant. The gothic, as Northey suggestively argues, is overcome in Canadian fiction by the sentimental. No one, however, would state that the same is true for the grotesque. The exhaustion of human will in Blais' novels, to cite only one author, is so persuasive that one can understand why Marxist criticism can hail the grotesque as a cultural defeat. The author appears, therefore, to be more exercised by the consistency of her thesis than by the truth of the text when she concludes her analysis of *La Guerre, Yes Sir!* with the observation that: "Carrier gives no real hint of the shape of things to come, but the undying energy of his characters and the constant upsurge of humour against horror, precludes a vision of total despair." A reading of *King Lear* might lead to the same conclusion, but Carrier shares with Blais a sense of metonymy in which humorous elements are only introduced in order to be suppressed. While the book demonstrates, then, a credible line of development for the gothic romance, the relationship between gothic and grotesque is tenuous indeed, and perhaps the brevity of the book or the paucity of material may prompt the sense of weakness in the method.

The treatments of *Wacousta* (a Canadian prototype) and *Kamouraska* (psychological gothic) are particularly well developed. For *Wacousta* she confirms, without acknowledging, Marcia Kline's distinction between American and Canadian approaches towards the terrors nature holds (*Beyond the Land Itself* [Cambridge, Mass., 1970]). While American fiction appears to opt for the primitive as opposed to the civilized, Canadian fiction views the latter as "unsuitable" and the former as "a terrifying alternative." Without taking into consideration D. H. Lawrence's statements on the impact of nature on the American spirit, some attention should be paid to Leslie Fieldler's study of the gothicization of nature in Charles Brockden Brown's creation of the "haunted forest" (the phrase is Fieldler's). Similarities, in fact, between Brown and Richardson make the kind of distinctions that Kline and Northey draw difficult to accept. Other assertions are equally awkward. Why, for example, is Hébert's use of psychological analysis "more obviously modern" than Poe, Conrad, James, and Dostoyevsky?

Certain chapters, notably the discussion of *Wild Geese* and *Surfacing*, suffer from brevity, for surely "sociological gothic," so far from being a paradox, has long enjoyed popularity as melodramatic romance, and thus deserves careful scrutiny from the point of view of literary sociology. Furthermore, *Surfacing* could have borne fuller analysis, inasmuch as the dialectic of the plot persistently aims at a resolution of some of the dichotomies already set forth in *Wacousta*. Since the strength of her study lies here, one wonders finally, leaving aside the often forced conjunction gothic-grotesque, whether the kinds of conflict, ambiguity, and interlaced plotting that Northey is adept at identifying could not have formed more explicitly the argument of the book.

E. D. BLODGETT

OF WARS & MEN

TIMOTHY FINDLEY, *The Wars*. Clarke, Irwin, $9.95.

W. A. B. DOUGLAS and BRERETON GREENHOUS, *Out of the Shadows: Canada in the Second World War*. Oxford University Press, $14.95.

PHILIPPE VAN RJNDT, *Blueprint*. Lester and Orpen, $9.95.

RECENTLY THERE HAS BEEN a resurgence of popular interest in books about war, both in this country and abroad. The lifting of the veil of silence around Britain's "Ultra Secret" has undoubtedly led to the beginnings of a series of re-appraisals of events in the Second World War period, and the best-seller status of books such as *A Man Called Intrepid* and *Bodyguard of Lies* testifies to this interest. In Canada, books such as Heather Robertson's *A Terrible Beauty* and Barry Broadfoot's *Six War Years* have enjoyed popular and critical success. None of this is surprising; the subject of human conflict has fascinated men of all ages. But it is clear today that war — whether of the Total, brush-fire, terroristic, or Cold varieties — and its myriad effects on the lives of millions of people is a real preoccupation.

The three books under review here all share this preoccupation and are, indeed, serious responses to the subject. Findley's *The Wars* is a novel about a young officer's experiences in the First World War, but in terms of its theme it is more than a conventional tribute. Rather, because of the honesty and intensity in its expression of the whole horror of armed combat, it is surely one of the most remarkable novels of war ever published. *Out of the Shadows* is, as the authors explain, a "popular overview of the events that comprised Canada's part in the Second World War," but even so it amounts to an illuminating — and controversial — treatment of an as-yet little understood period

of our history. Van Rjndt's *Blueprint* differs greatly from the preceding books in the sense that it is a novel about espionage activities in the Soviet Union and in West Germany, but it, too, offers us a perspective on man's consuming hatreds in a war-like situation.

Findley, a novelist in his late forties, has had indifferent success with his previous books, although his scripts for CBC's *The National Dream* and *Jalna* have earned him a measure of attention. In deciding to write *The Wars* he must have been aware of the potential of failure in dealing freshly with a war about which so much has been written, including novels and memoirs by such famous names as Ford, Cummings, Graves, and Remarque. Probably his motivation was more personal; it appears that his uncle, a Canadian army veteran of the Great War, was his model for the novel's hero, Robert Ross.

Robert's story begins in April 1915, the month of the first bloody encounters at Ypres. When his beloved, hydrocephalic sister dies by accident, the young man decides to bury his sorrow by enlisting in the Canadian artillery branch. By February 1916, he finds himself, a newly-commissioned second lieutenant, in charge of an ammunition supply unit at the front in Belgium. Soon the Germans open their offensive against the Allied salient at St. Eloi, and Robert is caught up with other soldiers in the rout which follows. Slightly wounded, he is sent on leave to England where he renews a relationship with a beautiful but aloof girl of noble blood. Their affair is a bittersweet interlude, for Robert is soon back in the mud of Flanders with his unit.

The crisis in the plot really occurs as Robert makes his return to war. One night he is sexually assaulted by unknown soldiers; and shortly after this outrage, in a moment of madness, he shoots a superior officer for allowing men and animals to be sacrificed needlessly during an enemy bombardment. His fate is sealed: pursued by military police to an abandoned barn (where he has tried to shelter his unit's panic-stricken horses) he is himself shot and captured. Court-martialled, Robert survives the war but dies blind and insane in 1922, having not quite reached the age of 26.

Findley's characterization of his hero is always sure-handed — realistic, never sentimental. Robert is extremely reticent, introspective, hardly ever voicing a personal opinion; but we know him by his actions, by his fortitude in the face of danger, by his selfless care of the frightened animals he seeks to protect from man's brutality — most of all, by the unspoken yearning of his soul to *live* amidst the mindlessness of slaughter. He is a true hero, an exemplar of courage. Findley has achieved something very fine in his delineation of the human spirit, despite the prevailing fashions of our anti-heroic age.

The author's narrative method and powers of description are also extremely effective. Findley's technique resembles Wiebe's in *The Temptations of Big Bear*; the character and his story are carefully reconstructed out of the clippings, diaries, reminiscences, and "facts" of history, providing the reader with a new sense of the reality of the past. The atmosphere of war is caught consistently; the elaboration of small details stamps on our minds the fury of bombardment, the inescapable claustrophobia of life in the forward trenches, the terror of death by drowning in the mire of flooded fields, and much else besides. Finally, the use of bird and animal symbolism throughout the narrative — though at times forced — is effective in revealing Robert's motives, especially his determination to save something of value out of the carnage of death.

Out of the Shadows conveys a very

different impression of the meaning of war in human affairs. Written by professional military historians, it is aimed nevertheless at the layman who wishes a short, readable account of how the Second World War affected Canada's social, political, and economic life. (Naturally, the book contains chapters on the nation's military contributions to the Allied effort as well. Ironically, in this regard, the authors conclude that "in the final analysis Canada's effort was not essential to winning the war." Perhaps not, given the enormous resources of the United States; but such a statement is bound to anger, and to hurt, many people in this country.)

Among the important developments in the period discussed by the authors the economic transformation of the country brought about by the necessities of war is seen as perhaps most noteworthy. From almost a standing start, Canadians were able to achieve miracles of production in the space of a few years. The sluggishness of the Depression yielded to a highly-efficient war economy in which every Canadian had a job and some real hope for the future. At the end of hostilities Canada's place as a middle-power in the world community was asssured. All of this is the stuff of contemporary myth and has often been discussed by other writers. What Douglas and Greenhous manage to clarify is the deliberateness of the processes of change, how the problems of poor utilization of civilian, military, natural and financial resources were solved by shrewd political policies and the willing co-operation of Canadians. The photographs which accompany the text add substantially to the impression created of a nation at war.

Philippe van Rjndt still hasn't reached the age of thirty but already he has won a reputation as a promising thriller writer. (Currently, he lives in Toronto; his earlier novel was called *The Tetramachus Collection.*) The plot of *Blueprint* is much too detailed to summarize, but in the mode of its genre, spy fiction, it tells a hard-hitting story of murky intrigue. In essence, Captain Alexander Roy of the Soviet military espionage branch becomes a victim of the sinister Bibnikov, the chief of the KGB's Special Investigations unit. Van Rjndt takes too many pains to keep his story-line clear, and the book is much too "talky" throughout. The denouement is melodramatic. Still, these faults aside, the novel serves as a grim reminder of how perilously near the surface smile of détente lie the fangs of war.

ERIC THOMPSON

ONE CROWDED DIMENSION

DAVID HELWIG, *The Glass Knight.* Oberon, $8.95 cloth, $4.50 paper.

WHEN DAVID HELWIG published his first novel, *The Day Before Tomorrow*, in 1971, it was suspected that his talents, though considerable, were not those of the novelist. This suspicion was strengthened in 1974 by the appearance of *Atlantic Crossings*, a book of poem sequences in which Helwig's quite genuine concern for the processes of history seemed to have found its appropriate form. With *The Glass Knight*, however, Helwig returns to the novel, and our earlier suspicion is confirmed: though Helwig writes well, what he writes are not good novels.

The Glass Knight is in fact an allegory, in the same sense that Morley Callaghan's early novels were called allegories: tolerantly, but with a faint tinge of regret. Although Helwig's two principals, Robert Mallen and his schizophrenic girlfriend, Elizabeth, are both

interesting and complex as characters, neither quite comes alive as a human being. Both are rather bloodless embodiments of contrasting ideas, facing cameos, than the ruthless portraits of humanity in conflict one feels they were meant to be.

Though the characters are one-dimensional, it's a crowded dimension. The novel moves loosely around the idea of pain and its consequent awareness: while Canada undergoes its mildly traumatic FLQ crisis in late 1970, Robert and Elizabeth's relationship undergoes a similarly mild disintegration. Robert, forty, divorced, a fragile knight in glass armour, seeks out pain because of the awareness (his quest, you see). Elizabeth, as cold and unyielding as one of Picasso's blue nudes, avoids awareness because of the pain.

On the allegorical level, Elizabeth is Canada: she is bilingual but predominantly English, she consistently turns her back on reality in order to nurse her illusions of peace and progress (and gets away with it in the end, by the way), and Robert even refers to her rather fearfully at several points as "quelques arpents de neige." Robert's allegorical equivalent is less heavy-handed (and therefore less effective). He bewails Elizabeth's inability to stare down life, but he is as unable to determine the course of his own pilgrimage as (presumably) the rest of us poor peregrines. Everyman? Everycanadian?

The comparison with Callaghan is not entirely gratuitous: Callaghan's early novel, *A Broken Journey*, may profitably be seen as *The Glass Knight*'s grandsire. There is the same Marxist economy of style, the same Freudian teasing, the same wooden dialogue that too often descends into an improbable exchange of soliloquies, and the same intense, brooding attachment to the minutiae of existence. But Helwig lacks Callaghan's prosaic instinct, a lack that aids the writing but hinders the novel. Though his random incidents are all thematically linked, they do not add up to a plot. They rather crowd one another off the page than provide the unity and direction the novel needs.

Despite the rambling and the brooding, despite the confusion of historic process with politics, the mood of the novel is a compelling one. Helwig's real strength lies in his ability to isolate and to define, in his sensitivity to the aching bones beneath the skin of experience. As a novel, *The Glass Knight* is the work of a fine poet.

WAYNE GRADY

* PHILIP RESNICK. *The Land of Cain*. New Star Books, paperback, $6.50. JOHN D. HARBRON. *Canada without Québec*. Musson, paperback, $6.95. These two books, one frankly tendencious and the other unadmittedly eccentric, have in common the comforting conclusion that English Canada can get along very well without Québec. Philip Resnick sub-titles his book "Class and Nationalism in English Canada," and writes from an openly Marxist standpoint, attempting to show how the emergence of nationalism has coincided with class changes in Canada, and arguing that the Canada which can survive the departure of Québec will be a socialist one. He ignores the crucial question of whether true federalism — as distinct from Trudeau federalism — might render the choice unnecessary through the development of an imaginative co-operative and libertarian socialism rather than the state socialism he appears to favour. So does John Harbron, who provides an unusual and somewhat colourful view of Québec politics by treating the French Canadians quite seriously as Latin Americans, and ignoring the brutalities of Latin American politics to suggest how Québec — and English Canada for that matter — might benefit from the examples of Mexico, Brazil, etc. in creating independent societies within the hemisphere. One wonders whether the remedy might not be worse than whatever ills afflict us now.

L.T.C.

opinions and notes

NEWS FROM NOWHERE

Davey's Criticism

IN MOST PERIODS of our cultural past, Canadian artists in every field have had to live with the tension between accepting or rejecting foreign aesthetic ideologies that came as part of their colonial packages. Fortunately, since the nineteenth century they have increasingly preferred to grope for and to grow their own. In particular, the sixties American style didn't thrive too well in Canada. Because our artists soon realized the so-called Internationalist school was really America writ large there was a more abrupt turning away after the usual flirtation. What use to a country deeply committed to humanist struggles and a concern with documenting the essential human quandaries of culture clash was an ideology dedicated to an assertion of individual will with an emphasis on fad-provoking innovative technique? Remember the New York art critic, writing of William Ronald's large abstracts, who was impressed with "the overwhelming power of the artist's will"? And remember how, having played the power game, Ronald came back home with a Ginsbergian howl reduced to clowning for us on radio and T.V.?

Just as the predispositions of our society and our creative urges are becoming clearer in all areas of our thought and feeling, just as we are coming to realize how unique and potentially important we are as an alternative North American society, just as our art is confidently beginning to express ourselves without self-consciousness about the things that really matter, Frank Davey, editor of the critical journal *Open Letter*, produces a guide to our contemporary literature, that, propagandizing and cleverly slanted, seeks to assert a sixties approach to creativity that even ten years ago only served to bamboozle a few of our young writers until they found their own voices. There is much of a feeling in *From There To Here* that its production was provoked by the spate of thematic criticism of which *Survival* was the main wave and the one most clearly nationalist. "Viewed from the seventies, McLuhan would seem to have been more a symptom of his time than its master," says Davey in his introduction. One's response is to say that Davey himself and the sensibility set for which he is the apologist (or would wish to be) can be seen in the same light.

Davey discusses sixty contemporary authors, in separate articles. Roughly, however, the pieces fall into three groups: hatchet jobs, apple-polishing jobs, and propaganda jobs. The hatchet-jobs, although genteel, are directed towards the Atwood-Anansi group in the main, supposedly for their polemical nationalism although the most vicious is reserved for Graeme Gibson, whose innovative prose at first glance might seem to be attractive to Davey's sensibility but which is dismissed in words which might equally apply to the work of many people whose work Davey espouses: "The elaborate narrative methods are annoyingly pretentious in that they suggest a profundity that they do not deliver." The apple-polishing jobs are directed to older important members of Canada's literary community and tend to be cautious in expression, sometimes damning with faint praise. The propagandizing articles are those which detail the work of writers whose work seems to fit easily into Davey's ideology of sensibility. In a great number of cases these are writers who were associated with Davey in the Black

Mountain derived *Tish* group, plus a few others who have come along since then and have fallen somewhat under its influence, especially some attached to the Coach House Press in Toronto.

This group was, and continues to be, a very consciously avant-garde expression, one determined to obtrude itself onto the world at large willing or no. *Tish*, 5 (1962) contained an editorial by David Dawson under Davey's editorship which is reprinted with the article on Davey (written by *Tish* member Bowering) in a blurry miniature which in part reads:

> After four issues we now know what we want to do. We have reached the stage where we can say NO; we can reject a good poem if it does not interest us. The fact that it may be good does not alter the fact that it may not work the way we feel a poem should work. We print poems that conform to our taste, poems which move somewhat in the same direction as our own.

Twenty-eight years ago, the Automatists of Quebec, in their manifesto, *Refus Global*, introduced many of Davey's notions — especially the idea of unlocking the creative powers of the unconscious. Theirs too was a search for new forms through which to express the notions of a new society. Unfortunately they also went to another cultural centre for their inspiration, to Andre Breton and the surrealists of France, believing the repression of the old order required a strong and internationally acclaimed ready-made aesthetic. But, interestingly, this manifesto, unlike Davey's, made it clear that an *Exclusivist* ideology such as Davey seems to express, was detrimental to their ultimate purposes. In fact, Borduas later felt that what the Automatistes thought was surrealism was nothing of the kind, but a liberating force self-generated, as it has turned out to be. (Interesting when we remember that Borduas' apprenticeship and inspiration grew out of his association with the self-taught and remarkable traditionalist, Ozias Leduc. An example of the old truth that what the best teachers teach is not fact or technique but attitude.)

In his introduction, Davey perceives the retribalizing effects of the post-electric age as creating conditions favourable for decentralizing publishing and other powers. These are notions derived, of course, from McLuhan as much as Atwood's Survival thesis derives from Frye. This is a healthy sign since McLuhan's contribution to the forms of contemporary literature in this country has not had sufficient notice. (The best argued essay in *From There to Here* by the way is the one on Frye which goes straight to the throat by seeking to dispossess the nationalists of much that they feel to be Frye's received axioms.) But when Davey says that "Mandel extended McLuhan's theories to literature," his traditional academic bias that one idea derives from another cannot accept that two men may independently respond to the pressures of their age in their own characteristic ways. Mandel's open-field approach to criticism and verse had more to do with introducing "the whole man" into areas grown markedly one-dimensional than with creating an ideology of method. In all of Mandel's writings the fettering power of ideological bias is protested vigorously (in *Silent Speaking Words* for instance). Mandel's attempt to open up critical sensibility to a multifarious range of expression on its own terms is concordant more with his view of the multicultural and mosaic society he lives in, as well as, one suspects, with his friendship with Irving Layton. The fact that Mandel can write a critical article called "Criticism as Ghost Story" which sees Atwood's *Survival* as the beginning of a new strain in criticism and at the same time write a congratulatory paragraph on the back cover of *To Here* attests to his quite human admiration of both writers' clever and creative minds, and

also to his eclecticism. Perhaps at the time of writing the notice for Davey he was not aware of the fact that Davey's apparently liberating rhetoric was in fact an ideology of an insidious kind. Mandel's retrospective article on the poetry of 1975 published recently in *Books in Canada* is an interesting article to read in this regard.

Davey's ideology favours "the pre-reflective consciousness," the "phenomenological," "multi-phasic" or "random" approach to form and content, with an emphasis on the use of "particulars" over "logicoriented" platonic struggles with the general and the abstract. In these ways, Davey asserts, our writers have moved beyond the "old packages" and "control" of the modernists and their obsession with artificial mythologies. In Davey's words, "Like the electronic media themselves, post-modern Canadian writing is phenomenological in content, presenting the unprocessed pre-reflective phenomena of perception rather than rational reflections of the modernist writer." Although it is not at all obvious from his prose style in this book, Davey prefers "pure noun in kinetic context" and "indirection." Of course, both notions, usually expressed as "cut out the adjectives" and "suggestion is stronger than statement" have been around a lot longer than Davey has. And the expression "leave your brains in the drawer" when writing first drafts has probably equal antiquity.

As an example of this system's method let me quote Davey on Bowering's *Geneve*:

> His most interesting and original poetry to date is *Geneve*, a book based on the thirty-eight trump and court cards of the Geneva tarot deck. Here, in a further step in his quest for personal and literary integrity, Bowering shuffles the cards into an order he will not know until the book has been written, and disciplines himself to record his spontaneous response to the upturned card before turning to its successor. In this poetry, truth is a constantly developing thing, an interaction between various phenomena including the poet.

I find no mention in his lexicon, nor evidence in Davey's poetry, of the polysynthetic charging of language into meaty conglomerates that signifies true tribal expression with its tendency to verbalism that makes static description into true process, resonant with ambiguity — only an emphasis on colloquial collages.

Davey's critical tendencies are to favour the lyric expression and its "Post-Layton" developments, over the narrative — perhaps because of the lyric's particularity, narrative and longer forms tending to deal with large general issues. Much of this preference derives from the Black Mountain school although that movement's avowal of the oral was the more seductive reason for its Canadian acceptance since the oral had been the real basis for Canadian poetry for generations. This emphasis on the short form, particularly the "amatory lyric" which he propounds as the Canadian development from the Black Mountain school (see Bowering article) blinds Davey to the long-standing tradition in Canada of the uniquely Canadian documentary narrative form. This form Dorothy Livesay marvellously analyzed for us in her essays on that subject in *Canadian Literature*, *Contexts of Canadian Criticism* and elsewhere. Strangely, or perhaps not so strangely, Davey mentions not a word about Livesay's researches or of her book, *The Documentaries* (1968) in his article on her, preferring instead to summarize her influence on Canadian writing as author of some of the "most sensitive and powerful poems of feminine sexuality in our literature." The persistence of that form in its contemporary expression through Pratt, Birney and Dennis Lee and latterly Don Gutteridge and Gary Geddes, goes unremarked by him prob-

ably because it refuses to fit into his theory of the random, multi-phasic and pre-reflective expression he admires. Such epics require work and intelligence consciously applied to bring them to fruition. Consequently he prefers the lyrics, or "other poems," in *Civil Elegies and Other Poems*.

Further, the lyric as an expression of intensity which Livesay has shown was often a spin-off from the matrix of the documentary, has, in the sixties and seventies, been incorporated, in the majority of publications, as part of a poem-sequence. As such, the lyric in Canada has been employed as a monitor of changes in the poem-cycle, having the same relationship to a larger conception as the short story has to the rhetoric of the novel. Similarly, Davey includes a preponderance of short story writers over novelists in his book. But here again we see even these writers expressing a concern not with the short story in isolation but as elements of a quasi-novelistic sequence. They include such minor figures as Clark Blaise, whose writing will illustrate what I mean, yet strangely exclude others such as Ray Smith, of a much more experimental and lusty stripe.

The lyric as entity unto itself is rarely printed as such except in small magazines (the same could apply to short stories) towards which of course Davey is predisposed. Thus perhaps his notions are derived from that rather limited view, being, as Bowering puts it, "a determined mover in the little-press world." The amatory lyric, in particular, seems to have rediscovered the musical roots it lost when it was ripped from the canzone and sonetta some five hundred years ago, and it can now be found comfortably asserting itself in the best of our popular songs. That Cohen's lyrics should have moved in that direction is not entirely an accident. And when McLuhan speaks of popular music as being "the literature of the new generation" he is in great part right. This movement may have helped make it clearer to Mandel and others that Layton's poetry is more directly concerned with moral imperatives and myth-making than with sexual adventures.

What Davey has failed to recognize is that retribalization and the re-emphasizing of the old oral tradition in Canadian writing has led not to a pure abandonment of "old packages," but a search for ways to recombine the powers of those forms into more Homeric ones that deal documentarily and directly with the processes of our society and the human quandaries they evoke. Poets attempt to capture some of the effects of prose, and prose writers have attempted to bring poetry's resonances and ambiguities to the novel. James Reaney's documentary lyricism has finally found its home in his impressive stage-saga of the Donnellys; and what can be said of Michael Ondaatje's dramatic prose-poem comicbook lefthanded rediscovering of the nature of American Mythmaking in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*? Even our historical documentary prose drifts towards poetry and the novel. Read the involving social history of the Métis in Woodcock's *Gabriel Dumont*, for example. Found poetry, which Davey espouses as evidence of the use of particularity, also more properly fits into the documentary mode and is thus more widespread than among the members of Davey's Sensibility Set. John Robert Colombo is its best practitioner, gleaning from the stubble of history and literature some extraordinary gems. Colombo's *Canadian Quotations*, in fact, is his masterwork in many ways, a documentary narrative epic in found form combining an amalgam of scholar's knowledge and poet's sensibility into a lexicon of rich texture and evocative particulars. (The book's publication perhaps came too late for Davey to make a comment on it.)

Concrete poetry, with its typographical and later pictorial arrangements is another favourite of Davey, but again it made only a flurry in Canada. It was really an attempt to render those visual ironies of its preceding fad, the haiku, which also didn't lend itself too well to good poetry here since it depended for much of its effect on an interplay of the idea with the aforementioned visual ironies of its ideograms and their placement on the page. With a western phonetic alphabet such things are more difficult if not impossible. But the exercise of both of these internationalist styles, though somewhat contrived and often being neither good art nor good poetry, can sometimes be "interesting" as they say.

Davey also seems unclear what he means by the words "technique" and "form," sometimes using them both in the same phrase. Since throughout the book there is a theme in most of the articles that the random and multi-phasic form is the poet's means to counter the "control orientation" of his society, it would appear that this anarchic structure is actually form used as symbol! But, to Davey, literature is politics anyway: "Every poem, film or novel carries in its form political implications." That he should so chide the modernists for "polemical verse" seems ironic when all that has happened in Davey's sensibility is a shift of "message" from content to form.

What we are left with, then, is really an emphasis on technique. George Grant (again in a book that goes unremarked by Davey) has shown us how this obsession with technique is indisputably the major characteristic of American society which he woefully predicts will ultimately engulf us. I'm referring to *Technology and Empire*. This concern with technique leads Davey to write a rather one-dimensional article about someone like Layton, for instance, whom he sees as perhaps contributing to "the fact that colloquial, open-form and process poetry has in the last decade come to dominate the older academic modes," rather than appreciating that what Layton really taught us was attitudinal as in Mandel's case — how to relish our lives and speak the heart's truth bravely, freely, with as much craft as one can muster. Rosenblatt's *Bumblebee Dithyramb*, the title poem of which is the most engaging chant-poem written in Canada, with marvellous buzzes, shifts and counterpoints which when read properly has held vast audiences spellbound in Bee-ness, can only be seen by Davey as "transparently modelled on the sound poetry of Bill Bissett." (As if his friend Bill Bissett had invented chants.)

The "particularity" that Davey makes much of might at first glance attach itself to Livesay's notions of documentary form. But a closer look will show that Davey's particulars are not of the same order as Rudy Wiebe's or Dennis Lee's but are instead attached to the writer's ego. Davey's Sensibility Set assumes "the concept of the poet as knowing more than he understands — a concept essential to Bowering, Coleman, Gilbert and Nichol." And again, about Gilbert, he remarks, "Gilbert's experiental world is that of most men alive in these decades, mundane, trivial, thoroughly non-spectacular." In Gwendolyn McEwen's work he admires "the explicit references to the personal life of the writer." Except in the genuine talents of Bissett and others whom he largely misrepresents (there is more control in Bissett's work than Davey would admit) Davey's "particular" is too often the banal.

A strangely Calvinist notion seems to govern this sensibility. Although its rhetoric is one of liberation and multifariousness, it exercises itself in diligent exclusion, of the richly imaged, the envisioned, the informed and the well-wrought. For

years the Shoenberg school tried to steer clear of "accidental harmonies" in their twelve tone constructions. Cage-style soundscapists similarly still avoid anything suggestive of "music" in their tones. Just as Cage is now seen by young composers as an acoustic engineer rather than a composer, so Davey may be thought of as a linguistic engineer rather than a poet. Speaking of Davey's confrontations with writers and critics Bowering says, "In the majority of cases his stand is better-researched and more sensitive in the area of language." Calvinist also is the idea that somehow the writer is chosen, becomes one of the elect; and once he is certain of that, all he has to do is let it all go, man, and the universal angels of poetry will speak through him.

Davey's analysis of Frye is directed toward a justification of this last position. He speaks of Frye as having been misunderstood (true) and misapplied (true), then ends: "Frye's theory of composition — based on Blake's dictum, 'the authors are in eternity' — resembles that of such contemporary pre-reflective writers as Gerry Gilbert, Daphne Marlatt, George Bowering, Victor Coleman, B. P. Nichol, and Bill Bissett.... They are the only writers who have shown faith in the ability of the universe to direct composition through open, random, or multiphasic forms, or a belief that the 'craft' of writing involves a listening to 'Mother Nature'."

I'd like to dispute that contention. It is extremely likely, though I have not asked him, that Frye came to that idea through his friendship with Ned Pratt, whom Davey accuses of "overtly fabricated creations" among other things. Just after he died, Viola Pratt told me that Ned wrote purely by "working with the gift lines from heaven." Every creative activity depends on inspiration; there's nothing new in that. What has to follow is an application of learned craft to illuminate the inspiration's true nature. As the Eskimo poet puts it, "Let me breath of it"; and then begins, "I have put my words in order on the threshold of my tongue." To quote Frye again, "The vision inspires the act, and the act realizes the vision."

Where Davey basically goes awry is in his superficial application of McLuhan's principles of communication theory to contemporary literature. McLuhan is a self-confessed footnote to Harold Innis, a man who worked with documentary particulars "in the field" to grow insights about the nature of society of stunning brilliance. McLuhan's ideas are an "innering" of his theme that societies grow in response to the nature of their technologies. But that man is a puppet of his technology has never been an idea held by McLuhan; as we approach the mid-seventies it becomes clear that understanding the consequences of our technologies and engaging in human choice about their use is as important as "Understanding Media" rather than engaging with it in an anarchic passivity, as Davey, in his introduction, advises us to do. The anthropologists Bailey and especially Edmund Carpenter, McLuhan's earth-bound inspiration, understand more profoundly that there exists a symbiotic relationship between technology and culture, just as one exists between culture and language, and as one exists between the poet and his inspiration. The Innuit carver of pre-Houston times in discovering and elucidating the forms hidden in bone and ivory exercised his will neither aggressively nor passively, but in such a way that through a penetrative consciousness he found the form hidden there, then through his skill illuminated it "from within."

Although he would deny it, Davey's sensibility, perhaps stereoscopic — even flashing and iridescent — is still essentially plastic and on the surface, still

related to the multiple perspective of cubism or the veer into dreamscapes of surrealism. (The revival of surrealism in the Southwestern United States might be noted here.) As such, although it offers participation-inviting advances on a Newtonian single point of view, it falls short of an X-ray vision, an entering into the structural essence of things, a penetrative consciousness that engages with reality illuminating it from the inside. One could also contest Davey's comparison in his introduction of literature with the phenomenological basis of science since contemporary science has given way to a direct study of the invisible laws that govern the appearances of reality rather than of the interactions between phenomena.

In *Crusoe*, Eli Mandel's recent book of poetry, which Davey fails to include in his article on him, the jacket copy warns of "some new poems whose simplicity and stark diction may startle some readers." The last poem, *Lake Wabamun*, indicates clearly the poet's movement towards a penetrative dialogue with the essentials of his environment and a recognition of the power of simple language:

> each day I/step/farther/into dark water/ ...
> to have come to this/simplicity/to know/
> only/ the absolute/
> calm/lake/before/night

It is this notion of an illumined reality that underlies Frye's belief in his introduction to *Dialogues Sur La Traduction* (between Frank Scott and Anne Hébert) that, contrary to Robert Frost's notion, poetry CAN be translated; what cannot are merely "the linguistic accidents."

The reading of the work of over a thousand Canadian writers in the last few years, many of them established authors, and my direct correspondence with them, has convinced me that the voice of the seventies, unlike that of Davey's self-ordained avant garde, is more concerned with the outer world than with the inner: the dive into ourselves has become the dive into the other. And the language employed is more simple and directly communicative than the esoterica of Davey's card-games with human sensibility or his obfuscatory articles in *Open Letter*. Hopefully, the critic's role as specialist-interpreter will soon become obsolete, and our literature will be able to speak for itself.

PETER SUCH

MUNRO'S WONDERLAND

ALICE (LAIDLAW) MUNRO, who sold her first story when she was eighteen, was born and brought up on the outskirts of Wingham, Ontario, where her father was a fox farmer. From her early teens she began recording in a vein of reminiscent realism the events and people of ordinary life around her. After a couple of years in the Honours English programme at The University of Western Ontario, she married in 1951 a fellow student, Jim Munro, and moved to Vancouver. In 1968 she gained widespread recognition with *Dance of the Happy Shades*, which won that year's Governor General's Award for Canadian Fiction. A later novel, *Lives of Girls and Women* (1971), and another collection of stories, *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* (1974), have confirmed her position as one of Canada's foremost current writers.

The influences, talent and developing technique of Alice Munro as a short story writer are the particular concern of this essay. In *Literary History of Canada* (1965) Hugo McPherson shrewdly notes that she captures the flavour and mood of rural Ontario and "this region takes on something of the macabre atmosphere

that we associate with Truman Capote and Carson McCullers." During an interview in 1971,[1] after acknowledging Eudora Welty as probably her favourite author, Munro remarked, "If I'm a regional writer, the region I'm writing about has many things in common with the American South.... A closed rural society with a pretty homogeneous Scotch-Irish racial strain going slowly to decay." Also cited as being of particular interest were Southern writers Flannery O'Connor and Reynolds Price, as well as Midwestern author Wright Morris. Their influence, though, was less "in terms of form and style" than "in terms of vision."

Although there are obviously vast differences between Munro's own country and the American South, some attitudes are common to both societies: an almost religious belief in the land and the old rural cultural values; a sense of the past and respect for family history, however unremarkable or bizarre it may seem to outsiders: a profound awareness of the Bible which is reflected in the very language and images of speech; and a Calvinistic sense of sin.

Also influential in Munro's artistic development was journalist James Agee's experiment of integrating photography and text in his joint publication with photographer Walker Evans of *Let Us Now Praise Famous Men* (1960). Like Agee, Eudora Welty had also learned through photography "to see widely and at close hand and really for the first time the nature of the place I'd been born into."[2] Both her interest in grotesques who fail to understand themselves, and her technique may be recognized in Munro's descriptive style. In her "The Ottawa Valley," for example, the narrator remarks significantly about her way of ending that story: "I didn't stop there, I suppose, because I wanted to find out more, remember more, ... bring back all I could. Now I look at what I have done and it is like a series of snapshots, like the brownish snapshots with fancy borders that my parents' old camera used to take."

The author, in a passage in the Epilogue of *Lives of Girls and Women*, talks about her desire to write down and capture the reality of Jubilee town:

> And no list could hold what I wanted, for what I wanted was every last thing, every layer of speech and thought, stroke of light on bark or walls, every smell, pothole, pain, crack, delusion, held still and held together — radiant, everlasting.

This intense feeling for the exact texture of surfaces and the tone of responses makes far greater demands than any cinemagraphic technique can adequately meet. It requires a style more akin to what in contemporary painting is often called "magic realism." Among those loosely categorized in this group, Alice Munro has noted a particular appreciation for the American Edward Hopper's paintings of ordinary places — a barber shop, seaside cottages, a small town street, roadside snack bar or gasoline station. Canadian painters like Alex Colville, Tom Forrestal and Jack Chambers have also influenced her. While all of these artists express themselves in individually different styles, the overall impression which they convey is one of acute perception of their environment. They exercise the selectivity of the expert photographer; yet by some personal, humanizing stroke each object or nuance in their painting somehow appears to have a special significance in its relationship to the rest of the picture. There is a kind of illusionary three dimensional aspect, a super realism or magical and mysterious suggestion of a soul beyond the objects depicted, which leaves the viewer participant with greater insights and an increased sensitivity towards the world around.

Such an impression Alice Munro can create in her extended images, which

often evoke in the reader an intuitive awareness of a story's entire impact. In *Dance of the Happy Shades* this technique can be observed in a number of descriptive passages. Frequently the author arrests or suspends motion before returning to action, as in the still painting description from "Thanks for the Ride" of a typical small town near Lake Huron, after the summer vacationers have gone home:

> It was a town of unpaved, wide, sandy streets and bare yards. Only the hardy things like red and yellow nasturtiums, or a lilac bush with brown curled leaves, grew out of that cracked earth. The houses were set wide apart, with their own pumps and sheds and privies out behind; most of them were built of wood and painted green or gray or yellow. The trees that grew there were big willows or poplars, their fine leaves greyed with the dust. There were no trees along the main street, but spaces of tall grass and dandelions and blowing thistles — open country between the store buildings. The town hall was surprisingly large, with a great bell in a tower, the red brick rather glaring in the midst of the town's walls of faded, pale-painted wood. The sign beside the door said that it was a memorial to the soldiers who had died in the First World War. We had a drink out of the fountain in front.

A winter parallel to this scene is provided in the final paragraph of "The Time of Death," which presents various responses to the fatal scalding of a slatternly woman's infant. In the description of "wooden houses that had never been painted, with their steep patched roofs and their narrow, slanting porches, the wood-smoke coming out of their chimneys and dim children's faces pressed against their windows" and "dead gardens" the fidelity of this pictorial detail reflects the bleakness of the situation. Yet as snow begins to fall "slowly, evenly," it blankets in whiteness the harshness of the tragedy and the pathetic feelings of the people involved.

While the Southern writers mentioned earlier undoubtedly influenced Munro's descriptive style, it was their expression of the profound dignity of even the most trivial events of every day life to which she especially responded. Later, when she first discovered Patrick White through his *Tree of Man* (1955), this feeling for the inherent beauty of every earthly thing was reinforced: for her, too, a lowly ant or a gob of spittle could be worthy of appreciative contemplation. There is a remarkable similarity between the imagery of White and Munro — probably because of their similar apprehension of the "holiness" of all aspects of life, in which "beautiful or ugly had ceased to matter because there was in everything something to be discovered."

The stories of *Dance of the Happy Shades* can be examined in the order in which they were written. Three the author labels as "sort of exercise stories ... not specifically imitative, but they fit into certain patterns."[3] All these treat the maturing process of the young as recalled later, and depend partly for their effect on a bifocal point of view that sees a situation from both an adolescent and an adult perspective. "Day of the Butterfly," with its delicate echo of Benjamin Franklin's "The Ephemera; An Emblem of Human Life," depicts with compression and polish not only the complexity of youthful feelings in the face of inexplicable tragedy but also youth's serene acceptance of death. In "An Ounce of Cure" a mature woman wryly recalls her humiliation over a youthful drinking escapade. Her sophisticated and intimate rapport throughout with the reader closes on a delightfully conspiratorial note as she revisits her home town to attend a funeral at which the undertaker was the person responsible for the unhappy episode: "I saw him looking over at me with an expression as close to a reminiscent smile as the occasion would permit, ... I gave him a gentle uncomprehending look

in return. I am a grown-up woman now; let him unbury his own catastrophes." The adolescent male narrator of "Thanks for the Ride," a vivid dramatization of the humiliation which the poor suffer from the affluent, after a bottle of bootleg brew and "headlong sex in a barn," is stricken by his date's farewell double entendre uttered in a voice "crude, . . . abusive and forlorn."

In the "first really painful autobiographical story," entitled "The Peace of Utrecht," Helen returns, after a ten years' absence on the West Coast, to her home town Jubilee for a visit with her spinster sister Maddy. To Helen the local life seems empty and forlorn. Her recollection of an ailing "Gothic" mother, "one of the town's possessions and oddities, . . . struggling in that house of stone until the very end," are depressing. An old history note from High School days, "The Peace of Utrecht, 1713, brought an end of the War of the Spanish Succession," opens the door to less gloomy memories of youthful activities and suggests a kind of parallel to Helen's own break with the past of Jubilee. This return visit has not been a success. The sisters belong to two different worlds. A renewed association with two tough-fibred old aunts, imbued with "a simple unprepossessing materialism . . . the rock of their lives" and adept at ironical acceptance of their own eccentricities, is painful because of the way they have preserved not only her mother's clothing but also a vivid memory of her final agony. Their preoccupations intensify the narrator's sense that "nobody speaks the same language."

An eleven-year-old girl is the central figure in "Boys and Girls," which explores the different roles and temperaments of the two sexes as society expects them to develop. To the young narrator, who enjoys helping her father on his fox farm and is much more useful to him than is her younger brother Laird, "work in the house was endless, dreary and particularly depressing; work done out of doors, and in my father's service, was ritualistically important." The word *girl*, formerly innocent and unburdened, becomes "a definition . . . touched with reproach and disappointment." Although she accepts the necessity in rural existence of the death of animals, she cannot stop herself from trying to help a doomed horse escape. Laird's pride in assisting in the mare's slaughter makes her realize that her father's dismissal of the incident — "she's only a girl" — may be a valid remark.

As expressed dramatically later in Munro's novel, there may be "a change coming . . . in the lives of girls and women" when they will not be dependent on the categories and roles in which men often arbitrarily place and try to keep them, but that change has not yet come in "The Office" or in "Postcard." In the first of these a married woman decides to get a place in which to do her writing away from her family. Her husband, "who does not really want explanations," agrees. Renting a suitable office from a Mr. Malley, she soon finds his attentions a source of irritation. Although she rejects his offer to install comfortable furnishings, Mr. Malley with his patronizing view of her writing as a therapeutic female hobby and his craving for intimacy is not easily discouraged. In his "obsequious hunger" to have his own experiences recorded, he details the calamities and betrayals of trust which he has suffered. Despite her annoyance the writer listens, but after finding him one night reading her manuscript, henceforth locks her office door. When he berates her and suggests that she is using the room for purposes other than writing, she continues unrepentant until his trumped-up charge that she and her friends have covered the washroom walls with obscene graffiti makes her decide to leave. In a

neat switch of roles she pictures him creating his own fiction out of the episode:

> Mr. Malley with his rags and brushes and pail of soapy water, scrubbing ... at the toilet walls, ... arranging in his mind the bizarre but somehow never quite satisfactory narrative of yet another betrayal of trust. While I arrange words, and think it is my right to be rid of him.

In "Postcard" a spinster receives a postcard from a middle-aged beau Clare MacQuarrie, holidaying in Florida, on the same day that she learns of his marriage there. Helen's reflections on her too easy but passive compliance over the years with his wishes, and her ironically confident expectations of marriage with him once his mother is dead, lead her to conduct a noisy mini-shivaree outside his home. The response of "fat, comfortable sleepy-faced" Clare is simply to tell her to go on home and give his love to her momma. "It didn't bother him too much how I was feeling . . . he was a man who didn't give out explanations, maybe didn't have any. If there was anything he couldn't explain, well he would just forget about it."

In "Walker Brothers Cowboy" and "Red Dress — 1946" the narrator is once more a young woman recalling childhood experiences. In the first, she accompanies her father, a travelling salesman for Walker Brothers patent medicines, on an afternoon sales trip through the "flat, scorched, empty" countryside. A visit en route to an old flame, Nora, grown coarse and blousy, reveals a new and enchanting dimension to her father's personality. Nora's gramaphone records of dance tunes somehow bring a mood of lightness to the Depression era of the 'thirties, when the rural scene is so bleak that even when children "play I *Spy* ... it is hard to find many colours. Grey for the barns and sheds and toilets and houses, brown for the yard and field, black or brown for the dogs. The rusting cars show rainbow patches."

"Red Dress — 1946" traces the adolescent embarrassment, intermittent despair and exhilaration of the narrator during an episode that centres on a Christmas school dance for which her mother has made her a red dress. In delightfully comic vein the girl's various moods and the unexpectedly happy outcome in the process of indoctrination into social and sexual conventions unfold. Her final realization neatly sums up the teen-ager's perennial problem in measuring up to a mother's expectations: "I understood what a mysterious and oppressive obligation I had, to be happy, and how I had almost failed it, and would be likely to fail it, every time, and she would not know."

A central story in this collection, and the "closest" to the author, is "Images," a young woman's recollections of an outing with her father. An intricate series of contrasts is presented: outdoor activity and the pervasive aura of an unexplained malady; apparent jollity and genuine misery; death and life; images and actuality. Behind such outward reality as the practical jokes of the father and his homely cousin nursing his pregnant wife, the sensuous apprehension of pungent odours, dead muskrats caught in traps, and a meeting with a hatchet-carrying hermit who lives with his whiskey-drinking cat in a roofed-over cellar, at whose initial appearance the narrator is petrified "like a child in an old negative, electrified against the dark noon sky, with blazing hair and burned-out Orphan Annie eyes," there are mysterious aspects larger than life. Like the gigantic shadows cast by an oil lamp, they forbode ill but also provide comfort. This is a strange story, replete with concrete imagery and suggestive overtones, that demonstrates the author's acute perception of smells and tastes as well as of sights and sounds

and their associations. Her father's boots, for example, are "as much an index to himself as his face was. When he had taken them off they stood in a corner of the kitchen, giving off a complicated smell of manure, machine oil, caked black mud, and the ripe and disintegrating material that lined their soles. They were a part of him, temporarily discarded, waiting."

From her day's tramp along the trapline and the visit to the hermit's abode, the girl, privy to her father's acceptance of the oddities of life, returns home no longer in awe of her spinster cousin's bossiness.

> Like the children in fairy tales who have seen their parents make pacts with terrifying strangers, who have discovered that our fears are based on nothing but the truth, but who come back fresh from marvellous escapes ... like them, dazed and powerful with secrets, I never said a word.

In John Metcalf's *The Narrative Voice* (1972), after rejecting one critic's interpretation of "Images," Alice Munro comments that "symbolism is infinitely complex and never completely discovered." Her own is not consciously planned or arranged, but rather "found." Various pictures in the mind begin to move "outward, in a dim uncertain way" as memory and imagination blend into action or feeling that becomes as true as elements in a dream seem true. In this way, the title story of the volume, "Dance of the Happy Shades," was molded into her own terms from an anecdote heard at a family dinner party. "The I of the story is a masquerade, she is a little middle-class girl I never was, an attempt to see the story through the eyes of the relative who told it to me. But once I got used to being her I could ... remember things — the house, the dresses, Mary Queen of Scots; I was not told any of that ... the kind of remembering I mean is what fictional invention is."

In "Dance" the narrator and her mother reluctantly attend the annual recital of aging, quixotic, and impoverished music teacher Miss Marsalles. Her diminished living quarters are cluttered with old furniture, books and pictures. Marauding flies buzz over sandwiches already curling at the edges and flat, iceless purple punch in a cut-glass bowl. After the embarrassed young narrator has finished her "dogged and lumpy interpretation of Handel" she is followed by a group of retarded children who play various pieces on the piano. "There is an atmosphere in the room of some freakish inescapable dream." Then one girl plays "something fragile, courtly and gay, that carries with it the freedom of a great unemotional happiness." Miss Marsalles, to whom "no gift is unexpected, no celebration will come as a surprise," announces the title of the piece, "Dance of the Happy Shades," and those in the audience somehow feel that they have witnessed an act of magic, "perhaps not altogether in *good taste*, ... a communique from the other country" where Miss Marsalles lives.

This first volume reveals that Alice Munro can treat a wide range of themes with a technical framework that is, in her own words, "very traditional, very conventional." In all but three of these fifteen stories the point of view is that of a child or adolescent, modified or controlled to some extent by the lapse of time, new insights and perspectives between an incident and its recording. In only one is the narrator or reader's sensorium a male. In each, the characters are seen in a strongly presented physical setting, in which the surfaces of life, its texture, sounds and smells are described with exactness of observation and delicacy of language. The focus is fairly narrow and highly personal, in the sense that "the emotional reality," though not the events, is "solidly autobiographical."

Although the stories have no formal sequence, they effectively trace the development of a sensitive young girl into womanhood. They capture in dialogue, characterization and description the practicality and hardships, seasonal rhythms and vitality of rural and small town life, the barriers between the young and the old, the poor and the affluent, the sick and the well. Secrets and a lack of genuine communication between family members or friends often lead to guilty estrangements; unawareness of a situation, perhaps because of a selfish distaste for unpleasant things or a fear of ridicule, is common; the pressure to conform is relentless, and failure of will to make one's own life is too frequent. The treatment of these various themes is everywhere touched with humour, compassionate irony, and a comprehension of the absurd and grotesque. Common experiences become unique, yet universal, expressions of what it means to be alive during this period.

In her latest collection, *Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You* (1974), Alice Munro moves into a larger, more cosmopolitan world. Only six of the thirteen stories are rooted in what was formerly considered Munro country. The other seven have contemporary urban settings, with landscapes as different as a train from Calgary to Vancouver, the West Coast, the Ottawa Valley, and, by allusion, even Europe and North Africa. There is a wider variety of characters also, fewer girls and young women and more middle-aged or elderly people. Most of the stories are longer. There is a mature awareness of the complexity and fragility of human relationships, the confusing standards of modern city life, and the conflict of generations. Satire is more common. These new aspects are ordered with the same characteristic perception, subtle interplay of emotions, droll sense of humour, and ironic compassion.

Although arbitrarily chosen thematic headings cannot adequately reflect the overlapping and variety of minor motifs in individual tales, four kinds of stories seem to emerge: first, those in which are blended a number of related themes — the essential individualism of each person, the impossibility of complete comprehension of one's own self let alone another's, the self-deception, buried resentments, and often unwitting vindictiveness of human personality; second, stories reminiscent of *Dance* in their focus on relatively simple emotional situations; third, stories which offer especially revealing insights into the author's technique; and finally, narratives in which a sense of personal guilt is pervasive.

The title piece, "Something I've Been Meaning to Tell You," a good example of the first group, is a finely orchestrated dramatization of the underlying tensions and ironies of close relationships. An omniscient author introduces the reader through the sensorium of a frustrated spinster, Et Desmond, to her beautiful elder sister Char, her ailing husband Arthur Comber, and a handsome former boy friend Blaikie Noble. Et, "who didn't like contradictions . . . mysteries or extremes," ironically creates a private fiction that her sister's youthful attempt at suicide, her frigid tolerance of Arthur, and her sudden death are all connected with a fatal attraction to Blaikie. Through the recurring images and allusions time flows easily backwards and forwards as on the little stage of Mock Hill a range of human emotions is portrayed with a gently comic undertone that is conveyed overtly in the names of the setting and characters.

Et's fantasy, plausible and ambiguous enough for a reader to speculate about its validity, is presented with splendid irony. She also sees a mythical parallel when Arthur in a foursome game of "Who am I?" chooses to be Sir Galahad:

> 'You should have been King Arthur ... King Arthur is your namesake.'
>
> 'I should have. King Arthur married to the most beautiful woman in the world.'
>
> 'Ha,' said Et, 'We all know the end of that story.'

Char's only response to such ruthless shafts is to retreat to the piano. Her sudden demise, occurring within hours of hearing Et's maliciously fabricated rumour that Blaikie has remarried, is as tidy and inscrutable as her face in death. The reader is left wondering whether Et ever will tell her ingenuous brother-in-law that his adored Char had "swallowed blueing once over a man that wouldn't have her."

"Memorial" is a complex study of the sterility involved in excessively organizing and ordering one's life. The reader's sensorium is Eileen, a relaxed divorcee visiting in Vancouver a younger sister June and her husband Ewart whose son Douglas has been killed in a car accident. Ewart is rich and inoffensive. June is aggressive, a participator in outdoor sports, growth groups, Yoga, transcendental meditation, *gestalt* — the whole gamut of modern fads. Even in bereavement she is apparently coolly efficient.

After the Memorial Service the house is filled with friends and neighbours. The teenagers, clad in fringed shawls and trailing dresses, smoke pot to guitar music in the recreation room. The older people drink upstairs. To Eileen there is an air of unreality about the whole occasion. The funeral service seems a kind of fraud. The affectations of June and Ewart — exotic art, miniature Japanese garden, adoption of two children of Indian blood — all appear artificial posturing. For Eileen, "the only thing that we can hope for is that we lapse now and then into reality."

Wandering out later that night for a breath of fresh air, she allows a rather drunk Ewart to seduce her. "Why Not?" she thinks, in a way that reveals how she rationalizes events just as her more methodical sister "works out" and finishes off her past:

> What Eileen meant to Ewart, she would tell herself later, was confusion. The opposite of June, wasn't that what she was? The natural thing for a man in pain to look for, who loves and fears his wife. The brief restorative dip. Eileen is aimless and irresponsible, she comes out of the same part of the world accidents come from. He lies in her to acknowledge, to yield — but temporarily, safely — to whatever has got his son, whatever cannot be spoken of in his house. So Eileen, with her fruitful background of reading, her nimble habit of analysis (material and direction different from June's but the habit not so different, after all), can later explain and arrange it for herself.

Deception of one's self and others underlies the parting between the sisters, as June attempts gropingly to understand her son's death. Eileen, outwardly tactful and concerned but actually cold and tired, wants "mostly to get away. It was an effort to put her hand out. Acts done without faith may restore faith.... she had to believe and hope that was true."

In "The Spanish Lady" a wife, en route home to Vancouver, reflects on the affair between her spouse and his paramour. Two attempted letters neatly introduce the dichotomy of her attitude toward them. The first letter is *au-courant* liberal in its rationalization of her feeling of jealousy; the second is reproachful of their cruel deceit. The crumpled notes quickly and graphically illustrate the intricacy and frustration of the situation.

As the narrator amusingly and ironically reviews the details of their friendship, she imagines returning home to find them together in bed and responding to the situation in two different ways: first, in a sophisticated fashion ("Would you like a cup of coffee, I imagine you're awfully tired?"), and then in an outbreak of rage, hurling things at the bed, screaming and

beating "their bare bodies with the hairbrush." Despite her sense of outrage and betrayal, however, she herself admits: "I have lied as well as I have been lied to. Men have expressed ravenous appreciation of my nipples and my appendix scar and the moles on my back and have also said to me, as it is proper for them to do, 'Now don't make too big a thing of this,' and even, 'I really do love my wife.' "

During the train trip a convert to the Rosicrucian concept of previous existences engages her in conversation claiming that he was once a conquistador and she a Spanish lady whom he had left behind. This theory of "fresh starts" has a certain appeal. But at Vancouver station, witnessing the sudden collapse and death of an anonymous old man, the narrator feels that by his last agonizing cry,

> everybody alive, is pushed back.... As if we were all wound up a long time ago and were spinning out of control, whirring, making noises, but at a touch could stop, and see each other for the first time, harmless and still. This is a message; I really believe it is; but I don't see how I can deliver it.

Situated between narratives of such emotional intensity and sombre overtones are two tales, "How I Met My Husband" and "The Found Boat," which provide a kind of relief from the tensions portrayed in adult relationships. Both return to the late 'forties and serve as a reminder of the happy aspects of innocent young love viewed in retrospect. The first is a charming presentation in appropriately rustic imagery and language of a poor farm girl, her awe at her employers' automatic appliances, coloured bathroom fixtures and three-way mirror, her delight in secretly trying on her mistress' elegant clothes, her naiveté and trust in love, and finally the indulgent and patronizing pleasure she seems to take in her husband's version of their romance: "He always tells the children ... how I went after him by sitting by the mailbox every day, and naturally I laugh and let him, because I like for people to think what pleases them and makes them happy."

"The Found Boat," in the same reminiscent vein of childhood days, actually suggests by its vernal setting, heroine's name, and the interplay of sunshine and water some of the freshness of an unfallen Eden. Two schoolgirls, Eva and Carol, find an abandoned rowboat during the Wawanash River spring flood and help three boys repair it. After the launching down river, they eat lunch together in an abandoned railway station, dark and cool, its floor littered with broken glass and its walls covered with suggestive graffiti. In a game of "Truth or Dare" all agree to strip off their clothes and run naked across the sunlit fields to swim in the cold river. The new awareness and sexual awakening which the episode brings is conveyed in delicate imagery as the initial taunting between the boys and girls gives way to a spirit of co-operation, and, on Eva's part at least, even a sense of privilege in sharing work. Although both girls apparently return to their former mocking attitude toward the boys, the "pride, shame, boldness, and exhilaration" of the experience in maturation will obviously remain.

Among the stories most arresting for their critical insights into the author's technique are "Material," "Marrakesh," "Tell Me Yes or No," and "Winter Wind." "Material" tells how a writer, Hugo, transforms a personal incident into fiction. His former wife muses about his publication with devastating satire on how "Outrageous writers may bounce from one blessing to another nowadays, bewildered, as permissively reared children are said to be, by excess of approval." Mocking the book jacket blurb, tearing apart its half lies of Hugo's experiences as "lumberjack, beer-slinger, counterman," she ridicules his image as "not only fake but out of date."

> You should have said you'd meditated for a year in the mountains of Uttar Pradesh; you should have said you'd taught Creative Drama to autistic children; you should have shaved your head, shaved your beard, put on a monk's cowl; you should have shut up, Hugo.

This is a very complex, ironic and comical story that touches on such themes and tensions as the amorality of artists, creating from "scraps and oddments, useless baggage," a "hard and shining, rare intimidating quality"; the tenuous tie that holds men and women together in love, "as flimsy as a Roumanian accent or the calm curve of an eyelid, some half-fraudulent mystery"; the way that men, whatever their temperaments, know "how to ignore or use things.... They are not *at the mercy.*" Dialogue, description, and reflection all unite in a realistic and ironic interplay of character and events to evoke in the reader a rich and varied response.

In spite of its exotic title the main action of "Marrakesh" is set in the Wawanash River district. Related from the point of view of an omniscient author, the story's chief sensorium is a retired school teacher, Dorothy. Her granddaughter, Jeanette, college professor, wearing "jeans and a peasant blouse" arrives in a foreign sports car for her annual visit. Her lament that "technology and progress are destroying the quality of life" in the old town reminds Dorothy of her own youthful love of the picturesque and hatred of change. In maturity, though, even supermarkets with their asphalt parking lots "would do for her to look at, beautiful or ugly had ceased to matter, because there was in everything something to be discovered."

One evening she listens while a neighbour Blair King and Jeanette over gin and tonic exchange various travel experiences, including a strange story with suggestive overtones about robbery and attempted seduction by Arab youths in Marrakesh. Later that night, unable to sleep, Dorothy sees her granddaughter and Blair unclothed in his porch, "guzzling and grabbing ... relishing and plundering each other.... helpless and endangered as people on a raft pulled out on the current. And nobody would call to them." Shaken by this sight, Dorothy retreats to her own porch, where with a wry comic note she reminds herself: "Strength is necessary, as well as something like gratitude, if you are going to turn into a lady peeping Tom at the end of your life."

In "Tell Me Yes or No" a narrator has an imaginary conversation with a dead lover as she recalls their affair and tells of a later trip to his home city. During this visit she haunts the bookstore which his widow operates until one evening the latter gives her a bag of opened letters and asks her to leave. Ironically the letters are not hers, but those of another woman who has become frantic because she has not heard recently from her lover.

Moving with the temporal fluidity of internal monologue, the story is rich in imagery, descriptive detail, and inner revelation as the narrator attempts to understand the deceased as well as their relationship for the previous two years. Their initial meeting had taken place in an age of "childbearing ... docility ... love of limits" when both lived with their spouses on the edge of a West Coast campus. Years later, the now divorced narrator and the journalist meet again "unexpectedly in a city where neither ... lived." After a pleasant lunch reminiscing together in a way that rekindles the earlier mutual attraction, they drive through the twilight to meet her plane. As the narrator notes, "love is not in the least unavoidable, a choice is made." The surrender in a noisy airport hotel is the beginning of an affair that is chiefly nourished by an exchange of fanciful letters. He writes, "*I do think of you I*

suppose as a warm and sentient flood . . . and I have the normal human concerns with being overwhelmed, which is what floods do." She replies in coyly suggestive Emily Dickinson fashion that she is "nothing but the tamest creek you could go wading in," and continues to play a kind of charade designed to make their love seem "harmless and merry." Now, faced with his loss, she reflects

> how women build their castles on foundations hardly strong enough to support a night's shelter; how women deceive themselves and uselessly suffer, being exploitable because of the emptiness of their lives and some deep — but indefinable, and not final! — flaw in themselves. And further and further along this line which everybody is learning these days like an easy song.

Virtually the last letter from her unknown rival begs the dead lover to write and "*please, tell me yes or no.*" Imagining the life of this woman, who has suffered like herself, the narrator can only answer the persistent question "How are we to understand you?" by an imaginative dismissal of the entire experience:

> Never mind. I invented her. I invented you, as far as my purposes go. I invented loving you and I invented your death. I have my tricks and my trap doors, too. I don't understand their workings at the present moment, but I have to be careful, I won't speak against them.

"Winter Wind" returns to Wawanash with a woman's reminiscence of a winter storm during her high school days. Because of the weather she stays in town for a few nights with her grandmother and great-aunt Madge, whose house is as "cozy as the inside of a nutshell." The family picture of her great grandparents on the wall fascinates the girl and symbolizes the personal sacrifices made by her ancestors to carve out an ordered way of life.

> The parents are seated. The mother firm and unsmiling, in a black silk dress, hair scanty and centre parted, eyes bulging and faded. The father handsome still, bearded, hand-on-knee, patriarchal. A bit of Irish acting here. A relishing of the part, which he might as well relish since he cannot now escape it? When young he was popular in taverns; . . . but he gave up those ways, he turned his back on his friends and brought his family here, to take up land in the newly opened Huron Tract. This photograph was the sign and record of his achievement; respectability, moderate prosperity, mollified wife in a black silk dress, the well-turned-out tall daughters.

Commenting on the different marriages of these two sisters and especially of the grandmother's "self-glorifying" renunciation of a former lover, the narrator muses about the accuracy of her depiction:

> . . . how am I to know what I claim to know? I have used these people, not all of them, but some of them before. I have tricked them out and altered them and shaped them any way at all, to suit my purposes. . . . I stop and wonder, I feel compunction. Though I am only doing in a large and public way what has always been done, what my mother did, and other people did, who mentioned to me my grandmother's story.

Yet the implication that her grandmother has been "stubbornly, secretly, destructively romantic" has not been invented: "we get messages another way, . . . we have connections which cannot be investigated, but have to be relied on."

In many of the stories already commented upon there can be noted an expression of a sense of guilt for uncharitable thoughts, acts of deceit or omission. In the last group to be discussed, regret and remorse are pervasive motifs. "Walking on Water," set in Victoria and suggested by a publicity stunt there of television comic Paul Paulsen, describes the tragic failure of a young Zen adherent's experiment in psychic control over matter, as seen through the perspective of a retired druggist. The difficulty of bridging the generation gap is vividly portrayed in realistic dialogue and sharp imagery, as he attempts to understand

the sense of values of the flower people. His touching concern for their welfare and poignant foreboding reach a climactic note with his eventual feeling of disorientation in their brutally existential dismissal of the victim's fate: "he wasn't one of us.... he was fairly old.... If that's what he was going to do, then nobody ought to stop him, should they? Or feel sad about him."

In "Forgiveness in Families" an elder sister recollects with biting satire the career of her hippie brother, "a child of nature," as he calls himself. His early indolence was a constant worry to his widowed mother: "Until recently the country did not pay you to sit on your uppers and announce that you had adopted a creative life-style." But in his mid-thirties, decked out in long hair, sandals and a priest's robe, he can collect welfare. When, partly because of his own neglect, his mother is taken to hospital seriously ill, he brings along a troupe of his fellow dervishes for an occult healing ceremony to which she later attributes her remarkable recovery. Although grateful, the sister is shocked to realize that subconsciously she had wished her mother to die as proof of her brother's careless irresponsibility.

In "Executioners" an older woman anaesthetizes with whiskey unpleasant memories "running underground ... spurting out at another place" in her mind. Taunted as a girl by a bootlegger's son, she dreams of vicious revenge upon him, of "driving spikes into his eyes" and jabbing him with his knife until "venomous substances would spurt and flow." She also recalls playing happily with the family of her parents' grotesque maid, whose two brothers frolicked like magic clowns. Actually they are tough and ruthless to enemies like the bootlegger. When his house is set afire and both he and his son perish in the flames, the narrator realizes that she has been an accessory in spirit to the actual executioners.

"The Ottawa Valley," final story of this volume, is another reminiscence of a childhood experience by a mature woman. During World War II she accompanies her mother on a visit to a blunt-tongued but good-natured spinster cousin, Aunt Dodie, in the Ottawa Valley. The woman reminiscences about such amusing incidents as the time they sewed the fly up on a summer worker's overalls, plied him with lemonade, then watched from a hiding place as he tried to relieve himself, "fairly clawin' and yankin' every which way" until he "just finally went past caring and gave up and ripped down his overalls altogether and let 'er fly." In recalling this and other stories, the cousins' versions often vary and their different responses are comically revealing of their different temperaments and sensibilities.

During the trip the girl is made painfully aware of her mother's deteriorating health, scientifically documented in the story by the inclusion of an entry concerning Parkinson's disease from a medical encyclopaedia. Even in simple games like matching bits of recollected poems, the generally shared knowledge of the illness brings embarrassment as the subject of death inevitably recurs. Preoccupation with her mother, the narrator admits, is central in the story:

> it is to reach her that this whole journey has been undertaken. With what purpose? To mark her off, to describe, to illumine, to celebrate, to *get rid*, of her; and it did not work, for she looms too close, just as she always did. She is heavy as always, she weighs everything down, and yet she is indistinct, her edges melt and flow. Which means she has stuck to me as close as ever and refused to fall away, and I could go on, and on, applying what skills I have, using what tricks I know, and it would always be the same.

The spectre of a gifted, eccentric and

ailing mother haunts much of Munro's fiction, and appears either briefly or as a dominating figure in several of the collected stories. She is a central character in *Lives of Girls and Women.* Frequently associated with her is a daughter whose growing maturity brings a sense of guilt for her own lack of understanding or compassion. Another less individualized but equally recurring figure in various aspects is the man, whether single or married, who uses or ignores women and events at his own whim. There is also a whole range of other characters that have been imaginatively created out of vividly recalled memories. For the most part they are unsophisticated people who only vaguely comprehend the meaning of their own lives. The reader is taken with them through a series of rather subtle, low-keyed circumstances in which the continuum is often disrupted and then re-established in a way that alters both the reader's as well as the characters' emotional awareness, and leads them both to a significant or fresh conception of the world. Most of the tales are presented from the first person point of view. Even in those few which happen to be written in the third person the narrative voice is that of the central figure. This technique allows an intimate rapport between reader and narrator. The blending of past and present often generates the energy of the story as the perspective continually shifts. In some tales the first paragraph is a microcosm of the whole; in others the ending contains the vital clues required to reveal the full deployment of fictional forces. Some move forward more by dialogue than description. In virtually all, the rhythm is achieved by a balance of the parts which defies rational analysis.

Morley Callaghan once remarked that good stories are written "out of a kind of feeling for life and people drained through whatever peculiar intellectual system you have, or whatever kind of heart you have." Alice Munro's special distillation of personality is revealed in the quiet humour, gentle irony, and compassionate understanding with which she treats her themes. Her uniqueness lies not only in the special angle of vision from which her characters are seen, but also in the lasting impact which they have on the reader. They are memorable for themselves as well as for their symbolic significance. Many are representative of particular life patterns, revealed often in a single picture, in the fashion of Sherwood Anderson, of "lives flowing past each other." But they still remain individuals who become permanent personal possessions of the reader. Her writing is original, not for its technical innovation or interpretations of the atomic age, but rather for its fragile insights into the complexity of personal relationships. Her narratives spring from an imaginative, intelligent and unpretentious individuality to which fiction is a natural recourse. They are independent, absorbing, and realistic expressions of the profound disturbances and magic of ultimate human reckonings.

BRANDON CONRON

NOTES

[1] With Mari Stainsby, *British Columbia Library Quarterly*, 35 (July 1971), 27-31. See also Graeme Gibson, *Eleven Canadian Novelists* (Toronto, 1973), p. 248.

[2] *One Time, One Place: Mississippi in the Depression/A Snapshot Album* (New York, 1971), p. 3.

[3] See John Metcalf, "A Conversation With Alice Munro," *Journal of Canadian Fiction*, I, 4 (Fall 1972), 54-62.

CRITICAL STREETS

Tallman's Criticism

THE HOUSE OF CRITICISM, like Henry James' house of fiction, has as many windows as there are critics to look through them. However, the reader of Canadian literary criticism might be forgiven the impression that the Canadian critical house is practically windowless save for one large pane in an upper back room where most of the country's critics are crowded, jostling each other in an effort to look out at the same view: the familiar bleak landscape, the one or two small figures bent in postures of suffering, the solitary house in the distance, probably a farmhouse.

Few windows of the critical house face the street, the neighbourhood, the city, the social scene. E. K. Brown, looking down from the top floor front during World War II, intelligently and broadly surveyed the economic, cultural, and literary scene of the time and concluded gloomily that the social conditions of the country were not friendly to creative composition and not likely to improve as long as literature and society remained separate and the fate of literature left to the hope for individual geniuses.

Robert McDougall, twenty years later, complained in "The Dodo and the Cruising Auk," published in *Canadian Literature*, that Canadian writing, especially its fiction, singularly lacked any social or cultural consciousness, that there was an "abnormal absence of feeling for class" and for the relationships between people within a society. An extraordinary fear and self-doubt, originating in puritanism, prejudice, and in a theory of nature which emphasizes an individual's psychological quest before any collective effort, resulted in this lack of social observation; — and "as the private worlds enlarge, the worlds of social relationship diminish." A more significant reason McDougall advanced, however, had to do with the uniformly academic training of most of our writers then, who came from well-to-do middle-class backgrounds, lived their formative years in institutions of higher learning, and produced prose and poetry written "neither by Brahmins nor by proles" — literature neither high nor low, merely academic. "And how," McDougall asked, "is one to expect from these closed, circumspect, and intellectually sophisticated ranks a dynamic view of society?"

What McDougall wrote then about Canadian writers was largely true of critics as well — indeed they were often the same people. And while there are some writers now writing out of different and more varied backgrounds and experience, the prevailing criticism still presents the same frigid, static scene McDougall saw. Northrop Frye's cultural and social essays, however brilliant his literary theory, dispose one to imagine that his critical window is stained glass or that, like the Lady of Shalott in her tower, the world comes to him in the darkened reverse paraphrases of a mirror. In the critical vision of Atwood, Jones, and others, the Gothic or tragic landscape and the private world predominate — vacant eye-like windows or blinds drawn down.

No one should insist that criticism must merely reflect literature any more than that literature must reflect society. McDougall was not asking for a sociological literature but for a "kind of turbulence that encompasses the whole of the social mosaic" and makes possible within it, freedom of choice and movement for the individual. Henry James, having built his house of fiction, goes on to insist that house, windows, and passing human scene are as nothing without "the posted presence of the watcher," the eyes at the

window, and what those eyes see. And by knowing of what this watcher has *been* conscious, James says, "I shall express to you at once his boundless freedom and his 'moral' reference."

There is something peculiar and restricted in a "moral reference" which is consistently and chillingly devoid of any sense of communities of men or the existence of men as city dwellers, as citizens. A repeated emphasis, in literature and in criticism, on Land, on nature as terrible and overwhelming, on private anguish, *is* exclusive. Indeed, I would argue, though it is not the principal intention of this article, that such emphasis is a way of excluding from a place and a share in the literature all those — the majority of people — who have no history of contact with "the land," who can never own it, who live in cities, are cosmopolitan. They are excluded by experience foreign to them and by threat, from something that is valued in this society — intimacy with and ownership of land, and therefore barred from a sense that they are part of that written world. In this literature and criticism of ownership, "back to the land" stories (re-*claiming* it), novels about restoring or returning to ancestral homes, tales of getting in touch with roots or family trees, critical reiteration of our wilderness heritage, are further versions of the same exclusivity.

One critic, though, for nearly twenty years, has been looking through a ground floor front window at the street and city outside, keeping a clear, compassionate, and lively eye on the "godawful streets of man." That phrase, borrowed from Jack Kerouac, is the title of a collection of Warren Tallman's essays making up the No. 6, Third Series issue of *Open Letter*, edited by Frank Davey and published by Coach House Press. As with *Open Letter*'s previous collection of Sheila Watson's stories and criticism, it's a valuable gathering, 12 essays covering a period from 1958 to 1973, and including three pieces printed for the first time. Tallman has been and is an influential teacher and presence at the University of British Columbia, highly regarded by students and writers besides the Tish poets he has been associated with. As a critic, he is known especially outside Canada for his articles on American writers (reprinted in this book) and as the editor, with Donald Allen, of *The Poetics of the New American Poetry*. This *Open Letter* collection allows readers to see clearly what Tallman's main concerns have been over the years. Those concerns, it seems to me, have been urban and communal, local and linguistic, continental and democratic.

The first essay, on Kerouac's style, begins with a vision of all cities fallen in the post-World War II world, a grim sight, a grim fall, but perhaps fortunate, for out of the wreckage a new city can be built. Not the same kind of city, but the city re-occurring as speech: "almost the only workable polis in our time is words, speech, language, because they form a plane at which communication, community, communion are still possible." Throughout the essays, Tallman attempts to describe and discuss *this* city and its inhabitants, the verbal neighbourhoods writers fashion to make themselves at home, and the condition of those who are excluded or cast out from the city into silence. Language, in the Beat collapsed Kerouac world, is a means of survival, improvised to the rhythms and stresses of those godawful streets, words driven by the energies and needs of living. If Kerouac's outcasts have no more community than the given moment, his fictions create possibilities for the future. In his trust in fictions, in making the world in language, Tallman gives the writer an important social function, at the same time as he urges him to come down from

his lonely prerogatives and listen to the sounds of those mean streets.

Kerouac's beat songs, Ginsberg's mad howl songs, the broken bell songs of Hart Crane are the "music of *this* world," a music which seems to Tallman the true sound of modern language, and a world where communion is not a religious sacrament with hymns but a happy coincidence of friends meeting on the corner, all trying to tell the news at once. Not that "Jerusalem" isn't a fine anthem, but most of us don't live there. Central in Tallman's writing is his insistence that an ear finely tuned to the grand arias of Theme, Meaning, Idea, and Art won't hear the street songs — or maybe the cry for help — just outside the door. *That* deafness is a crude distortion of all music. In "Wolf in the Snow: Modern Canadian Fiction" (recognized for years as a major critical article), Tallman writes that "finer is relatively crude, because frequently untrue, and crude can be relatively fine. All too often, in fiction as in life, those pretensions which we seek out because they make us fine provide false furnishings for the actual house in which we live. This fine is crude."

The juxtaposing and transposing of high and low, exalted and mean, shapes all of Tallman's essays. He sees, for example, that the disturbing split between form and language in Hugh MacLennan's novels results from the pretence of intellectual depth MacLennan imposes on his characters, an impossible façade, "so false that [he] is incapable of animating it because it has so little to do with the profound naivete and relative crudity of response in which MacLennan's true force as an artist is rooted." The Irving Layton that Tallman admires is not the acclaimed rhetorical Prospero but the Caliban who is "not afraid to reveal the badness of his badness, the inner imbecilities and cruelties that gnaw and fester those times the self turns savage under the whips and knives of the times. Most of us cooler customers haven't nearly his nerve for letting the crudity show even though it can be the very ore in which vital energies are locked."

Not surprisingly, then, Tallman began to write about Mordecai Richler before that author had much Canadian recognition. As well as being a critic who has also gone to the streets for his subjects, Richler has in his fiction consistently played off the crude and the fine. A "battle of the brows" Tallman calls it, high against low, where the lows have Richler's "special affection because their wackiness provides the 'inner life,' the responsive energy, that lends shaping force to his imagination." And Tallman sees that Richler's best writing comes when he transforms the grimmest, most tawdry, ugly, and stupid aspects of life into high comic vision.

This double vision of life derives in English literature, especially in satire, from Swift, who understood that everything spiritual and exalted in our lives is mocked by a gross and corporal parody of it which we try to ignore. Tallman and Richler share a sense that the crudity of the fool who persists in his folly is finer than the refinement of a middle-class establishment liberal, the real low-brow. It's a conservative position: man had better attend to the business of living — and writing — and leave the towers of organization and ideology to those climbers who want to shut out the low-down music of turbulent St. Urbain streets. Duddy Kravitz, in his crude originality, is a mug who "can make with the music," and "the music in *Duddy Kravitz* is where in novels it always is, in the style." It may be a harsh music, but "What are the disorders, dissonances, and disarrangements of modern writing but the bells that break the towers."

It is in this broken world of language

the writer lives, his writing no more complete nor whole than his life, than any life. "Life is the value," and "the visions of fiction" a major way of knowing that life, of knowing "the actual house in which we live." The writers Tallman goes to are those who most seem to him to enter the language, live in it, and reenact the energies of living, whose styles appear to improvise a world in words. William Carlos Williams' localism, "his intensified preoccupation with the matter at hand"; Robert Creeley's domestic, related world of concentrated perceptions; Charles Olson's "rooted" intelligence prowling the home of his body in the neighbourhood of particularity ("the body in which we dwell, our eyes are home, our ears, our intellects, emotions — a human house"); Robert Duncan's long residence in "the natural habitat of poetry"; D. H. Lawrence's animating consciousness mediating between the world's life and the rich images of mind; — Tallman writes of these. And of Ginsberg, Kerouac, Richler, whose words travel the lousy neon holy pavement of New York, San Francisco, Montreal.

If other critics have written at greater length about all these writers, few have entered into the spirit of their writing, that is, their style, in quite Tallman's way, his own style quickly taking on the rhythms and syntax of, say Kerouac or Creeley, and even, in one essay, of Henry James. It's active writing, in the act of staying close to shifts of perception in a writer, to the text at hand. Tallman has his own stylistic marks, too, quick to fashion epigrams, borrow from nursery rhymes, folk tales, popular slang and song. If sometimes a little fanciful, it's animated writing, and never dull. Metaphors of music and dance, absorbed from Williams, are intrinsic to his critical vocabulary: he's always aware of the voice and accent of language on the page. Pictures, too, are everywhere. In several essays, Tallman turns the action and theme of novels or poems into canvases, critical landscapes of Lawrence's novellas, Creeley's poems, some Canadian novels. These pictures are less landscapes, though, than portraits, with people arranged from foreground to background, illuminated and evaluated by the light of their varying energies. The human image predominates, and if there are beasts, if this continent is a grey wolf whose shadow is underneath the snow, the beast is soon transformed into "old mother North America with her snow hair, her mountain forehead, her prairie eyes, and her wolf teeth, her wind songs, and her vague head of old Indian memories." Time turns into place in "the vicinity of World War I," and place into time at "long past World War II o'clock." We are mothered by the land we live on and at the end of "Wolf in the Snow," even desolate Canadian houses are repossessed, the gods of life returned to them.

Houses, as bodies, as language, as houses, safe as, are everywhere in Tallman's essays, and houses return us to James, certainly the guiding sensibility behind this criticism. There among all those moderns is the writer Tallman calls the "most complete of our artists," who wrote again and again of the paradoxes of crudity and refinement, the ironic reversals of high and low in society, the ambiguities of value in Old and New worlds. James understood the principles of exclusivity in society, and saw, too, society as a metaphor for inner conditions. He composed social portrait after portrait, pictured houses and rooms, but they are canvases tracing the motions of a mind, and structures opening into an intelligence and out to the reader. The intricate perceptions of James or one of his hyperconscious characters are as precise as those of Olson's "proprioceptive man," and the inclusivity of a James sentence has the same origins as the com-

prehensive attention shifts in a Williams story. Tallman's modernist paradigm of "self as subject, writing as verb, living as object" echoes the architect of the house of fiction: artist as consciousness, form as medium, human scene as object. And "reader as correspondent" puts the same obligation on us as James' exhortation that we be "finely aware and richly responsible." Olson's biological metaphors of "sensibility within the organism" recall James' image of sensibility as a soil out of which subjects spring. "Experience . . . is our apprehension and our measure of what happens to us as social creatures" writes James, a measure variable enough to please Creeley and Williams. Tallman's essay on *The Princess Cassimassima,* taken, I believe, from a Ph.D. thesis, and one of the earliest pieces here, shows how much of James' technique and thought he has absorbed. What James wrote of the famous Chapter 42 of *Portrait of a Lady* — "It was designed to have all the vivacity of incident and all the economy of picture" — is a good description of a Tallman essay.

Like James, Tallman is an urban man, an urban critic, though never, like James, urbane. He is an enthusiast, who, like the late film critic James Agee, writes most perceptively when he can admire and love his subjects, and who finds moments of beauty to applaud in the most flawed creations. And what he praises in Richler, a forgiving scepticism, is his own attribute, too. "Just as [this scepticism] cuts against everybody's pretensions that they are better than they actually are, it cuts against fears that they are worse." Resisting romantic views of nature, he is ill at ease with W. O. Mitchell's brand of Wordsworthianism in *Who Has Seen the Wind,* believing that a soft-focus version of the social realities of prairie small-town life disguises, perhaps even accepts, real cruelties. While beautiful passages in "Wolf in the Snow" respond to the silent aching loneliness at the heart of the Canadian novels he discusses, Tallman sees that silence as a kind of death. I was reminded many times reading these essays of Frost's poem "The Most of It," with its cry into the wilderness that what life wants "Is not its own love back in copy speech / But counter-love, original response," and its final vision of the mute beast at the heart of nature: — "And that was all." To that ambiguous "all" many responses are possible. D. G. Jones suggests in the conclusion to *Butterfly on Rock* that Canadian writers tell us to take courage, go into the wilderness, and embrace the beast as ourselves. Margaret Atwood at the end of that dark background to Canadian literature, *Survival,* stoically mentions there are a few points of light out there — somewhere — to keep away predators. The beast could appear as a political animal or a pet illusion. Others might say "that's all? so what?" Tallman's response is, in effect, "go home where you belong."

That "home" is not necessarily a Canadian home, a regional home, or even a city home, but more like where the heart is, a body that speaks. In this sense, Tallman, whose interests are not confined by national boundaries but only by those of language, is our most domestic critic. But it's difficult to be at home, in language or in community, if vested interests, political and financial, or philosophical and aesthetic, beat at the door or plot schemes of urban renewal. The democratic spirit of Tallman's essays — I suppose some would call it "American" — is less interested in imagining a Canadian Whitman (surely a contradiction in terms) than in imagining an original response to the demands of an unimagined place. "North America, with its essentially unformed, misformed, or mis-informed environment" needs the voices and words of people, or writers, who can build that city

of language, form a community to answer the silence of space.

In "Wonder Merchants: Modernist Poetry in Vancouver During the 1960's," Tallman traces the history of one such response (begun about the time McDougall was writing his article), the response of young students and writers, there and then, to American modernist poets—especially those writers who are the subjects of Tallman's other essays. Modernism, in his view, is a more immediate, practical, and radical response to the present world, and to those empty western spaces, than Humanism (represented by Layton, Souster, Dudek, Purdy, etc.) or Eclecticism (Birney, Mandel, Avison, etc.). "Modernism caught on in the Canadian west because it was right for the west, where the environment is so open and undefined that the self stays open and undefined, childlike, perhaps, easily given over to a sense of inner wonder." Modernist writing occurs as part of living and both take place in a particular locale and in the world of language at large, a shared community. Frank Davey, in his introduction to *The Writing Life: Historical and Critical Views of the Tish Movement* (the short title taken from the title of a Tallman essay), grandly links this modernism to a tradition which includes Arnold, Pound, Whitehead, Heidegger, Merleau-Ponty, Buber, Marx, Unamuno, Jaspers, among others. Tallman, characteristically, concentrates on recreating the sense of discovery, the delight, and the necessity, felt by young, literarily-unsophisticated people in the presence of modern writers — living examples; their realization that even *here*, maybe *especially* here, writing was possible. I'm here, you're here, he's here: think what we can do, together, with *that*.

Writing seen not as "literary" activity but as "living," both Tallman and Davey stress, involves the writer more fully with his immediate community and with cultural and social activity everywhere. The writer has a social office to perform, and what he writes is important as *information*. As Williams puts it,

> It is difficult
> to get the news from poems
> yet men die miserably every day
> for lack
> of what is found there.

What McDougall called our "obligation to debate perpetually the credentials of the social plan" receives more honour from modernists and communalists than from nostalgic solitaries wandering the soil of their ancestral acreages. The excitement of finding community in language is close to a "turbulence encompassing a whole society," opening possibilities for doing, making, and saying.

One minor curiosity in Tallman's criticism is his quickness to attribute exceptional abilities in writers to some strain of non-Anglo-Saxon blood (Wah's Chinese, Kiyooka's Japanese backgrounds; Williams' Spanish, Kerouac's French-Canadian origins) or to foreign experience (Marlatt's far-Eastern beginnings). And Tallman's communal vision understandably limits the sympathies he can extend to those writers who *are* drawn to psychic or physical extremes "where there is no social fuel," those isolatoes and their quarrels with large beasts. Too, when one stays a lot at home, it's tempting to take out an insurance policy, and there's perhaps a touch of protectiveness in some of the essays, particularly in "Wonder Merchants." But more typically, Tallman keeps an open door policy, everyone welcome who cares for language and treats it well.

In fact, I think that, in keeping with the spirit of these essays, *Open Letter* might have given more welcome to those readers who have not previously encountered Tallman's work. While the issue is well-designed and the essays speak for themselves, a gesture beyond the com-

munity which already knows Tallman would have been graceful: a note on his career, some explanation for making a collection at this time — *something* to give the issue the sense of occasion it deserves.

McDougall had hope that the Canadian imagination, a flightless dodo, could be transformed into, at least, a cruising auk. Twenty years later, Tallman tried a more ambitious metamorphosis. In the conclusion to "Wonder Merchants," and the book, Tallman gathers into the alchemical studio of his prose all the western poets whose work he has sketched out as "a picture from the west." Then abandoning portraiture, he uses découpage and assemblage to fashion a life-size monster, "The Poet." Taking the humours of the poets and the powers of place, he bubbles up a potent home-brew, a critical elixir which translates the creature into, naturally, human form. And sends it stumbling towards the East.

I don't think it's arrived in Toronto yet, but last summer, in a community of dedicated young southern Saskatchewan poets, I heard one of them, in a poem, tell about some gophers in the sky teaching human beings to fly. Had Tallman's poet-beast reached the prairies? With local visions like that one, it isn't going to reach the East without further transformations. And will all the critics finally leave that back window and take to the streets to stare in wonder? I can hardly wait.

ANN MANDEL

CHILDREN'S EYES

THE BURGEONING INDUSTRY in children's literature has resulted in a wide variety of recent publications. Some have been given more publicity than they deserve, but unfortunately many others go unpublicized or unnoticed. The animated vegetable stories of *The Hole in the Fence/ Mes Amis, mon jardin*, for example (two colourfully illustrated 1975 volumes, which come for those interested with teachers' guides), are published by the Federal Department of Health and Welfare under the aegis of its drug abuse programme. And since the unhappy demise of the government publications bookstores, it has become increasingly difficult to find out what the government printers *do* publish. Which is all the more the pity when the books are as delightful as these: cleverly drawn and — despite the occasional moral solemnity — accurately evocative of children's schoolyard and neighbourhood confrontations.

The lavish use of illustration and colour contributes immeasurably to the appeal of these books, but it is a pressing Canadian problem to maintain such standards. Talonbooks does a handsome job (more appealing to adults than to children, I think) with Elizabeth Hopkins' primitivist drawings for *The Painted Cougar*. And McClelland & Stewart's admirable *Magook* series ($1.95 each) maintain high standards, too, though it is in temporary abeyance after the first four issues precisely because of marketing and budget. Particularly attractive in the first four issues are Ann Blades' illustrations, Kathryn De Vos Miller's nature drawings, and Madeline Kronby's always inventive bilingual stories. But however attractive each issue is, magazine marketing is different from book marketing; it depends on return custom, and lives on change, on the reader's excitement at the prospect of the Next Issue. Not to produce new issues soon will mean *Magook's* demise for letting that expectation dry away, which (given its quality) would be unfortunate; it would also be an unhappy blow against all such publishing ventures.

Of the new books out, some relate directly to television programmes and have almost a built-in audience because

of that. Methuen's *The Dog Power Tower* ($5.95; $3.95 paper) derives from "Mr. Dressup." Prentice-Hall's *The Gift of Winter* ($6.95), by John Leach and Jean Rankin, was a CBC special in 1974; delightfully drawn and amusingly conceived, it has, however, a curiously wishy-washy sense of characterization. The figures Malicious and Rotten promise well enough; but their (for some reason adverbial) antithetical counterparts Goodly and Nicely do not get well enough off the the page. They are not meant, of course, to be genuinely Good or Nice. But the impulse to allegory in the context of fable loosens what could otherwise be a small classic of a winter world's imagination.

The contrast between these books and another half dozen is only partly that between colour and lack of it. Elizabeth Cleaver's paintings for William Toye's retelling of *The Loon's Necklace* (Oxford, $5.95) are in fact *in* colour, but the trouble with them, as always, is that the colours she chooses have little to do with the environment she pretends to draw; the borrowing of Coastal totems as an all-purpose Indian Image is an endemic cultural problem, but to match it with the colour blue is to ignore the realities even more. And least successful as a genre in modern Canadian children's story-telling is that of retelling the myths and legends of other or older or previous people. Two of the three books from Kids Can Press — *Kyrylo the Tanner*, *The Shirt of the Happy Man*, and *How Trouble Made the Monkey Eat Pepper* ($2.95 each) — at least have the benefit of including written texts in the original Russian and Italian, but they (and even the English-language West Indian story) *sound* like translations, the conversational structures are made to sound artificial, and the vocabulary underestimates what children can absorb. Mariam Habib's African stories (*The Lost Child*, Vantage Press, $5.95) are for older children, and are more directly culturally rooted in Tanzania, but for all that will give any enquiring Canadian child a better sense of the world of others. Informative in a different way is Ingeborg Marshall's Beothuck resource-book *The Red Ochre People* (J. J. Douglas, $6.95), which is useful more for its precise drawings of artifacts than for its Europeanized drawing of people or for its simple text. And of the four volumes in Fforbez Enterprises' new Karpet series for very young children ($1.69, or 4 for $5.95), the two by Sue Ann Alderson are marred by being imitative fairyland exploits with an intrusive moralism, while the two by Ray Logie, despite the archness that sometimes intrudes upon his linguistic playfulness, are entertaining stories. Catherine MacKenzie's illustrations to Logie's work, moreover, particularly to *The Houseless Mouse*, are a pure delight.

There have also been a series of fictional narratives appear, some of them more interesting for their authors than for their stories. Marian Engel's *My Name Is Not Odessa Yarker* (Kids Can) is a mechanical identity tale, perhaps of most interest as an elliptical footnote to *Bear*. Gladys Hindmarch's *The Peter Stories* (Coach House) uses children's rhymes (Peter and the pumpkin shell, Mary Contrary) to tell adult fables of male-female relationships. And there are new teenage narratives: Eugenie Myles' *Little Cayuse* (Nelson), full of confrontations with prairie nature and exploring the necessity of bravery; D. H. Turner's *To Hang a Rebel* (Gage), which tells the stirring adventures of a boy who lives in Mackenzie's home at the time of the Rebellion and becomes a spy for the cause; and Sheila Burnford's story of a dog's life during World War II, *Bel Ria* (McClelland & Stewart, $10.00), enjoyable for readers who enjoy their sentiment on the surface, though the more compelling because it doesn't deign to

oversimplify its language along the way.

I leave for the last a curious and lively book by Kenneth Dyba, *Lucifer and Lucinda* (November House, $6.95), partly because it's so naively engaging — the story of an orange cat's love for a little girl — and partly because it's so deliberately contrived as to be an adult's book most of all, and certainly a book for an adult to enjoy reading to a child. It's full of the same quirky humour that marked Dyba's *Sister Rexy*; it's a tale of magic and transformation (though this theme is a little forced), of adventurous travel (through the Canadian cat jungles of the Hoodoos, Pincher Creek, Neepawa, Dryden, and Fredericton), and of punning political satire with the mildest of edges. There are echoes of Margaret Laurence's mole story in it, but Dyba sounds a voice of his own. Here the narrative matters less than the texture, and the result is one of those startlingly direct revelations that comes when the adult world is recorded with the illusion of a child's sophisticated eyes.

W. H. NEW

REFERENCES

A VARIETY OF NEW VOLUMES is now available from Detroit's apparently inexhaustible Gale Press. They include the first volume of *Twentieth-Century Literary Criticism* (comments on creative writers 1900-1960; $42.00), and the second volume of *Contemporary Authors* (permanent series: i.e. biocritical notes on now deceased authors mentioned in earlier volumes of *CA*; $42.), neither of much relevance to Canadian writing. In *Contemporary Authors* (volumes 69-72), one finds brief notes on people like Moshe Safdie, but little more. In *Contemporary Literary Criticism*, volume 8 ($42.00), however, are to be found extensive selections from criticism of the work of Atwood, Clarke, and Moore, particularly useful in that it draws attention to an international range of reviews. And in R. B. Slocum's valuably annotated comprehensive *Biographical Dictionaries* (2nd supp., $35.00), substantial sections are devoted to Canadian books and Canadian subjects.

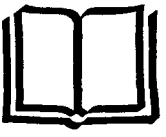
Gale also publishes a number of reference books for those interested in children's writing: Dennis La Beau's index to biographical information on children's writers (included are Montgomery, Haig-Brown, Harris, and others) is called *Children's Authors and Illustrations* ($15.00); and there are also two substantial illustrated reference works that would be of interest to teachers and inquisitive students: *Yesterday's Authors of Books for Children* (2nd volume in a series; $25.00) and *Something About the Author* (volume 12; $25.00). The latter is the least interesting — biographical and bibliographical snippets primarily to give rudimentary information. Haig-Brown is the only Canadian included in this volume. (Houston and Takashima appear in volume 13.) The former work is a splendid compilation of biographical and bibliographical information, with illustrations from original works and from films and other adaptations. One finds twelve pages of helpful commentary on the works of John Buchan here, for example, and Lucy Maud Montgomery appears in volume one. If there is so far little on Canadian writers themselves, there remains a lot of material on books Canadian children still read, and the quality of the production is consistently high.

From other presses comes another spate of books for academic reference shelves. Teachers of junior and senior high-school Canadian Literature classes may find useful a series of guidebooks (lessons ideas, research suggestions, notes, etc.) released by CanLit (P.O. Box 1551, Peterborough, Ontario). Most widely to circulate (in

paper, at lower cost, $6.95) among students, however, will be Michael Gnarowski's revised version of his helpful introductory *A Concise Bibliography of English Canadian Literature* (McClelland & Stewart); it guides students sensibly to major works and major criticism. Unhappily it resolves the perennial "Who's Canadian?" problem by leaving out *both* Lowry and Moore. The nationality battle persists.

From Clio Books in Santa Barbara comes Narda Lacey Schwartz's *Articles on Women Writers* ($24.95); her net is wide, and Canadian women are listed, but the critical listings are highly selective. And from the University of Toronto Press come *Ontario and the Canadian North* ($25.00), a valuable descriptive, indexed (and illustrated!) contribution to local history research compiled by W. F. E. Morley; and *Canadian Selection* ($35.00), compiled by Edith Jarvi *et al.* Jarvi's annotated catalogue is designed as a guide to libraries interested in building their collection of Canadian materials, and I am sure it does its exhausting task (in 1060 pp.) with much skill. Yet I am somewhat puzzled by the criteria for selection. Books, anthologies, journals: a variety of works is included. But one checks out books of this kind by checking what one knows best. I am delighted to find I am included for five books, but not sure why others — *Four Hemispheres*, for example, and a Commonwealth Literature bibliography — are omitted. Some Commonwealth books are in; some are left out. Happily the editors have not exerted a bias against comparative critical studies. But why a bias against the comparative anthologies that show another face to the same endeavour? And why a bias, in a library guidebook of all places, against comprehensive bibliographies? One finds parallel action taken against other writers as well. The novelist and story writer Jack Hodgins is represented by his three most recent titles, but the high-school anthology which we prepared together some years ago, *Voice and Vision* (still available from McClelland & Stewart) is not to be found. The reasons for editorial selection in *Canadian Selection* are not clear. Readers should use it, but enquire beyond it as well.

W.H.N.



NOW IN PAPER

AMONG RECENT PAPERBACK publications are several welcome volumes: Clara Thomas' lively and sensitive biography of Anna Jameson, *Love and Work Enough* ($6.95), and the third volume of James Eayrs' spirited history *In Defence of Canada* ($8.95), both in the University of Toronto Press' University Paperbooks series; the revised version of Peter Such's novel *Fallout* (NC Press), a fragmentary but in retrospect youthfully visionary indictment of Canada's uranium-boom history; Dorothy Livesay's selected poems, *The Woman I Am* (Press Porcépic, $3.95); Barry Broadfoot's settlers' book, *The Pioneer Years* (Paperjacks, $5.95); and for thriller-followers who haven't already found it, Tom Ardies' *Their Man in the White House* (Paperjacks, $1.50). Promised in paper is yet another thriller, the captivating fictionalized story of French political intrigue which John Ralston Saul has called *The Birds of Prey* (Macmillan, cloth $9.95).

W.H.N.

ON THE VERGE

**** MAURICE GARRIER & MONIQUE VACHON. *Chansons politique du Québec*, vol. 1 (1765-1833). Leméac. "Political" is defined widely in this collection, and the songs range from a graceful tribute to Lady Carleton to a militant pro-British 1807 song (tune: Yankee Doodle), and from a spirited assertion (("Ciel, protège notre bon Roi/ Et conserve-nous Georges Trois") to an equally spirited denunciation ("A ces vils despotes Anglais/Non cette race adultère/ Retournera en Angleterre"). Notes, scores, and informative tables support the texts of the songs themselves and provide a lively insight into phases of Quebec's cultural history.

W.N.

*** MALCOLM M. THOMSON. *The Beginning of the Long Dash: A History of Timekeeping in Canada.* University of Toronto Press, $17.50. From astronomical clocks to chronometers to cesium atomic standards, methods of timekeeping have changed radically in just over a century. Told here are the stories of the people and the ambitions that effected such changes in Canada. What comes through, both in the narrative as a whole and in the detail of the research and the illustrations, is a sense of the extraordinary technological debt that the culture broadly owes and scarcely understands.

W.N.

*** MICHAEL MACKLEM. *Liberty and the Holy City.* Oberon, $17.50. Michael Macklem disclaims the intent of writing a "history of liberal thought." Nevertheless, his method is historical, as he investigates key thinkers in England from John of Salisbury, who in the twelfth century believed that "liberty was a privilege belonging exclusively to the church," through the various twists and broadenings of the idea of freedom and its relation to justice, until, having found inspiration in Milton and a congenial spirit in T. H. Green, he comes to a conclusion which he himself admits is only a halt on the way. "It had become clear that liberty is in fact a means of grace or it is nothing. Unless, in other words, spiritual conditions are in themselves relevant to the State, there can be no such thing as personal immunity. But if the State exists to promote the spiritual as well as material interests of the individual, liberty must be the first of its objectives. For the difference between good and evil is liberty itself. The holy commonwealth is a commonwealth of free men." This is a thoughtful and thought-provoking book, but the thought is essentially in the history, and it is as a statement of where we have reached rather than where we might go that it has value.

G.W.

*** CRAWFORD KILIAN. *Go Do Some Great Thing.* Douglas & McIntyre, $12.95. One of the more neglected episodes of early British Columbian history was the arrival, during the Fraser Valley gold rush of 1858, of several hundred free blacks who had found life intolerable in California. For decades they formed an important element in the population of Victoria; they prospected and traded in the Cariboo; they pioneered as farmers on Salt Spring Island and in Saanich. In the early years, while there were many Americans in Victoria, they were still subject to a good deal of prejudice, which may have been one of the reasons why they generally supported the entry of British Columbia into Confederation. Altogether, the story of the migrant blacks of British Columbia is an interesting one, and it is surprising that *Go Do Some Great Thing* should be the first book devoted to them. Perhaps it is because information is slender; certainly Mr. Kilian has at times extended himself excessively over matters of general British Columbian history with which the kind of reader who will pick this book is likely to be familiar. But it is a well written book, and a needed addition to western Canadian regional history.

G.W.

*** RICHARD J. SCHOECK, ed. *Review of National Literatures*, 7 (1976), $8.00. A special Canada issue. It might not seem possible that something new could be said about Canadian Solitudes, but this issue contains a probing historical article on the subject. The whole issue, in fact, has a historical, descriptive bias — useful for reinterpreting Pratt, and interesting on Laurence and Hébert — but it breaks down (or perhaps only displays the bias of its own time) when it turns predictive and insists on identifying a "genuine national literature" with biculturalism.

W.N.

*** THOMAS YORK. *And Sleep in the Woods.* Doubleday Canada. Narratives of conversion are always fascinating, especially to the unconverted. Partly this is because of a curious contradiction between the deep privacy of the

process of conversion and the publicity of any attempt to describe it. However honest may have been the experience, there is a certain self-advertisement that seems inconsistent with spiritual enlightenment in books like St. Augustine's *Confessions* or Newman's *Apologia pro Vita Sua*. The other reason why the unconverted are so drawn to the flame — or the *ignis fatuus* — of the conversion narrative is the feeling all sceptics share — but rarely confess — that they too may be travelling on one of the many roads that lead to Damascus. *And Sleep in the Woods* satisfies both reasons for fascination. Thomas York, who is a novelist as well as a United Church pastor, certainly makes the literary most out of the narrative of his flight from the American south to the Canadian woods and the spiritual visitations that ensued. One does not doubt his experiences, but still finds it odd that he can write of them so volubly and with such deliberate artifice. At the same time, as a fellow man of letters, one is struck by the haunting speculation of how, if one were after all converted, one would fulfil the normal writer's urge to tell. *And Sleep in the Woods* is a book too self-conscious to be memorable, but it provides some interesting glimpses of the inner life of a reasonably good novelist.

G.W.

*** GEORGE RADWANSKI. *Trudeau*. Macmilland of Canada. $14.95. *Trudeau* is a portrait in depth of the man who, at the moment of writing, is Canada's Prime Minister. It is based on long conversations with Pierre Trudeau and on months of discussions with his associates, and it is supported by George Radwanski's considerable knowledge of the permutations of Canadian politics during the decade of Trudeau's administration. Since Trudeau is in fact much less a private figure than Radwanski tries to persuade us, there is not a great deal in the way of revelations that will surprise or be useful to either the Prime Minister's friends or his enemies. Those who detest him will find themselves confirmed in their reasons for doing so, and so will those who admire him. But this does not mean that Mr. Radwanski has been neutral; it is obvious that the blue and basilisk eyes directed on him during his interviews have not been without their effect, and he ends his book with a justification of Trudeau's policies so partisan as to diminish considerably any pretensions his book may have to being an objective study.

G.W.

** *Hommage à Lionel Groulx*, sous la direction de Maurice Filion. Leméac. n.p. Lionel Groulx, the patron intellect of Québec separatism, was born a hundred years ago. He constructed or reconstructed many of the myths that glorified the past of New France, and more than any other writer he was the protagonist of a racial interpretation of Canadian history. In the cult that now elevates his name one sees strange political combinations, for Groulx himself was an intense conservative, one of the leaders of the Québecois version of Action Française and an admirer of Mussolini and Franco, if not of Hitler, yet one finds among his pious admirers such *soi-disant* social democrats as René Lévesque. Lévesque is one of the contributors to *Hommage à Lionel Groulx*, a centennial tribute to the controversial Canon, who was born in 1878 and died in 1967 during another centennial, that of the Canadian confederation which he so thoroughly distrusted. *Hommage* is in three parts: a group of academic studies of Groulx; a group of tributes by famous living Québecois, including Lévesque; and a group of unpublished fragments by Groulx. It is useful reading for those who are interested in the roots of the Parti Québecois and the ideology it represents.

G.W.

** PETER SUCH. *Vanished Peoples: The Archaic Dorset and Beothuk People of Newfoundland*. NC Press. Archaeologists and anthropologists are all too often prisoners of their specialist vernaculars, and this means that one is usually relieved when a professional writer who makes no claims to be a specialist in such fields decides to write on their subjects, and does so with modesty and lucidity. This Peter Such, the novelist, has done in his illustrated book on the original peoples of Newfoundland. Everything he tells us can indeed be found with labour elsewhere, but he has brought it together interestingly, translated it from the jargon, and presented us with a readable and useful short history of the extinction of peoples.

L.T.C.

* JESSIE & WREFORD WATSON. *The Canadians: How They Live and Work*. Griffin House, $8.95. Part of a uniform series, this is a highly introductory, highly generalized account of the society for potential travellers, better on geographical implications than on history or Art or food. The literary section scarcely reaches the 1960's, and painting largely closes with the Group of Seven.

W.N.