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THE MAKING OF MODERN POETRY

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editorial

IN THE LAND OF EITHER/OR

IN 1871, BRITISH COLUMBIA joined Confederation on the promise of a railway connection across the continent. In 1876, Alexander Graham Bell made his telephone work. Marconi received the first transatlantic telegraph message in 1901, in Newfoundland. The CBC was founded in 1932. Television came to Canada in 1952. Jet passenger service linked Toronto with Vancouver in 1960. Anik I inaugurated Canada's satellite communications system in 1972. By the end of the 1970's, "fibre optics" and "computers" had become the watchwords of communications analysts and technicians; and in 1980, "Telidon" promised to become the system of the future.

Looking back at this sequence of attempts to conquer distance and time in Canada, we can marvel at the changes that have affected peoples' lives; and we can reflect on the increasing speed with which changes — of magnitude — are taking place. But can we comprehend such changes? We tend to interpret sequential events passively, as though they were merely new stages in a simple-life-unrolling-as-it-should. As though simplicity were still possible. As though new experiences in life are always extensions of the structure of life we already enjoy. Perhaps wishful thinking governs more than we care to admit. Because those who don't "already enjoy" tend to interpret sequential events as though each new one inaugurated a revolution to end all revolutions. Such responses render it difficult both to make credible claims for social stability or to recognize a real revolution when one's in the offing.

David Godfrey, in *Gutenberg 2* (Porcépic), the fascinating volume on the "new electronics and social change" which he and Douglas Parkhill (of the federal Department of Communications) have edited, claims that just such a real revolution is underway. Changes in technology are invoking changes in lifestyle, Godfrey writes, with such speed that they have happened before most people know they are coming; hence the technology is qualitatively altering society and at the same time invoking a new ignorance and a new illiteracy. Who will be involved? Every-

one. Who will be in control? That depends on who remains "illiterate" and who acquires the ability to help shape the connections between technology and social structure.

That computers already are variously aiding, folding, and spindling our lives there is no doubt. In the thirty years since 1950 — from a time when experts thought twelve computers would satisfy U.S. needs to a time when home computers are marketed as a suburban necessity — technologists have evolved micro-transistors, taken advantage of the cheapness of silicon to develop optical fibre communications systems, produced graphics components which have all the clarity of printed diagrams, and adapted other sciences to an exponentially growing machine memory to produce, for example, programmes in sociology and reflexive psychology with all the illusion of objectivity. There are valid applications for such techniques. But it is hard to remain placid when considering all their implications. It is not comforting, in other words, to know that — faced with a question from a machine — many people will be more willing to reply than they would if a human being had asked it, *and more open*, because they attribute to it at once a certain dispassion and a predisposition to listen. One must remember John Madden's solemn observation in *Gutenberg 2*: "computer and telecommunications technologies are *not* neutral and unbiased." Indeed not. They are hailed as the likely replacement for conventional mail delivery and bill collection; computer disc programmes are marked as the probable substitute for newspapers and directories; the systems are claimed as the resolution to problems (of both space and time) affecting telephone communication. The computer can take simultaneous events (like conflicting television productions) and by recording, make them sequential, so that they can all be enjoyed; it can receive messages at awkward hours, and so contend with the dilemmas of time-zone differences; it can take a mass of data which confuses the human mind, and classify and sort it till it becomes comprehensible. Behind these capacities, however, lies the imagination of the programmer. And extrapolated from the computer's proposed functions lie such problems as free choice, privacy, and legal responsibility.

One can rephrase these problems as four questions about any computer communication: who writes it? who controls it? who reads it? and who judges it? For a communications system to work it is clearly advantageous for the elements in it to be standardized. But if standard, do they then come under a single monopoly control? If under a single control, who makes the decisions and who makes the profit? If profit is the motive behind a communications system, and not merely an adjunct to it, does the amount of profit, more than the commitment to sharing information, govern the availability of information? Will there be barriers against some information, and if so, who will be in a position to make appropriate distinctions between, say, openness and obscenity, advertising and economic exploitation, a complex defence of national independence and a simple border-closing profiteer-

ing? If the computer replaces the newspaper, who guarantees that the computer-services will supply the range of information and informed commentary that once characterized newspaper journalism? Who guarantees the privacy of the private letter on computer? If a libel is perpetrated and retrievable on thousands of computer screens, how many court cases, how many courts, how many lawyers will the "new electronics" prompt? What price the freedom to be at once informed and independent?

Questions such as these we have asked in various way for some years, and they underlie a lot of adults' resistance to the computer "revolution." But what often goes unmarked is the fact that the revolution involves not only speed and magnitude but also changes in patterns of thought. Computers are not human; they operate on electrical circuitry which has been designed to select serially between sets of two options. The mathematics which governs them is dual: an algebra of (0,1). In order that the computer might make its "choices," all the information programmed into it must be reduced to an absolute and dual system. The circuitry is either "on" or "off"; the machine either selects or it does not; there are no other options. Which explains why computers continue to have some difficulties responding directly to language. Language is plural, not dual, full of multiple meanings, puns, metaphors, and contextual distinctions, and it depends often on ambiguity more than on categorical clarity for its artistic effects — just as a style of life depends on circumstances, moral understandings, custom, ceremony, and other non-exclusive claims upon a complex heritage. For the mind impatient with ambiguity, intemperate towards relative values, or inflexible about options, dualistic computer logic provides both the security of neat boundaries and the illusion of truth. But unless we wholly restructure our perception of human experience, it must inevitably distort as well.

So much, then, depends upon the programmer's totally human imaginative reach that one must encourage people with a sympathy for the humanities not to flee the computer revolution but to engage with it. Children must discover the freedoms and complexities of both language and number; we cannot sacrifice the future to easy dualisms. Life offers already too many instances of plural truths giving way to circumscribing dualities, in politics and publishing, for example, as well as in technology. Constitutional debates which differentiate between "Canadian" and "provincial" rights as though the provinces were not of their very nature Canadian imply an *either/or* dualism that the plural nature of the Canadian Confederation will not justify. Publishing houses which sacrifice the original and the unusual in order to print only the familiar and the commonplace might maximize their profits but will not sustain the culture. Critical and pedagogical methodologies which narrow the options for creativity and learning, rather than enhance them, will — because (often unwittingly) they predefine art and thought — inescapably inhibit both art and thought. It need not be an *either/or* world in which

we live. We can still choose. If the communications revolution keeps its goal — communications, not revolution — clearly in focus, then it carries the promise of further enfranchisement and opportunity for understanding. But it cannot do this if people remain passive about their own future. The computer, that intricate servant, that possible master, that biased machine, awaits the plural mathematics of the humanist's mind.

W.H.N.

THE POETS MELT ON WINNIPEG BEACH

Francis Sparshott

Mayday. Three poets walk between ice and sand,
three poets.
One on the lifeguard station
stares away sunward over the soiled beach
hugging his old knees;
one poet.
One with her eyes black-framed
aiming a black pen at the black book
on her black lap makes the white pages tremble:
one poet.
One that I could not see,
one I have never seen,
one poet.
They hold up the ice to the sun,
exlaiming together in their hoarse voices
because the crystals die with a faint chant;
but the sky is suddenly filled with stretched necks
of geese going over in their changing skeins
and a babble of nests in the clear north.
Three poems are written between sun and sand.
Geese in three poems
strut on the beach. The air fills
with words going over in their changing skeins
calling each other hoarsely, urgently
home to the clear north.

JAVA TO GENEVA

The Making of a Pratt Poem

Susan Beckmann

THE EVOLUTION OF EXPRESSION is just one of the meanings underlying the highly suggestive phrase "from Java to Geneva" in the Pratt lyric "From Stone to Steel," but it is this aspect of the phrase that metaphorically evokes E. J. Pratt's whole creative process from the first primitive stammerings of an idea to its articulate expression in a finished poem. What we have known of this creative method goes very little beyond such a metaphorical analogue, as our knowledge has generally been limited to comments Pratt made in interviews, such as these from a conversation with the CBC's Jed Adams:

> . . . an idea comes to your mind and it's nebulous at first and it takes shape by continuous reflection on it. And always in my mind is the importance of having the ending right. That's the reason why I write the end first. . . . I gradually weave my way back to the beginning, rather than from the beginning to the end. I find that's more satisfying because I have a terrible fear of anti-climax.[1]

By studying all the materials we have available to us on one given poem, we can find out a great deal more about Pratt's working practices from the conception of that nebulous idea to its polished expression in a finished poem. The writing of "The Truant" provides an ideal example for such an examination, as it was unencumbered by the problems of working with vast amounts of factual research, and because it reflects in miniature Pratt's usual method of proceeding from idea through research, drafts, excision, expansion and revision to the final form of a poem. Yet it should be conceded that the creation of "The Truant" is not entirely typical of Pratt's writing process, for the poem is dramatic rather than lyrical or narrative, the two types of verse most commonly associated with Pratt, and thus required not only different materials, but also a slightly different handling. However, its creation is representative enough to illustrate the most characteristic habits of his writing process, and after examining the creation of "The Truant" I shall turn to a study of the additional complicating factors and working practices exhibited in the writing of Pratt's narrative verse.

In a letter to A. J. M. Smith dated July 13, Pratt's friend and colleague at the University of Toronto, Ernest Sirluck, described the immediate circumstances in which "The Truant" took shape:

> Ned Pratt has been closeted with himself on the second floor of Vic since the end of term; he's working on a poem about which he's unusually close-mouthed. All

> he'll say is that it's concerned with the relation of human nature to power. I've never seen him so serious.[2]

This brief statement can help us begin to reconstruct the way in which Pratt worked and furthermore identifies the environment in which so much of his poetry was written. There is the reminder that only in the holiday period when he was free from the demands of lecturing and marking papers for Victoria College[3] could he settle down to write his verse. But the compensating advantages of his position at the University are also made evident in an indirect fashion. A private place to work, colleagues with whom he could discuss his writing and on whom he could call for specialized information for the documentary narratives, and the security of a guaranteed income, however small, helped to offset the immense demands on his time and energy.

The specific information that Sirluck's comments provide about the writing of "The Truant" also commands attention. The concentrated effort and seriousness with which Pratt undertook the whole endeavour suggests that, although Pratt intended the poem to be fun, he also had an important personal statement to make. "The Truant" was written under the shadow of the Second World War so that it bears the defiant stamp of battles waged against great odds which are definitive for Pratt of heroic conduct. It is the archetypal conflict of the individual against overwhelming and oppressive power that stands behind the extravagance of the Panjandrum's accusations and curses, and the effrontery of the little genus *homo*.

While Sirluck's observations contribute knowledge about the external circumstances in which "The Truant" took shape, for detailed information about how the poem was actually written, what literary influences it was subject to, and what it meant to Pratt, we must turn to other sources. Among these is a description of the poem prepared by Pratt for a reading given in the Victoria College Library in March 1956:

> This is a poem called "The Truant" representing man as talking back to a totalitarian God of power divorced from human considerations of kindness, equity and justice tempered by mercy. He is called here the great Panjandrum, a silly nonsensical term like the Lord High Executioner, knowing he can crush the human species physically by his overwhelming might. Hence the language he uses is formal, erudite and in accordance with a Gilbert and Sullivan court etiquette, and I am afraid able to vex his cousin. The theme is a conflict between the human will and an arbitrary oppression. Some of the words used in this poem I didn't know myself until I began searching for scientific terms in the unabridged dictionaries.[4]

Pratt points here to several influences on the poem which we should briefly consider. If the seventeenth-century court masque lends structure and character to the poem, it is the court masque as seen through the gay nineteenth-century eyes of Gilbert and Sullivan. It is from an eighteenth-century nonsense story by Samuel

Foote[5] that the title "Panjandrum" comes, but the evolved meanings of the word contain an ambiguity which Pratt built into his portrait. The *O.E.D.* defines "panjandrum" as "a mock title for *an imaginary or mysterious personage of much power, or a personage of great pretension* [my emphasis]; a self-constituted high mightiness or magnifico; a local magnate or official of grand airs; a pompous pretender." By design, the poem does not answer the questions of whether the Panjandrum is a mysterious, or just an imaginary character, of whether he is a personage of much power, or simply one of great pretensions.

Sandra Djwa[6] has demonstrated that the truant is revolting against a stoically-conceived cosmic power, yet conflict of the human will with an overwhelming mechanistic power is not only a standard theme of Pratt's, it is at least as old as Blake, as Northrop Frye has pointed out. After listening to Pratt read his new poem, Frye wrote this account for A. J. M. Smith:

> Ned has just read us his best poem yet, I think, called "The Truant." It's Blake's conflict of Orc and Urizen, the Prometheus-Jesus agent of humanity revolting against the God of universal machinery.[7]

In view of Pratt's close association with Frye at the time when the latter was absorbed in his Blake studies, the possibility of the poet having this particular instance of an archetypal conflict in mind when he wrote "The Truant" is not to be discounted out of hand. A comprehensive study of such sources and analogues for the poem would make a valuable addition to Pratt criticism, but is beyond the scope of this paper.

PRATT'S SEARCH FOR SCIENTIFIC or specialized terms in the unabridged dictionaries is evidenced in several places in the manuscripts where words such as "troglodyte," "coprolite" and "thaumaturge" appear in the margins. Some were worked into the poem; others never found their place. Similarly, lists of rhyming words jotted down in the margins, a characteristic feature of all Pratt verse manuscripts, contain some material the poet was able to use and some that had to be discarded. For example, from the list "black," "egomaniac," "track," "back," "bric a brac" and "claque" only the first (at l. 53 of the final version of the poem), second (at l. 55) and fourth (at l. 61) found a permanent place as rhyming words in the poem. The manuscripts of "The Truant" written in pencil in two battered notebooks (Box 4, no. 30 and 33) and four typescripts which I shall refer to as typescripts one, one A (a carbon copy of the typescript one with pencil emendations in Pratt's hand), two and three, have been preserved in the E. J. Pratt Collection of the Victoria College Library, University of Toronto.

These drafts indicate that the poet's usual practice of beginning by writing the end of the poem first and then working his way backwards was not observed in

the creation of "The Truant." The first fragmentary lines Pratt wrote for the poem were part of the Panjandrum's recitation of the truant's ancestral history and his threatened punishment:

> I found you in the primal slime — the protozoa
> And though you've grown I've modelled you
> You have become arrogant, a little dot speck mote
> Six feet tall and two feet wide
> I'll take you at the end intoxicate your cells cancel
> Put arthritis in your joints I'll dim your eyes deafen your ears[8]

What followed were preliminary versions of the truant's reply, insinuating that man had in fact created God.

There is considerable evidence in the manuscripts that "The Truant" grew out of another poem, the little lyric "Out of Step" from *Many Moods* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1932), for this title stands at the top of the second page of the earliest drafts and re-appears twice at later stages in the working papers. No doubt drawing on the age-old traditions of the harmonious music and movement of the heavenly spheres, Pratt spoke in the earlier poem of a "celestial dance" set to the "perfect orchestration" of him who held the "mighty baton," the "Master of the Skies." The measures of that dance were bungled by the numerous, awkward human imitators of the heavenly grace and expertise:

> But when the human dancers met,
> This year — about two billion —
> They fumbled with their minuet
> And CRASH went their pavilion![9]

The dramatic situation which structures "The Truant" is man being called up before the Master of the Skies (now in the person of the great Panjandrum), to answer for his infernal awkwardness, for his being *out of step* in the celestial dance. Here the dance is seen in the character of a court entertainment which requires the direction of a Master of the Revels, and it is he who levels the charge against truant man of walking "with tangential step unknown / Within the weave of the atomic pattern" (ll. 14-15), while the Panjandrum recites the accusations of "singing out of key" and "shuffling in the measures of the dance" (ll. 66, 68). In one early draft of "The Truant" the Master of the Revels "trained his cosmoscope / Upon the ballet of the fiery molecules" rather than on his captive, but Pratt revised the lines in accordance with the new poem's emphasis on man (as compared with the cosmic interest of "Out of Step"), shifting the subject for the microscopic investigation to the truant.

It should be noted, however, that it is typical of Pratt that once he has hit upon a particularly euphonic phrase or striking image he is unwilling to discard it lightly, and so "the ballet of the fiery molecules" found its place elsewhere in the poem at l. 27. But the phrase "rhumba of the stars" which came to Pratt's mind

at the initial drafting of lines for the poem never met the demands of rhyme, rhythm and sense at any one point in the poem so it was reluctantly dropped. Similarly, other examples of the terminology of music and dance, vestiges of "The Truant"'s relationship to "Out of Step," disappeared or were modified as the drafts developed. The Master of the Revels, describing his rebellious captive at one early stage of the writing, added, "I have vowed to make a dancer of him"; this despite the fact that his unwilling pupil "forswears all tempo." An unrhymed and unpolished statement of the truant's rebellion was also phrased in terms of music and dance:

> I will not join your ballet, sing your chorus
> I'm six feet tall and two feet wide
> And fourteen stone You
> Out of the fire water slime, I crawled found dry land
> fugitive from the dance

The air of Renaissance court masque that lingers in the poem as we now have it was once a stronger controlling metaphor in the verse, for the charges against the truant at one point included the disparaging of the fawning audience of the Panjandrum's cosmic pageant, or as Pratt put it:

> I now indict you of your capital crime
> . . .
> Your foul unmitigated arrogance dissonance
> Of singing out of key, ~~leaving the dance~~
> And leaving that dance
> And jeering at our universal claque.

A proposed title for the poem, "Off-Stage," appears in both notebook drafts and suggests that for some time Pratt conceived of the whole poem as a kind of pre-show confrontation between director and reluctant actor. "Still on the Stage" was another prospective title for the poem and it too emphasized its dramatic context.[10] A character called the Astronomer Royal was also originally a part of the court masque cast, though he did not survive the third draft of the opening lines of the poem. To him was initially assigned a part in the opening question-and-answer sequence of the poem, with the Astronomer Royal in the role of custodian of the truant and the Master of the Revels in that of interrogator. The Master of the Revels did survive, however, and he remains a somewhat incongruous relic of this stage of the poem's development. The highly dramatic structure of the poem is a happier result of Pratt's handling of his subject matter in the fashion of a Renaissance court masque.

Chaos, Old Night and Apollo proved to be the only survivors of another group of characters who were excised from the poem. They had found their way into the verse as the result of the only factual research Pratt seems to have done for this poem. On the title page of the notebook in Box 4, no. 33[11] are notes on the Greek

creation myth. In capsule form they record that the universe began as "a formless mass" ruled over by Chaos, until Erebus, his son, became the father (by his sister, Night) of Darkness and Light. From the union of this latter pair came an egg which, when hatched, resulted in the birth of "Eros — God of Love who formed the universe." Using this information, Pratt drafted these fragmentary lines:

Who pinned upon your Seraphim their wings
We showed you how to knot the tether
A rain of atoms
Banished Saturn and placed Jove upon his throne
Toppled the Giants
Sent Apollo after Daphne
We pulled you out of Chaos and Old Night
We painted pictures of your face
And ~~then rubbed out the colours~~
A rain of atoms
A stone dropped in a pool
A bursting bomb.

Between this draft of this section and the next, these notes on Norse mythology appear:

Thor (Zeus) foe of the giants whom he killed with his hammer
Freya (Venus) blonde
Luna Tiu (Mars) Loki { evil / giant } smoky.

Note how even in the process of recording factual material the poet in Pratt is at work, jotting down the word "smoky" as a possible rhyme for "Loki."

The Norse mythology was incorporated into the succeeding draft, so that the lines (with marginalia enclosed in square brackets) then read:

We painted pictures of your hybrid broods
Jove nestling as a swan in Leda's arms [sandals / Atlantic race / chase]
Aurora blushing at her birth from Thea
~~Apollo with his~~
Hyperion with the sun-burns on his face
Golden blond diaphanous Freya
. . . [we washed cosmetics / from your cheek]
Coyly watching Thor's conceit
Over his biceps as he left his smoky
Anvil to compete
In trials lost through the pranks of Loki
And when we tired of Chaos & Old Night
And the baby symbols Darkness and Light [archaic]
We pictured you as a rain of atoms
Or as a stone dropped in a pool
Set of circles made
Or as a bursting bomb exploding every in flight.

One more revision saw the cutting of much of the mythological material and the emergence of the passage in a form similar to the one in which we know it:

[Prelude to birth postlude to death]
And when one day pondering an eolith
We suddenly grew conscious of your age
And turned a human page [fern and fungus breath]
We jettisoned the cosmic myths
With all its baby symbols to explain
~~The sunlight in Apollo's eyes~~ [our rising pulses]
Chaos and darkness and the birth of pain
The sunlight in Apollo's eyes
And it was then we learned how to anatomize
Your body calibrate your size
And set a mirror up before your face
To show what you really were a rain
Of dull Lucretian atoms crowding space
A series of concentric waves which any fool
Could make by dropping stones within a pool
Or as a bursting bomb forever in flight
Within a slough of Chaos and Old Night.

Such large-scale excision and revision is matched on a smaller scale by the evolution of individual lines, couplets or groups of lines. We can, for example, trace what became of ll. 148-50 through nine stages to their present form. At first there is simply a list of rhyming pairs in the right-hand margin of a drafted stanza:

pain
cosmic stain
earth
birth

The last line of the drafted stanza

The rising pulses and the birth of pain

incorporated the first and last words from the list, suggesting that Pratt was considering a couplet with an internal rhyme here.

In the next stage at varying intervals in the right-hand margin of the revised stanza appear the phrases:

prelude to birth postlude to death
fern and fungus breath
our rising pulses.

Then after rejecting

That blend of fern and fungus breath,

Pratt filled out the line to complete the couplet and reversed the association of "prelude" with "birth" and "postlude" with "death" in this fashion:

Fear and the fern and fungus breath
Postlude to birth prelude to death.

But still not happy with the result, he tried yet again, immediately modifying the second line as he wrote:

Fear and that fern and fungus breath
~~Which steals upon us at our death~~
That clogs our nostrils at our death.

In the next draft the couplet does not appear as a unit, the line "The rising pulses and the birth of pain" standing on its own. But by the following re-writing the three lines are brought together, though the last line is still undergoing internal change:

Our rising pulses and the birth of pain,
Fear and that fern-and-fungus breath
That clog the approach of
Clogging our nostrils at our death.

Two more attempts at this troublesome line follow, as

Which stalks our nostrils to the caves of death,

yields to

Stalking our nostrils to our caves of death.

In the reasonably complete draft of the poem in the notebook of Box 4, no. 33, the lines reach their final form, except for the punctuation which is not fixed until the typescript versions.

Our rising pulses and the birth of pain
Fear and that fern-and-fungus breath
Stalking our nostrils to our caves of death — .

It should be emphasized that such experimentation with the form and placement of individual lines is typical of Pratt's writing process, and that the experimentation continues in some cases through typescript and manuscript versions.

Lines 32-33 of the poem

The chemists have sent back the same old story — / 'With
our extreme gelatinous apology,'

were first drafted as

Our chemists have returned the same old story
With the most humble*
apology

By the next draft they read:

* word is unclear in manuscript.

We
The chemists have returned the same old story
With our most debased apology.

The first typescript version appears as:

The chemists have sent back the same old story —
"With our most debased apology, . . . "

Typescript one A shows an emendation of the second line to read:

"With our knee-bent gelatinous apology, . . . "

and in succeeding typescripts and published versions the lines reach and retain the form in which we know them.

Line 7 of the poem as it appears in the *Collected Poems*, ed. Northrop Frye (Toronto: Macmillan, 1958), "By the keen logic of your two-edged sword!" did not become part of the poem until it was published in book-form in *Still Life and Other Verse* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1943). Line 122, "drew / Your mileage through the Milky Way," did not reach its present form until the re-publication of the poem in the *Collected Poems* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1944). Before that time typescripts and published versions had read: "drew / Your *mumu's* through the Milky Way."

A COMPARISON OF THE VERSIONS of the poem from the final holograph version, which totalled 178 lines, through the typescript versions of varying lengths, to the final form of 190 lines in the *Collected Poems* (1958), shows just how much revision and expansion Pratt demanded from himself even when the outlines of the poem were fixed. Typescript one shows significant variants from the final version in ten places. The Panjandrum is addressed as a "universally acknowledged Lord!" at l. 6, rather than as a "forcibly acknowledged Lord!" Entirely absent from typescript one are line 7 (discussed previously), ll. 47-52,

Pulled forward with his neck awry,
The little fellow six feet short,
Aware he was about to die,
Committed grave contempt of court
By answering with a flinchless stare
The Awful Presence seated there,

and ll. 72-73, "You have fallen like a curse / On the mechanixs of my Universe." The variants on l. 33, "With our extreme gelatinous apology," and l. 122, "Your mileage through the Milky Way" are discussed above. The "spavined troglodyte" (as it becomes in typescript three) is at this point a "cocktailed[12] troglodyte." Rather than "ordered the notes" at l. 133, typescript one has "paraded the notes."

And ll. 172-73 then read: "Will catch you blind and reeling and will send / You on that long and lonely. . . ."

Besides the change in l. 133 noted already, the only significant change between typescripts one and one-A is the modification of "dust" to "ash" in l. 164, "We grant you power, and fire / That ends in ash." Lines 72-73 are added in typescript two and ll. 47-52 first appear in typescript three.

The early holograph drafts are punctuated extremely lightly, but the final holograph draft in the notebook of Box 4, no. 33 shows evidence of a conscious effort to guide the reader by means of punctuation. The typescripts of the poem reveal Pratt polishing the grammatical aspects of his punctuation, for example, removing the comma after "size" in l. 152, "calibrate your size / And set a mirror up . . . ," and closing the quotation marks that had formerly been left open after the truant's final vaunt, "No! by the Rood, we will not join your ballet" (l. 190).

A collation of any of the published versions of "The Truant" with that of the *Collected Poems* (1958), reveals a mistake in the latter, and since it has been the copy text for most, if not all, subsequent republications of the poem, the error has been perpetuated. In both typescripts two and three, l. 28, "His concepts and denials — scrap them, burn them — " appears at the top of a new page. In the *Canadian Forum* version of the poem, 22 (December 1942), 264-65, as well as those of *Still Life* and the *Collected Poems* (1944), the line begins a new stanza, consistent with the rest of the poem's practice of assigning a new verse paragraph to each new speaker, but in the *Collected Poems* (1958) this stanza division has been lost. Both the rules of grammar and consistency with the rest of the poem argue that this division should be restored.

Northrop Frye reports that Pratt revised the poem yet again[13] for the 1958 *Collected Poems*, toning down the rebellious nature of the "little genus *homo*," but ultimately Pratt was convinced by the judgment of his friend and editor that the original version was the better poem, whatever the poet's change of heart may have been.

And when all the revision was completed, what did Pratt think of the poem? Another letter from Ernest Sirluck[14] to A. J. M. Smith records that Pratt spoke of it as "the present development of his central practice" indicating that the symbolism of "The Truant" was in the mainstream of Pratt's poetic practice, and that he saw himself as a symbolic poet rather than as a chronicler or ballad-maker. Yet there is no record of Pratt's ever having referred to "The Truant" as his favourite poem, that distinction being reserved at different times for "The *Roosevelt* and the *Antinoe*," "The *Titanic*" and "Brébeuf and His Brethren." The observations he did make on the poem are largely restricted to thematic comments such as this:

> The theme is the revolt of the human individual against tyrannical power. Man through evolution has become a truant from the original dance of the atoms. He

> has developed concepts, a will of his own, a moral sense and a spirit of adventure which refuses regimentation. He has left the stage and gone off on his own but is discovered by the Master of the Revels whose job it is to superintend the festival of fire. The man is brought up before the great Panjandrum of the Universe for trial. He is accused of singing out of key and of walking out of step and the Judge or Panjandrum assigns to him a penalty — not only of death but of being sent back after death to join the original molecules of fire in their eternal revolution. The Judge relates the man's ancestral past and the man replies that everything of value which the universe possesses is created by man himself and that this is a part of human nature which survives death and the material universe. The free personality is something immeasurably greater than mere bulk and power and physical motion.[15]

The evolutionary road of Pratt's thought on the relationship between cosmic order, man and a ruling power, from its first expression in "Out of Step" to its polished articulation in "The Truant" was indeed a long one. Thematically, Pratt moved from presenting the orthodox Christian position which sees universal disorder as a result of man's fall from grace, to a more broadly humanistic position which views whatever there is of either order or disorder in the universe as a manifestation of man's thought and action. Stylistically, the development was more complex, though the stages have been clearly traced.

IN FACT, THE DEVELOPMENT of almost all the poems after those of *Newfoundland Verse* can be studied by scholars interested in the genesis and evolution of Pratt's poems, as much of the draft material has been preserved in the Pratt Collection of Victoria College. The introductions and explanations that Pratt wrote for much of his verse are also among these papers and they often provide information about the original impetus towards the writing of a poem.

Sometimes the germ of a poem has become fairly well known, as is the case with "The *Titanic*." The ship went down very close to Pratt's home in Newfoundland, but it was the aspects of irony in the disaster that particularly drew him to it as a poetic subject. Pratt, in speaking of how he came to write the poem, said,

> My interest in the loss of the *Titanic* was always more than a desire to record a story, a concern more with the implications of the disaster than with the factual side of it, though of course the impression has to be produced through the facts. It is a study in irony, probably the greatest single illustration of the ironic in marine history. I do not think that the public have ever been completely aware of how deeply involved the *Titanic* was in the web of fate. It was as if the order of events had been definitely contrived against a human arrangement.[16]

Part of the irony was reinforced for Pratt by his meeting with Marconi on the day before the inventor's history-making reception of a trans-Atlantic radio-signal and the resulting elation that Pratt shared with so many others at the promise of

no more disasters at sea, no more of the grief he knew so intimately. Relating the number of safeguards built into the *Titanic*, Pratt explained:

> And the greatest of all lifesavers was the wireless which for ten years before 1912 had demonstrated its wonderful efficiency in the rescue of life at sea. I remember the intimate contact with wireless which a number of us had in Newfoundland just at the time of the achievement. I was attending the public school at St. John's where we had a remarkable teacher of Science, a man named Holloway.... We were just getting over the thrill of the discovery of the X-ray, the Roentgen ray which he was demonstrating to us in his laboratory, when he announced to us that a greater thrill was awaiting at the House of Assembly where the class in Physics went to see Marconi in person.... No one knew why Marconi was in town, or what he was doing up on Signal Hill a mile away at the mouth of the harbour. It was a dead secret only disclosed the next morning when the papers headlined the fact he had bridged the Atlantic from Signal Hill to Lizard Point in Cornwall with wireless telegraphy. I mention this because accompanying the thrill was the widespread confidence and boast that the days of great disasters at sea were soon to be ended.
>
> And the most powerful set on the ocean had been installed on the *Titanic*, with a radius of 1,000 miles at night. They said it was inconceivable in this modern age with the ocean alive with ships that a steamer could founder before her passengers and crew were taken off by a rescuing ship.... When the news of the disaster came to New York, Marconi, who was in the city at the time, and who was preparing to go back to Europe upon the *Titanic* on the return trip, wouldn't believe the report.[17]

Pratt's connection to Marconi and Marconi's to the *Titanic* disaster were part of the strange and fateful web of circumstance that so attracted the poet to the event.

Little, if any, of this is new information, but often the germ of a poem is less well known. Few people are aware, for example, that "The Depression Ends," to quote Pratt, "sprang out of a single word." His holograph introduction to the poem expands on this comment about how it was written:

> My friend and colleague P[elham] E[dgar] shouted at me as I was passing his room in the college one day not very long ago to come in and look at a word which he had just read in the A[tlantic?] M[onthly?]. Here's a word which has never been in a poem to his knowledge, the word 'prognathic.' "I'll stump you," he said, "to get a poem out of it...."
>
> I went home and said to Mrs. P[ratt], "What does the word suggest to you?" She closed her eyes and saw a Dickensian character, a Dominie, standing, birch in hand, over a squad of cringing schoolboys ... "Well, what are you going to do with her? Are you going to make her the heroine or the villain of the poem?"
>
> "No," I said, "I am not going to have anything to do with her, except that she is going to suggest the content of the poem by contrast."[18]

The poem he wrote was, of course, filled with the spirit of generosity.

Sometimes poems grew out of direct personal experience, as was the case of "The 6000" which, Pratt said,

> was suggested by a ride from Toronto to Belleville in the cab of a fast locomotive of the 6000 series. The speed, power and roar of the engine presented the analogy of a monster — a bull conceived in ancient fable with fire for breath and steam for blood.[19]

At other times, generally accepted truths would be undermined by some current event and Pratt's new insight would be given a literary form. Such was the case, according to Pratt, with "The Prize Cat":

> "The Prize Cat" . . . refers to Mussolini's attack on Ethiopia just before the Second World War. I had been pondering over the illusion that, with the growth of civilization and culture, human savagery was disappearing.[20]

At still other times, it was a written source that first prompted Pratt's poetic energies. Speaking about the origin of "The *Roosevelt* and the *Antinoe*" Pratt revealed:

> there was quite a long incubation period of straight amazement at the magnitude of the rescue without any formulated intention on my part to write about it. I first saw the account of it headlined in our Toronto papers and was so struck by the heroic outlines that I sent for and obtained copies of the New York papers and later of the English papers. . . .[21]

To observe that Pratt followed a pattern of exhaustive research following his decision to write a long poem on any given topic has by now become a commonplace of Pratt criticism, but often the sources and extent of his research have not come to light. The poet's comments about the sinking of the *Titanic* suggest some of the resources he may have drawn on in assembling information for his narrative of the event:

> I do not suppose there is in this century a single "local" event which has given rise to more discussion and heart-probing than the loss of the *Titanic*. Witness the length of the list in the *Periodical Index*, and the volumes — two of them during the past year — relating the reminiscences of the survivors and casting new light upon the disaster. . . . I had heard many people say that after seeing the film *Cavalcade*, the one unforgettable impression was the inscription of the name *S.S. Titanic* on the lifeboat when the lovers were taking their journey across the Atlantic.[22]

In another commentary on the poem Pratt quotes somewhat imperfectly from the report of the U.S. Senate Committee headed by Senator W. A. Smith that investigated the disaster, so he was obviously familiar with this source of information in one form or another. Furthermore, he not only familiarized himself with the records of the operations of the White Star Line to which the *Titanic* belonged, going so far as to secure menus of what would have been served to the ill-fated passengers, but he also sunk himself in the trade rivalries of the period. A very different kind of research went into the section titled "D-179." The technical terms used in the poker game Pratt gleaned from conversations with Pelham Edgar and other poker-playing friends. A variety of other resources, including books, articles

and technical reports of the disaster contributed in a general way to Pratt's feeling for the atmosphere and events of the ship's fatal maiden run.

Much of this research found its way directly into the poem. The rivalry between the shipping lines makes its appearance in the opening lines as Pratt narrates the way in which the *Titanic* out-classed the Hamburg-American's *Imperator*, and again as a topic for discussion in the dining saloon as the possibility of the *Titanic* outstripping the speed of the Cunard liner *Mauretania* is debated. The menus of the White Star Line were well utilized in "7.30 p.m. at a Table in the Dining Saloon" as Pratt used an itemized list of food and spirits to counterpoint the conversation of the diners and illustrate the scale of pretension to which the *Titanic* rose.

PRATT SEEMS TO HAVE NEEDED a special intimacy with his subject-matter, a physical closeness to it, to write at his best in the narrative poems. Commenting on the value of the reconstruction of Fort Ste. Marie and St. Ignace Pratt said: "There is something very dramatic in the very matter of exactitude. Indefiniteness is always a psychological loss to a pilgrim who is visiting a shrine."[23] It was just such a heightened sense of the dramatic and a psychologically convincing portrayal of the events he narrated that Pratt sought to achieve in paying such careful attention to detail in the writing of his verse. Thus, to prepare himself to write "Brébeuf and His Brethren" he not only sunk himself in the literary accounts of the history but he also made

> a number of visits to the shrines and the sites of the ancient missions to get some knowledge of the topography, of the flora and fauna, of the rocks and trees, the trails, the waterways, the edible roots and the proper names personal and geographical. . . .[24]

For "Behind the Log" he spent several days at sea aboard ships that participated in Convoy SC 42, or ones similar to them. He interviewed seamen who had been at the Battle of Cape Farewell. He secured copies of the Forms and General Instructions relating to convoys and even paid a visit to the Norse-Canadian Trading Company office in Toronto in order to get an authentic Norse translation of the words he wanted to put into the mouth of the Norwegian captain at the Convoy Conference.

Pratt's need for direct contact with his subject-matter is perhaps best illustrated by his struggles with the writing of "The *Roosevelt* and the *Antinoe*." Pratt relates that after reading the newspaper reports in January 1926,

> I did think that possibly during the following summer . . . I would make an attempt at it, which I did, but I realised that I was making a failure of it. I had selected a light mode of verse, the faster tetrameter in which "The Cachalot" was written. I saw it wouldn't go; the material broke the mould and so I abandoned it.[25]

It took the stimulus of several scientific articles on the radio compass (an instrument that had played a crucial role in the rescue) and renewed press interest in Captain Fried that was occasioned by his rescue of the *Florida* on January 23, 1929, to fully re-excite Pratt's interest in the *Roosevelt*'s rescue of the *Antinoe* as a poetic subject. But in the meantime he had written to the U.S. Steamship Line to get permission to visit the *Roosevelt*, a trip which was made in early January of 1929. He secured a passenger's diary, the logs of both ships, the exact messages which had been flashed back and forth between the two ships during the rescue operations and the contracts made between the master and sailors, signed before the departure. He was shown and allowed to operate the wireless, direction-finder and lifeboats aboard the *Roosevelt* and with the help of the second officer retraced from stateroom to deck the steps of the priest who had attempted to administer the last rites to the drowned sailors. Pratt had to leave the actual writing of the poem until the university year was over, but it was then drafted with relative ease in the summer of 1929 and published in early 1930.

We can document the practice of undertaking such thoroughgoing research for the first time in the writing of "The Cachalot." In an address on his publishing career Pratt explained how he came to choose the subject and also why he thought research such an important part of the writing process.

> I began hunting for a subject which would require some research and *give body to poetry* [my emphasis] and I thought of whale-fishing. I had seen whales alive and dead. I had seen them in the harbours of Newfoundland, particularly at Moreton's Harbour where I taught school for two years. I rowed around them where they lay dead after capture prior to their manufacture into oil. I realized that at last I had a subject which could lend itself to research — to the digging up of the raw material. . . .[26]

Pratt's notes to the poem published in *Verses of the Sea* (Toronto: Macmillan, 1930) indicate two literary sources Pratt used in his research: Frank Bullen's *The Cruise of the Cachalot Round the World After Sperm Whales* (London: Smith, Elder and Co., 1899) was no doubt consulted for the fight between the kraken and the cachalot, and it may have suggested the poem's title. Alpheus Verrill's *The Real Story of the Whaler: Whaling Past and Present* (New York: D. Appleton and Co., 1916) contributed other details of whaling expeditions and the object of their enterprise.

The fact that early drafts of "The Cachalot" can be found in a notebook which also contains copious notes on *Moby Dick* opens again the whole vexed question of the relationship between Pratt's poem and Melville's novel. Considering this fact, the striking structural similarities[27] and many other "coincidental likenesses" — such as the fact that Melville's *Pequod* meets (in Chapter 52) a whaling boat called the *Albatross*, the name Pratt chose for his whaling vessel in "The Cachalot" — one is inclined to think that *Moby Dick* was another source book.

In addition to personal experience and literary sources, the poem also benefited from Pratt's consultations with Frederick Banting regarding "data about [the] internal constitution of marine mammalia."[28] One humorous result of this relationship was the mock-heroic passage about the cachalot's pancreas and liver which was, if Pratt is to be believed, written because of the wide-spread current interest in those organs resulting from Banting's research. The notebooks in the Pratt Collection show that Pratt's own research included a lot of fact-hunting about early explorers, whalers, and whaling, as well as the assembly of a great deal of information about whales, krakens, and other forms of marine life. These materials were worked into the verse to give it an air of authenticity.

The research carried out for the companion poem of the *Titans* volume was even more extensive if the amount of factual notes which precede the drafts are an accurate measuring standard. Pratt carried out an intensive study of geologic ages, flora, fauna, geography, diseases and disorders of a dietary origin, and weather patterns in Southeast Asia for "The Great Feud." Though most of the information seems to have come from written sources, Pratt's visit to the Field Museum of Natural History in Chicago in June of 1926 when he was already at work on the poem, provided him with the object of his search for a counterpart to the semi-intelligent, female anthropoidal ape:

> I went to the zoological section and noticed that a whole floor was occupied by the skeleton of a carnivorous dinosaur named Tyrannosauros Rex. I looked at a number of the dinosaur's eggs which had been dug up in the Gobi desert, petrified of course through age and of enormous size. I said to myself — "What a monster to introduce into the fight."[29]

The impetus and the structuring principle behind "The Fable of the Goats" was a combination of the political situation in Europe in the mid-1930's and a little-known Aesop's fable. According to Pratt, Aesop's "Fable of the Goats" became "the basis of a rather elaborate poetic symbolism which . . . reflect[s] in an ironic manner contemporary world conditions."[30] Pratt's outside research for the poem was principally geological as he reports:

> I had to consult a geologist in order to construct aright the structure and strata of the mountain range on which the duel between the two goats took place. I wanted an exceedingly slippery rock and Professor Thompson gave me the names of a number of rocks, amongst which was schist, which he said would be geologically and mineralogically authentic.[31]

One could examine at greater length the origins and research processes behind Pratt's narrative poems, but I have cited the preceding cases as the most interesting and illustrative of the widely varied kinds of impetus by which the poet was motivated, and the equally varied kinds of investigation he undertook to give substance to his work. It is not possible within the confines of this paper to trace each poem discussed through its development in drafts, typescripts and publica-

tions; for the road from the "Java" of Pratt's thought and expression in manuscript drafts, to its "Geneva" in the production of a finished poem, is typically a lengthy and involved one. The detailed study of "The Truant" shows the kinds of intense revision this commonly meant for Pratt. When writing a narrative poem, the poet was careful to ensure that he was factually accurate in every detail and thoroughly knowledgeable about the environment and atmosphere in which he set his tales. Characteristically, Pratt would seek to attain this knowledge at first hand in order to have the details of an incident vividly and accurately set in his mind. Then, and only then, could he begin the long and demanding process of transforming the stammer of his ideas into articulate expression.

NOTES

[1] "First Person: An Interview with Jed Adams," transcribed from a tape in the CBC archives, Toronto. The programme, which was written and produced by Lloyd Chester, was aired in 1959.

[2] Ernest Sirluck file, A. J. M. Smith Collection, Thomas Fisher Rare Book Library, Univ. of Toronto.

[3] In an address delivered at a testimonial dinner to mark the publishing of *The Roosevelt and the Antinoe* Pratt remarked, "the University vacation [is] the only time I have for writing" (Notebook, Box 9, no. 65, E. J. Pratt Collection, Victoria College Library, Univ. of Toronto).

[4] Holograph in pen on small slip of paper, Box 4, no. 34, E. J. Pratt Collection. I have punctuated this and other Pratt prose commentaries in order to facilitate reading.

[5] The story was recounted by an anonymous book reviewer in Article VII, *Quarterly Review*, XCV (1854), 516-17. The anecdote, which is full of *non-sequiturs*, was designed to test the memory of the actor, Charles Macklin. Pratt's epithet "great Panjandrum" may be an imperfect memory of Foote's "Grand Panjandrum."

[6] Sandra Djwa, *E. J. Pratt: The Evolutionary Vision* (Vancouver: Copp Clark, 1974).

[7] Undated letter, Northrop Frye file, A. J. M. Smith Collection.

[8] Notebook, Box 4, no. 30, E. J. Pratt Collection. All subsequent quotations from manuscript drafts are from this notebook unless otherwise stated.

[9] This, and all quotations of "The Truant" with line numbers cited, are from E. J. Pratt, *The Collected Poems*, 2nd ed., ed. Northrop Frye (Toronto: Macmillan, 1958).

[10] Another title which appears to read "Still on the Rungs" seems to have no dramatic context at all, but may be meant to suggest an evolutionary scale.

[11] Why these notes should appear here rather than with the earlier drafts I have been unable to discover.

[12] "Cocktailed" in this context means an animal of less than pure breed.

[13] I have found no evidence that this revised version has survived.

[14] Undated letter, Ernest Sirluck file, A. J. M. Smith Collection.

[15] Notebook, Box 4, no. 33, E. J. Pratt Collection.

[16] Typescript, Box 3, no. 18, E. J. Pratt Collection.
[17] Typescript, Box 3, no. 18, E. J. Pratt Collection.
[18] Notebook, Box 7, no. 51, E. J. Pratt Collection.
[19] E. J. Pratt, holograph introduction to "No. 6000," *The Canada Book of Prose and Verse*, Book 4, ed. C. L. Bennett and Lorne Pierce (Toronto: Ryerson and Macmillan, 1935), p. 544.
[20] Notebook, Box 7, no. 60, E. J. Pratt Collection.
[21] Notebook, Box 9, no. 65, E. J. Pratt Collection.
[22] Notebook, Box 3, no. 16, E. J. Pratt Collection.
[23] Typescript, Box 3, no. 24, E. J. Pratt Collection.
[24] Typescript, Box 3, no. 24, E. J. Pratt Collection.
[25] Notebook, Box 9, no. 65, E. J. Pratt Collection.
[26] Typescript, Box 9, no. 69.4, E. J. Pratt Collection.
[27] See Robert Gibbs, "The Living Contour: The Whale Symbol in Melville and Pratt," *Canadian Literature*, 40 (Summer 1969), 17-25.
[28] Typescript, Box 9, no. 70.3, E. J. Pratt Collection.
[29] Typescript, Box 1, no. 6, E. J. Pratt Collection.
[30] Typescript, Box 3, no. 21, E. J. Pratt Collection.
[31] Typescript, Box 9, no. 70.3, E. J. Pratt Collection.

THE SMALLEST DETAILS

Bert Almon

You could call him cautious, or timid:
prudent is the word that he'd select.
He wears a red shirt to eat spaghetti,
and for the colder nights he turns on
the electric blanket a little early
and puts his pajamas under it to warm.
But when he goes to meet her — the joker,
the casual one who puts his ways down
to a sign of the zodiac — he forgets
his gloves, scarf, hat, and once even
fumbled his car keys into a snowbank.

TACTICS

Francis Sparshott

He lived he lives here that is true
a man with neither sons nor spouse
he cannot will not talk to you
I am the daughter of the house

My seven brothers went to war
they all fell burning from the sky
they joined the Royal Flying Corps
and that is how and that is why

The baron hid behind the sun
he wore a scarf and leather gloves
and they were seven and he was one
and he the falcon they the doves

The portraits hang in heavy frames
above the mantel on the wall
I never read the dates and names
I dust the glass and that is all

My mother's gone she crossed the seas
to tie a laurel round a cross
I was the one they loved to tease
they pinched and punched they are no loss

But Billy Bishop where were you
hopping the misty hedge below
those brilliant losses of the blue
you did not share you could not know

You strafed the trench you downed the hun
then homed on whisky in the mess
until your dingy war was won
that left my father comfortless.

DON GUTTERIDGE'S MYTHIC TETRALOGY

Keith Garebian

THREE PARTS OF DON GUTTERIDGE'S tetralogy appeared in the seventies, so there is no analysis of them in John Moss's *Patterns Of Isolation*, Doug Jones's *Butterfly On Rock*, or Northrop Frye's *The Bush Garden*. Nor is there any particular comment in Frank Davey's *From There To Here*, Elizabeth Waterston's *Survey*, or *The Oxford Companion to Canadian History and Literature*. Gutteridge does get worked into Margaret Atwood's victimization thesis in *Survival*, but the insistent generalization, blatant oversimplifications, and flippant humour of that book would hardly tempt a critic to examine Gutteridge's poetry for something other than thesis fodder. Gutteridge's historical tetralogy — *Riel* (1968), *Coppermine* (1973), *Borderlands* (1975), and *Tecumseh* (1976) — is a relatively recent corpus, but right from *Riel* it is apparent to a perceptive critic that Gutteridge is more than a journeyman poet.

Superficially, Gutteridge appears to be a documentary poet along the lines drawn by Dorothy Livesay in a celebrated paper presented at York University, June 12, 1969.[1] His tetralogy — where each work can stand impressively by itself — does not follow the strict narrative pattern in Browning's or Tennyson's manner; nor does it place its chief emphasis on historical perspective — despite all its debts to such eminent sources as Samuel Hearne, Louis Riel, John Jewitt, and David Thompson. Unlike American epics such as *Leaves Of Grass* or *The Bridge*, Gutteridge's tetralogy does not seem to create a single national myth, but reads very much like a group of long poems that are "based on topical data but held together by descriptive, lyrical, and didactic elements." Gutteridge's poems — especially *Riel* (subtitled "a poem for voices") — are meant to be read aloud; thus they join the ranks of other Canadian long documentary poems such as Marriott's *The Wind Our Enemy*, Birney's *Trial of a City*, Pratt's *The Titanic*, and Livesay's *Call My People Home*.

The most recent preoccupations with the documentary form in Canadian poetry — Andrew Suknaski's *Wood Mountain Poems*, Michael Ondaatje's *The Collected Works Of Billy The Kid*, Milton Acorn's *The Island Means Minago* — try to be more than either simple reportage or skillful didacticism. They attempt myth-making on a national scale, beginning with locale and extending, like Yeats's

famous gloved hand, past the cobwebs of history to universal themes and myths. Always there is an insistence on symbolic significance beyond the mere themes or didactic force. Indeed, all the parts of the tetralogy tell real stories — factually documented in fundamentals — for a myth's sake; and this myth is nothing if not that of a psycho-spatial man — doomed redeemer, freely adventuring explorer, or shocked captive-initiate.

Gutteridge — like Pratt — begins with historical data, but inevitably moves to create a poetic meaning for his stories. If we were to stand back from each of his four narratives, we would find four types of myth with their languages of symbolic translation. *Riel*, for instance, could be interpreted as a salvation-history, a story of a redeemer and his martyrdom. The symbolist *Coppermine* is in the old tradition of the quest. *Borderlands* is a myth of psychic integration and uses the motifs of captivity and cruelty. Finally, *Tecumseh* aligns with *Riel* in becoming an explicit myth of translation with Osirian analogies. In each case, there is an obsessive intensity of theme, but the entire form of *mythos* is clarified by Gutteridge's skillful deployment of language. The lyrical mode holds sway over all other styles, and diction and image show Gutteridge's preoccupation with transformations, with writing a language capable of expressing states of being.

RIEL DRAMATIZES ANTITHETICAL responses to land and life: the Métis response (personified and intensified by a neurotic Riel), and the white, colonial response. The first response is expressed through symbolism, lyrical and dramatic rhythm, while the second response is made explicit by flat prose.

At the beginning of this five act drama, we do not hear Riel's own voice, though we feel his spirit — especially as this vibrates in the act of his walking with his father in Pembina in 1858. The Métis, we are told, find "in walking a togetherness of spirit," and the image of legs dominates the whole first section of Part One — particularly the first five lines, which use words like "walking," "legs," "steady stride," "lean-muscled," and "striding." The second sentence begins with a verb and (because of the omitted, but implied, connecting pronoun "they," i.e., Riel and his father) we have the emphasis on a verb that becomes the principle of continuity, the dynamic essence of the joining and separating imagery and the evocation of a linguistic characteristic of Cree (one of Riel's tongues) which can render a whole sentence or idea by a single word. A scholar has called the Cree language "one gigantic verb" because it often achieves through alterations in verbs what other languages achieve through declension or addition of nouns,[2] and the unmistakeable impression we get from the third-person narrative opening is of one gigantic verb — the act of walking in togetherness before space and event intervene and separate the two walkers.

The preponderance of prepositional phrases — two in almost every line — creates a density of detail and modification; and a concreteness derives from the several dozen nouns. As the fellow-feeling between father and son is built up, it becomes increasingly clear that Gutteridge is aiming for a tribal sense in the rhythm, imagery, and event:

> They were walking: as a Métis always walked
> Because a man could feel the Mother Earth through the palms
> Of his feet, and know the firmness of her flesh
> And the great unturning heart at the centre of her,
> Were walking because walking told in every stride
> Of man's moving over the earth in a passing as brief
> As a footprint, and because a Métis found
> In walking a togetherness of spirit,
> Of flesh knowing the same earth at the same turning
> Of the sun or the season, and a man moving
> Was like the wind's loving of the deep grasses,
> And did not stand like the rocks and die with stillness
> In the bones, and because walking made spring
> Out of muscle and limb, and a man could feel
> His body lean as a willow in its long greenness,
> And because there was joy in a Métis walking
> With himself or his brother. These things had been told
> To him by his elders, and he had felt them.

Gutteridge's technical virtuosity is impressive. There is a taut quality in the buffalo hunt episode; a dream quality during the homeward journey, with slowly stretching syllables languorously and softly pronounced; a surrealistic overlapping of Thomas Scott's hysterical, sadistic laughter with the thundering noise of the stampeding buffalo; complex modifiers and descriptions from nature that (like the Cree tongue) are expressive and dramatically rhythmic in their rich vowel sounds, strongly aspirated consonants, verbal insistence, and varied tempo. Gutteridge is a prime synecdochist, for he takes the half wagon-half man configuration of the nomadic *Bois-Brulés*, and makes the wheel and circle emerge as dominant images during great colourful moments such as the gathering at Pembina.

But Gutteridge retains control over his language and his subject. Immediately following the opening section on the fellowship of walking, there is a prose letter by Charles Mair to *The Globe* in which the possession of land is made a bourgeois theme. An irony is obtained from the sharp contrast between young Riel's appreciation of the "great unturning heart" at the centre of Mother Earth and Mair's utilitarian approach to the question of prairie settlement:

> But who should come in and possess this land? The question is easily answered. Any farmer who has £300 of capital and provisions to subsist his family for at least one year. He should also bring his seed-grain, a Pittsburgh plough, harrow teeth and a separate mower. And he would have no difficulty in selecting a farm. There

> is no Stobson's choice about it, 'this or none.' The cake is 700 miles long and 400 miles wide — and plenty of elbow room. Here at the western terminus of the proposed route from Canada are the three prime desiderata of the husbandman: land, wood and water. Land upon whose bosom has withered the enriching and procreant vegetation of centuries — land which drops fatness, as if in the fulfillment of prophecy: at once generous and abundant, and more durable than its tiller.

Mair, in an extremely ironic way because he is a poet writing so mundanely, suggests that he himself is much of a bourgeois materialist, seeking to convert raw land into productive landscape.

The rift between man and land, western landscape and colonial encroachment, is further dramatized by the image of the railroad. Here geometry and language are the twin nuances of meaning, for the railroad is a "straight line" to "horizon's roundness" and its "steel tongue" intones "its single word into empty western-sky." From the beginning, then, of European expansion farther west, there is a drama and difference in viewpoint and language. Where the Métis, because they are native to the prairie, commune with the dusty plains and the ghostly winds and lights of the aurora borealis (*chepuyuk*), the white colonizers impose their shapes on the land via their technology, and show off "brick towers," "stone spires," and "square roads." The names of concrete objects contrast with images of hands, feet, and heart, sometimes allied to and consecrated by Métis religious connotations: "he was happy just to feel his father's strides / Coincide with his own"; "liking the feel of current pulling at his feet"; "twin-spires of the love / He learned at the altar of his mother's voice and arms / And hands." The community of feeling is intensified via the brief family-history of the Lagimodières and the repetition of the joining and separating images of feet, hands, and waters.

Though Gutteridge keeps his eye on event and connection, his dramatic evocations of personality and motive are strong. He shapes mundane, detailed portraits of such figures as Schultz, Scott, and Sir John A., which contrast vividly with an impressionistic, abstract rendering of Riel. Schultz, the western archetype of a political physician, is sketched as a staunchly respectable bourgeois, a freemason with Orange sympathies, bureaucratic, scheming, dyspeptic, arrogant, hostile to Catholics and Métis, and the prairie landscape. When he is first introduced to us, we take note of the strong patterns in his rhetoric. There are several adverbial phrases and clauses of concession that serve to make Schultz seem an archly sly conciliator who balances limitation against achievement, handicap against advantage.

Sir John A. comes off no less ironically. He is placed in a concrete world of objects, textures, and material values, and it is altogether a comfortable, elitist setting with its sideboard of American mahogany, its French port, crystal, scraps of parchment, quill, desk, stuffed chair, cigar-box, cut-glass decanter. With all the accoutrements of material comfort, Sir John A. entertains his distaste for the

Catholics, and seems intolerant of anyone else. His character and Schultz's show that the new Northwest was to be an extension of Protestant Ontario. In the archetypal mode of a nation-builder, he is represented as an architect toying with building blocks of the country's future as his alcoholism weaves its dark river in his blood.

In contrast with his white antagonists, Riel is represented through emotion-charged symbols. Many key periods of his life are suggested — his "miracle" in 1874, his wooing of Evelina, his madness, exile, and trial — but, in general, there is little attempt at a direct revelation of character and certainly no explicit conjuration of what Kinsey Howard calls his "paranoid schizophrenia": wherein he was prone to grandiose illusions, egotistical spells of morbid introspection, mental excitability, a sense of persecution, and a conviction of divine mission. This is not to suggest that these traits or symptoms are not present in the poem. Gutteridge does not take license with history; he merely departs from it in order to create something quite different.

If (as A. R. M. Lower argues) there is a point when history becomes myth, then Gutteridge's Riel is less a historical figure than a mythic one. He is not a rebel or insurrectionist but a line of resistance — a core of anarchic defiance. Yet Riel is not simply a symbol. If he were only this, then Gutteridge would have ironically repeated a historical mistake which once caused Riel to cease existing as a credible man. Though he is dramatized in opposition to Scott, Schultz, and Sir John A., Riel is an eloquent mystic, but here again irony prevails; for unlike the mysticism of orthodox Catholics, Riel's mysticism contains little or no joy. Instead, Riel's mysticism is based on certain magical superstitions, and expresses the transports of one who has not been estranged from his "primitive," native self. It is the root and delimitation of his messianic obsession, and leads to dreams and visions that are lyrically intense and totally alien to the minds and hearts of the colonizers.

There is another problem with Riel's characterization, and this probably arises out of the lyrical compression in the verse. To begin with, we do not have enough of the priestly rhetoric that often drenches the historical Riel's letters and sermons. And because of this deficiency, we do not obtain an effective contrast between the religious musings of a man obsessed with his self and the political writings of the same person where there is scant attention paid to personal fate. Nor is there enough ambiguity surrounding Riel's sanity. In Gutteridge's poem, we feel some of the soul-magnifying and mind-splitting force of his sense of destiny, but there is no sense of bizarre, anthropomorphic eccentricity, no grotesque distortions of the ego and religious belief that could possibly arouse solid doubts about his mental equilibrium. He is very realistically a David, awaiting the moment of his victory over Goliath: "David: fondling a / smooth stone, fingers seeking / The spring of its power." He is also very credibly a historical Messiah-*manqué*, "Moses confronted by a burning bush / That made the sky around it only blacker," and even,

spiritually, a Christ among men. But he is not a madman, even in passing flights of uncontrol. His flashes of apocalyptic imagery (such as allusions to moving mountains, the Four Horsemen of the Apocalypse, and the Second Coming) make him an intense mystic, but they do not suggest he is hallucinating like one who has lost all distinction between the actual and the imagined.

THE ENDING OF *Riel* RENDERS the poem apocalyptic in its symbolism and meaning, and this revelatory impulse links it to *Coppermine*, which, however, expresses a very different myth in a different style. The period of *Coppermine* occurs roughly a century before Riel's story, and now we are in the North rather than in the West. If *Riel* can be seen as a would-be Messiah's quest for his people's salvation, *Coppermine* can be interpreted as a Canadian version of the El Dorado myth.

Though Matonabbee, Chief of the Northern Indians, is the most striking character in this poem, it is the figure of Samuel Hearne who projects (through Gutteridge's poetic refractions) the white man's quest for the golden (read copper) one:

> Matonabbee speaking
>
> 'Where the mouth of the grand river opens
> To swallow the sea, lies the Copper-mine:
> And they say the metal sits there in chunks
> As big as a bison's flank, and that once
> When the dogs long ago dwelt there, they built
> Giant fires out of the burning Aurora
> And ate the copper flesh to make their
> Blood hard, and what you now see there are bones
> The gods have left behind in the daylong
> Darkness, with only the Boreal light
> Flickering on their nakedness like pale
> Shadows of flame from some far-off dying
> Hearth-fire of the Manitou.'

As Matonabbee tells this legend of the coppermine, he seems to be enjoying the myth possibly because he gauges its special enchantment for Samuel Hearne and company. And the copper symbol is portentous from the start — sinisterly so, for it is present in "gold visions" rejected by Midas whose gold-lust would normally not exclude anything golden.

Gutteridge projects through Matonabbee the sort of terror sprung out of the land and described by Frye in the *Literary History of Canada*: "It is not a terror of the dangers or discomforts or even the mysteries of nature, but a terror of the soul at something that these things manifest." In *Coppermine* the terror is

temporarily attenuated as the Copper Woman myth enlarges. Geography is internalized and reprojected in lines that describe this mythic creature:

> Because she was a magic god-woman —
> Brown, like us, only her skin glowed as if
> Tiny fires burned in her flesh and shone through
> So you could see the rivers and runlets
> Her blood made, her whole body like a map
> With its own lakes and streams, and dark patches
> Where the land lay, and she had no deerskins
> On her, though the cold made the tent-poles snap,
> And snow melted on the flesh of her breasts,
> Buttocks and unlit cave of her thighs.
> They followed her over the treeless Barrens
> Through the darkness of night and day, their eyes
> On the north, which was the darkest part of
> The sky, and on the crevasse of those deep
> Woman-thighs, till they came to the place of
> The copper, and found her vision was true.

Everything is transmuted surreally into copper. Even the sexual sadism (just as strong in *Borderlands* and *Tecumseh*) is converted into something like a picture by Salvador Dali whose surface exoticism or polished strangeness does not obscure the psychological portent. The purpose of the surreal is not simply to excite the senses with a flow of apparently discrete images and colours, but to create a field of association that could develop into an integration of meaning. Though at first the surreal seems only unlikely or purely imaginative, its symbolism has an important psychic import. The surreal allows the poet the opportunity to indulge his artistic imagery, dispense with linear narrative, and — provided his synecdoche is clear enough — to build up a special significance for his motifs.

The method of *Coppermine* is largely symbolic and abstract — unlike that of *Riel* where meanings and symbols are connected through events that can be verified historically. Not that *Coppermine* is not based on history, but its composition appears to rely less on documented experiences — though its depiction of the Eskimo slaughter is thoroughly accurate — and more on Gutteridge's power of lyric projection. Because the poet is interested in determining "what the eyes / won't tell," "what kind of mind" feeds on certain legends, he uses history as a point of departure or, at least, a core of radiation. The core is, of course, Hearne's obsession with discovering the source of copper, and the separate rays are the moments (scenes) of energy where the characters and the poet think "copper." There are accordingly periods of powerfully evocative symbols, moments when the struggle of the inarticulate seems to be overwhelming, phases of unresolved enigma, but the total work ultimately creates a significant story that, in using the archetypal quest form, finds analogues of being and types of knowledge that radiate from Hearne's adventure of exploration and discovery.

External and internal worlds converge in *Coppermine*, and the mouth image becomes the chief expression of this phenomenon. Even in his fantasies, Hearne imagines himself being swallowed by the mouth of the mine, and his brain, the seat of reason and animal spirits, becomes metaphorically contracted to the mouth as space, light, and knowledge enter it.

This particular metaphorical alliance is especially significant, for it is an important detail in Gutteridge's synecdoche of psychic integration. Even space is represented as a "polar mouth / mind eaten / with its own appetite" and then, even more explicitly (but repetitively), its "magnetized teeth / nibble my brains / like copper meat."

The poetic voice of Hearne the explorer develops the drama of quest wherein the spirit seeks unity in the material world. In this regard, the geometric images (especially those of circles) are particularly effective. The first circle is, perhaps, the explorer's own eye, which besides throwing its focus on the sun (a cosmic eye) and the lines of vision measured by the quadrant (Hearne's third eye), also looks at itself in a sort of Plotinian reflexiveness. For Plotinus, the eye would not be able to see the sun if the eye itself were not the sun. Hence we have traditional representations of the sun as an eye, or of Osiris and Christian God as a divine eye.

With his quadrant, Hearne acquires a third eye which is of dual significance. On the positive side, it symbolizes superhuman or divine awareness — much in the manner of Shiva's powerful third eye. However, on the negative side, a third eye is useless and is cast in darkness. In symbolist theory, the multiplicity is a sign of inferiority or psychic decomposition. It is the negative aspect which is stressed rather comically when Hearne breaks the quadrant:

> That day on my
> first journey when I
> broke my quadrant;
> they found it funny
> to see a blind man
> with three eyes.

The broken quadrant itself has an interesting significance, for the symbolism of quaternity implies the idea of a perfect order, the idea of the four natural elements that compose the universe in ancient Greek philosophy. Elsewhere in the poem, there is a moment imagined by Hearne when the square is circled: "Circles in a / squared eye: / earth affirmed. . . ." Here the squaring of the circle (or the circling of the square — the order is reversible) is a geometric metaphor for stability, order, and materialized energy.

The point of Hearne's quest in this poem is not simply a geographical adventure or a colonial enterprise. It is abstracted into a quest for self-transformation. Matonabbee indicates as much by his own self-translation, when in dance he becomes a man recovering his sense of the eternal:

Matonabbee as
leader of the band
conducts the
supplicantatory dance,

and for an encore
swallows whole
(like a slithering adder)
a ten-inch rancid penis,

then, puffed as a bullfinch
struts and prances
till we almost believe
those antlers sprouting
from his skull!

The energetic verbs and participles ("puffed," "struts," "prances," "sprouting") align with the slithering adder and penis to signify both an inner spiritual and an external material strength — potential for the propagation of cosmic forces. The rising force is developed in the swelling dance where the verse follows the ascent of Matonabbee's force, moving upward from the sexual organ to the skull or realm of thought, at which point Matonabbee becomes a horned god or motif of eternity.

Samuel Hearne, however, never attains this height of self-transformation, though he experiences intensely an implosion of energy and consciousness: "the caves in the / brain flame inward / like igloos of / transfused light." Hearne is always uncertain of his direction:

I am here, I know,
was there, and there

but

if I lose this
book map page
where have I been?

where do *I* go?

Despite his confusion, Hearne experiences an upward movement. This is catalyzed by Matonabbee's ritualistic dances, priogenitive prophecies, and symbolic references. It is Matonabbee who suggests the unity in multiplicity, although Hearne does not confine his images and symbols to Indian myth. He conjures up psychic significances from the Bible and Egyptian myth, and just as he sees in Matonabbee's slithering adder dance a spiritual ascent, he also intimates through his reference to Osiris rising, an evolving ascent; the very name Osiris means "he who is at the top of the steps."

Matonabbee, nevertheless, becomes the prime reference for Hearne as Gutteridge carefully represents the chief as a symbol of supreme spiritualization. There

is a section, for instance, where Hearne observes, at first hand, the strange art of the medicine man-cum-conjurer:

> See Matonabbee the conjurer
> swallow a four-foot sword
> with his two-inch tongue!
> No tricks here
> no sleight-of-hand,
> naked as a bird he's
> plucked from tuft to toe!
>
> Old man in his death-throes
> waits for the magic to come:
> I watch his face, see
> death growing there
> like a masque of
> plaster bone,
> eyes adazzle with
> the glitter of dying:
> last radiance of
> mysteries not known
> magic unredeemed.
>
> But see how the
> conjurer plunges the
> healing wand into his
> living throat, four feet
> down to the blood and bone
> to the heart of the mystery,
> see him pull the cord
> to draw the magic out:
> glittering sword
> adazzle in the darkness,
> bloody tongue
> of radiance.

The sword has obvious magic power — linked as it is to steel and hence to transcendent toughness or an all-conquering spirit. It is a symbol of spiritual evolution[3] and in the context above, its association with light and fire ("glittering," "adazzle," "radiance") intensifies the spiritualization.

The "old man" is not a decoration or self-evident symbol. Besides being obviously a personification of age-old wisdom, he is the symbol of what Jung calls the "mana" personality — that is, the spirituality of personality caused when consciousness is over-burdened with matter from the unconscious — death, in this context.[4]

It is Matonabbee who activates the magic of the sword, who releases the magic spirit welcomed by the old man awaiting death, and who (an hour later) takes

on the crooked grin of a slightly ruffled bird — another symbol of spiritualization — as the old man is returned to life.

FOR ALL THEIR STRANGE BEAUTY (a beauty coupled often with the obscene cruelty of violence), their intensity of imagery, their technical skill, Gutteridge's poems move inevitably towards the theme of death. *Riel* ends with the eponymous figure's abrupt hanging, with the cold "gray towers" of Ottawa dominating the fadeout. *Coppermine* charts its quest pattern surrealistically, but moves to the subject of a material death. Yet, this time the end is dualistic, for while Hearne begins his "long walk," he moves "back," i.e., returns his spirit to its cosmic source.

Borderlands, the next poem in the tetralogy, does not suggest a positive aspect to the death theme, for it shows John Jewitt, its protagonist-initiate, preparing for death without any spiritual translation. *Borderlands*, however, continues to show Gutteridge's variations on patterns. Unlike *Riel*, it is not about an ambivalent historical figure. Unlike *Coppermine*, it is not abstract in its method; nor is it a quest narrative. It is what could be called a story of initiation,[5] where the chief narrator is primarily concerned with self-preservation. The difference between quest literature and initiation literature is that between free exploration and captivity, or between ultimate purpose and a sense of immediacy.

Ostensibly based on Jewitt's account of life among the Nootka, *Borderlands* substantiates Frye's claim that "literature is conscious mythology" where its mythical stories "become habits of metaphorical thought."[6] This symbolic aspect crystallizes early as Maquina, the Nootka chief, articulates the perimeter of his geographical knowledge:

> Looking out is West
> where Ocean begins
>
> Looking in is East
> where Forest has his root
>
> We have no North:
> sun is always
> South of this coast
>
> North of here
> is nothing,
> nothing I
> want to know.

The primeval setting is radically different from the prairie in *Riel* and the surreal locale in *Coppermine*. Here myth grows out of "immense ranges of mountains or impenetrable forests" and "the pain of constant / distance" in the ocean. It is

the myth of the captive-artisan, the blacksmith who is almost broken on the forge of his experience in an alien world. Jewitt, whose blacksmith-father wanted to be "Christ's armourer," discovers that his craft has dual significance: it is both his salvation and his weakness, for it permits him Maquina's favours but also keeps him the chief's captive. Maquina intends to be the strong hammer that strikes the metal of white man's flesh.

Here, as in *Riel*, Gutteridge develops a dialectic out of two contrasted ways of life — each apparently extravagant to the other. Where Mozino's Journal refers to a "barbarous sacrifice," Captain Gray and his crew take sadistic delight in murdering and committing outrages on the Indians: "we giggled as the / little puddings of their / brains dribbled out, / we took turns pissing / on their last smiles." The two tribes — Nootka and European — are closer in their instincts than they realize, for there is no difference between Maquina's lyrical description of the slaughter of the crew and Captain Gray's sadism — except one: Maquina is coldly detached while Gray is emotionally and psychologically involved.

In other aspects, too, Nootka and European resemble one another closely. Maquina is ruthless in sex and war: he hacks his wife to death just as brutally as he assaults the *Boston*'s crew. Jewitt, by the same token, becomes pure animal in his lust, and though some whites have objected that his idiom is too modern for the setting, we should remember that animal nature lies under the accretions of time and culture.

The shared savage instincts are set apart by contrasted languages which attest to distinctions in background, sensibility, and objective. Maquina asserts that the white man's way of fixing and cataloguing reality by rigid, unchanging names contrasts with the aboriginal proclivity towards multiplicity:

> My daughter has had three
> names and many more to come,
> when I have reached my
> last name on earth
> I shall already be dead,
> when my tribe runs out of words
> this coast will be blowing sand.

Maquina calls the white man's words hard, many-edged, angular, and sharp, but destructive. The irony is that while the white characters often struggle to give names to feelings and experiences, Maquina is an eloquent primitive. There is a strong clipped quality to Jewitt's diction, as though speech were being wrenched out of him.

The only time Jewitt becomes lyrical is when he describes his smith's craft. Here Jewitt is released from the burden of his coarse, ungraceful aspects and exults in the grace of his craft. Maquina, by contrast, consistently sounds a raw music that attests to the tactility of his being — a drum on which the universe sounds itself.

This eloquence is a crafty device which does not simply serve Gutteridge's lyrical impulse; it is a valid, *psychologically* correct product of passion and a human nature attuned to its setting. Gutteridge, perhaps anticipating critical queries or objections, quotes Mozino's view on native eloquence and rhetoric:

> Since eloquence has always been considered the child of vivid passions, and since these are capable of firing even the imagination of these savages, it should not seem strange that I affirm its existence among these islanders, and in passing forestall those critics who are quick to claim that the speeches placed in the mouths of these savages by certain writers are false, as if in order to speak with enthusiasm, making use of the most moving figures of speech, it is necessary to attend universities, to read books entitled 'Rhetoric,' and be ridiculous mimics of Marcus Tullius. To be eloquent, it is enough to follow freely the impulse of nature, whose mastery created the most celebrated orators of Greece.

What *Borderlands* amounts to, then, is a literary documentary where the desire to impress by a cumulative piling of effects diminishes its intrinsic dichotomous nature. At once direct, immediate, colourful, and powerful, *Borderlands* does not move deeply enough into realms of the archetype. We see that Maquina intuits the symbolism of salmon as the fish of wisdom; we know that the Bear ceremony has a significance beyond the merely sensational enigma impressed upon Jewitt; but the symbols do not amount to much in the general scheme of the poem. What we tend to remember best are the sexual sadism, certain exotic ceremonies — documented in Jewitt's original journal — and Maquina, who despite an impressive theatricality, integrity, and strength, does not overwhelm Jewitt.

The fundamental problem might be in Gutteridge's tendency to oversimplify the captivity story. His poem misses the motive for the chief's slaughter of the crew; it also misses the striking indignity suffered by Maquina, following Captain Salter's reproach. The poem fails to become the tragedy it could have been, and becomes a melodramatic narrative where Jewitt prepares for death and Maquina reasserts his "sea-dream" mortality.

THE FINAL PART OF Gutteridge's tetralogy returns us to cosmos and epiphanic translation after exploring the borderland between history and myth. *Tecumseh* is, like *Riel*, an example of conscious mythologizing, and like *Riel*, extends from historical circumscription to a psychic internalization of the land and its various impulses.

The first part of *Tecumseh* provides us with pioneer dreams in French Quebec. There are various dreams projected in this section — that of a seigneur who is full of alcohol, blood lust, sex, and tawdry religiosity; one by a young woman and her mother — for both of whom reality is paradoxically an *illusion* of security and permanence; and two dreams by pioneer father and son who struggle to make the

land fit their dreams of colonization and prosperity. These dreams are counterpointed by Tecumseh's in Part Two, where the Indian strives to find a language appropriate and powerful enough to free the figures of dream: "my tribe's history / the necessary nightmare." There are several other elements as well — interludes, commentaries, historical expositions, meditations, a proclamation by General A. P. Hull, letters, and orations — but the predominance of dream renders this poem apocalyptic, and when we view it in the total context of the tetralogy, we see how the apocalyptic is a frame around Gutteridge's mythic mode.

As in all major works of prose and poetry about colonial Canada, it is the white man's dream of imposing himself upon the land that degenerates into a horrible nightmare wherein the external is internalized. Just as with Margaret Atwood's pioneer, who grows progressively insane as the land invades his resisting mind, the Quebec *habitants* are imprisoned in "cages" of their own making and become victims to their own paranoid delusions of security and permanence.

The colonial dream of civilization is protected assiduously by the various emigrants, but no dream remains inviolate:

> The dream of civilization
> I carried with me
> over the borderless ocean
> kept pure in the stink
> and rabble of the ship,
> have guarded here
> against all enemies —
> needs room to breathe,
> as well, will soon be
> feeding on itself.

No matter how zealously the bishop attempts to assert pioneer endeavour and instruments of colonization, his apology is a weak resistance to the inevitable power of the land which compels the pioneers to admit that their log-walls are only an illusion of a home, "a domestic fiction" which ineluctably becomes a squelched dream.

Pioneer effort becomes grotesquely obsessive, but even the most grotesque human aspiration cannot match nature's grotesqueries. Father and son, both full of harsh labour, cannot force the land into a Procrustean adaptation to their ambitions:

> But the big
> trees remain
> beyond the clearing
> beyond the arc
> of hand or axe,
> nightmare or dream:
> in the coldest day

they etch their grotesquerie
across the whitest sky.

In the end, the son wants freedom from both his father and the land, the father is swallowed by his own dream, and there is an overwhelming sense of defeat despite the advent of nationalism and territorial protectionism.

Tecumseh's dream is to reclaim the land his people have surrendered to the white man. What justifies this dream is not simply a moral right of re-appropriation, but a fundamental understanding of nature that is resisted by the white colonizers to whom land is simply property or a possession that is without numinousness.

As in *Riel*, the political element is strong — particularly with the genocidal charge laid against the Canadians, and the subtle American strategy of exploiting Tecumseh as an agent for their own imperial expansionism. But the controlling dialectic (as in *Riel* and *Borderlands*) is expressed by a clash of symbols and values in the white colonial language of steel (the railroad a "steel tongue intoning / Its single word into empty western sky") and the Métis language of spiritual brotherhood. In *Borderlands* this clash is polarized in two modes of language — the rigid tongue-sounds of the whites and the perennially recreated language of the Nootka's never-depleted supply of words. Now in *Tecumseh* we have language that suggests a primeval myth, and the images (as in Scott's Laurentian poems and many sections of Pratt's *Towards the Last Spike*) spring out of the elemental landscape — of rock older than first bone, "seamed with myth / with hieroglyphic runings / sealed by a silence / that stilled / the first and vital Word." We have the aggressive, destructive language of the western colonizer whose speech, like his pioneer activity, testifies to a ruined dream feeding on itself, and is expressed with energy but without love or understanding. And we have the second language — the self-conscious, visionary utterances of Tecumseh, chief of the Shawnee, who tries to unite different tribes against the U.S. and save them from extinction.

Gutteridge generally finds the right sensuous lyric form to vitalize his narrative and absorb the prosaic ironies of miscellaneous documentation. His diction is powerful but beautifully simple except when he tries to express a character's intuitive intelligence by means of sophisticated abstraction. At these points, Gutteridge's imagery becomes obtrusive and anachronistic, especially when it issues from Tecumseh in moments of intense lyric self-consciousness. With Tecumseh, Gutteridge too often strains western diction into expressing an acute anguish and sensitivity whose pain is older than language.

But there is achievement even in this failure, for *Tecumseh* is an impressive drama of translation. Despite his mutilated corpse, Tecumseh remains the unstilled voice of conscience in a land that has the scattered pieces of his body. His Osirian dismemberment is a deliberate mythic reference, and when his resurrected spirit is said to enter all things and speak to us in a way that "humiliates the air" and

breaks the chronology of his people's despair, we know explicitly that Gutteridge is exploring the borderland between history and myth.

With Riel and Tecumseh, Gutteridge finds two historical figures who indulge in conscious mythologizing. Riel cultivates tenaciously his self-images of prophet and messiah where Tecumseh's oratorical power, while asserting the catastrophe and pacifying powers of language, enlarges his own vision of a personal myth that will be both strong and liberating:

> I want to fashion good words forever,
> stretch my body into a continuous sentence,
> humiliate the air with speech, break
> the chronology of my people's despair,
> sew them green stories, chronicles of hope,
> weave a new history from our twin beginnings:
> we shall see our own shame and the
> white man his — he will smile and
> give up his books, his bellicose
> reading of the world's working-out,
> my myths will eat him, page by page,
> into silence — decoded, he will be free
> at last to utter those poems that have
> no need for the curvature of words. . . .

At the end, of course, Tecumseh becomes the spirit in all things, the historical hero, prophet, and mythopoet.

In sum, Gutteridge's tetralogy crystallizes his sympathy for underdogs — whether they exist in western society or outside it, sinister or disturbed. This produces — for all the sophisticated symbolism — a worldly vision of a human struggle for power. But this power is not simply the power of politics or technology. It is, instead, the power to evolve spiritually, and it is a mystery treated with sensitivity. Clearly, the heroes in Gutteridge's landscapes are not the bourgeois proponents of planning, technical efficiency, regimentation, and social convention. When his men become heroic — and it is always *in extremis* — they do so in circumstances that do not afford the protection of social order.

What this produces is a sentimentalization of the primitive ethos, and such an effect is yet another demonstration that the romantic age of Canadian poetry is not really over. From Purdy to Cohen, from Gutteridge to Atwood, there is still a fascination with masks — with gestures and expressions of the primitive, as if that element were the residue of a civilization purer than our own. All these poets are concerned with visions of destruction which may or may not be translated into a psyche-enlarging apocalypse, but the combination of brutal sex, physical violence, and psychic confusion is metaphysical in its attempt to yield a transcendental value as art. The danger inherent in this position, as Sandra Djwa has pointed out in a piece on Cohen's black romanticism, is "the temptation it offers to mistake

catalogued sensation for new revelation."[7] I think, however, Gutteridge generally succeeds admirably in resisting this temptation.

NOTES

[1] "The Documentary Poem: A Canadian Genre," in *Contexts of Canadian Criticism*, ed. Eli Mandel (Chicago: Univ. of Chicago Press, 1971), pp. 267-81.

[2] Joseph Kinsey Howard, *Strange Empire* (Toronto: Swan Publishing, 1965), pp. 44-45.

[3] J. E. Cirlot, *A Dictionary Of Symbols*, trans. Jack Sage (New York: Philosophical Library, 1962), p. 308.

[4] Ibid., p. 231.

[5] See Maurice Hodgson, "Initiation And Quest: Early Canadian Journals," *Canadian Literature*, No. 38 (Autumn 1968), pp. 29-40.

[6] Northrop Frye, "Conclusion to a *Literary History of Canada*," in *The Bush Garden* (Toronto: Anansi, 1971), p. 232.

[7] Sandra Djwa, "Leonard Cohen: Black Romantic," in *Poets and Critics*, ed. George Woodcock (Toronto: Oxford Univ. Press, 1974), p. 183.

THE BLOOD-ORANGE MOON

Fraser Sutherland

A lonely hanging sun, the moon is full of itself.
In Bethel Cemetery the corpses take their Sunday stroll.
Why should we living wake?

In the several darknesses the leaves are fronds,
oarmen of the outer river.
Our lives are cryptocrystalline.

But we have more neighbours than we thought,
in the opaque passages.
They are making deliveries. Calling cards.

Yet that moon, a rutted pippin,
a swollen bitter tangerine
is picked out of darkness.

SCOTT'S "LAKESHORE" AND ITS TRADITION

(For A. J. M. Smith)

Germaine Warkentin

FRANK SCOTT'S POEM "Lakeshore" first appeared in *Events and Signals* (1954), a volume that bore as its epigraph the words "between the event and the observer there must pass a signal — a wave, an impulse, or perhaps a ray of light." *Events and Signals* provides a broad conspectus of the state of Scott's art in 1954, and the volume stands, Janus-like, facing backward on the terse and satiric modernism of the poems in *New Provinces* (1936) and *Overtures* (1945), and forward to the reflective, yet experimental modes of the *Eye of the Needle*, *Signature*, *Trouvailles*, and *The Dance is One*, the latest of which was published in 1973. When Scott issued his *Selected Poems* in 1966, "Lakeshore" was placed at the beginning, as if to constitute a signal itself, a definition of the poet's vision and a statement of his art which provides a necessary prelude to confrontation with the whole man.

What kind of signal does "Lakeshore" constitute? What event does it record, and to what observer is the message sent? We need to know, in order to resolve the problem — often voiced by readers — of the meaning of the poem's ending. Is the figure of the poet musing alone on Ararat an image of contemporary disillusion, or is the fact that he has survived his Flood the expression of some kind of blessing? One route to an answer is through an exploration of the richness of the poem itself, not merely the complex interweaving of its biological and Biblical themes, but its intricate and beautiful texture. Such an exploration leads us not only to a new view of the poem, but to several other perceptions as well: a sense of "Lakeshore"'s original literary context, its meaning for Scott's art, and particularly a recognition of the extent to which it articulates a solution to the problem of man in nature which has been tested out by other Canadian poets before and since, though rarely with such mastery.

"Lakeshore"'s point of departure is a visual image striking not only in its exactitude, but in its unexpected point of view:

> The lake is sharp along the shore
> Trimming the bevelled edge of land
> To level curves. . . .

This is the archetypal lake — Northern, one supposes — of Canadian poetry and painting. But although Scott sees it pictorially, he does not treat it as if the subject were a static one. Rather, the lake is an agent, carpentering its place in the visual ground as it trims and orders the earth around it. Yet the border between water and shore is not as sharp as we at first think:

> the fretted sands
> Go slanting down through liquid air
> Till stones below shift here and there
> Floating upon their broken sky
> All netted by the prism wave
> And rippled where the currents are.

Through this amphibious medium the sands fretted by the carpenter's saw descend into the medium that works at them until the very visual ground itself shifts and inverts, and the stones beneath the water seem to move upward and float upon the broken surface that is their sky, though it is at our feet. The world is turned upside down, yet the inversion is not disorienting, for the stanza ends with the floating components of the scene serenely "netted" by the now prismatic water, which still works variations in the surface of the lake by the internal force of its own currents.

The stanza establishes a thematic opposition between the rigid delineation of boundary lines and the gathering of disordered fragments into unified wholes which turns out to have technical, structural, and eventually moral implications for the development of the poem as a whole, and which can be seen even in its metrical features. A steady, four-beat line is the prosodic unit throughout the poem, and imposes upon its internal shifts and inversions a containing net like that of the prism wave, while at the same time allowing other, more irregular forces to act. For example, "Lakeshore" is not in any usual sense rhymed after the first stanza. In the lines we have just looked at, a pattern exists: a, b, b^2 [*land / sands*], c, c, d, e, c^2 [*air / there / are*]. This looks like rhyme at first, but in fact the expectations Scott establishes include those of half-rhyme, and there is considerable internal rhyme and assonance: *bevelled / level*; *level / fretted*; *sands / slanting*; *stones / floating / broken*; *netted / rippled*. Thus, the poem, like its subject, moves amphibiously between two worlds, one rigorously ordered and controlled, the other yielding, shifting, and changing, but like the prismatic wave full of many different ways of seeing.

It is upon this metamorphic scene that the poet gazes:

> I stare through windows at this cave
> Where fish, like planes, slow-motioned, fly.
> Poised in a still of gravity.

The image of his eyes as "windows" recalls the severe, almost reductive carpentering of the first lines. Earlier our vision had been led downward through a lucent

and yielding medium into another world. Now, through his "windows" the poet stares, not *down into*, but *at* a scene which he describes as a "cave." The word "cave," unexpectedly applied to the jewel-like underwater scene of the first lines, suggests another distinction between shore and lake. The lake, seen as cave, belongs to a primitive world before historical time, and the poet on the shore to its opposite: the sophisticated dimension of temporal experience. That the distinction between them is tragic is clear from the impoverishment of true seeing suggested in the strangled words, "stares at."

The stillness of the staring poet is reproduced in a different way in the scene upon which he gazes. His only idiom for describing this draws upon similitudes from the windowed world he lives in: the fish are like "planes," the suspension of law he senses is described as "a still of gravity." And the line itself is full of expressive halts and stoppages. The light by which he sees all this is *like* the sun, only paler and of a different colour. The lines tell us that the poet and the world out of which he gazes are unilingual, perhaps even inarticulate, that they lack words and images for experiences other than their own.

YET AT THE SAME TIME, the poem is speaking to us almost privately in a language which is quite different from this constricted idiom; it is more fun, for one thing. Scott's word-stock has the simplicity and clarity of the language of a poem by Ben Jonson — "store," "cave," "still," "hangs," "open." But at the same time as he is presenting us with this limpid linguistic medium, he is playing with the currents in it, in such lines as

> The narrow minnow, flicking fin,
> Hangs in a paler, ochre sun,
> His doorways open everywhere.

The stoppages in "where fish, like planes, slow-motioned, fly" seem to express the watcher's own constraints, but balanced against this is the delicious rapport between "narrow" and "minnow," "flicking" and "fin," "paler" and "ochre." And in its terminations this stanza relies not on rhyme and half-rhyme but on a few simple cases of assonance that open up alternatives in the method of the poem at the same time as the grave and regular metre provides a source of strength.

These prismatic possibilities the windowed poet can sense at the end of the stanza, when he realizes the fish's relationship with his environment — his doorways are open everywhere — and implicitly contrasts it with his own sequestration. The image of "doorways" is still drawn from his earlier repertoire, but recognizing their openness takes him over an important boundary. Suddenly metamorphosed into a thing of nature himself, a tall frond leaning into a marine inversion of the

world in which it is nevertheless rooted, he bends to seek another light, another forest.

Scott's control of image, prosody, and diction in this poem is almost perfect. Only twice does it loosen for a moment; once here, in the flaccid line "vivid with gloom and eerie dreams" which is meant to suggest the dreamlike "otherness" of the inverted world beneath the water, but really just seems effect for effect's sake. He does the same thing, although without such costly results, when towards the end of the poem the swimmers rise towards the surface with "mermaids in their memories." This want of vigour is oddly unlike the rest of the poem, which is much tougher and more rigorous, as we can see when Scott begins to shape for us that which *seems* like dream to the descending poet, but which is to constitute a discovery of the "home that stirs the dark amphibian," that is, the ultimate reality of the experience of primal being.

Entering the water, the poet has seen himself metamorphosed for an instant into the vegetable frond, rooted on the shore though searching downward into an element mysteriously more natural to it. But Scott's real interest is in the somatic responses of human flesh — its eyes, orifices, loins — and he abandons the vegetable metaphor to explore an image which extends itself over almost all the rest of the poem: that of the body of the poet descending into the deepest of the water's colonnades, the currents of its physical rivers contracted as it strives to return to a place which is both its metaphysical centre and its point of historical origin. This experience is not a solitary one, for with him others come of their own will, naked swimmers drawn likewise to their beginnings. The image is riveting: through the water the bodies fall home "like tumbled water loosed above," not rooted like the poet, but liquid like the medium that gave them birth. "Stroked by the fingertips of love," they lie "diagonal," a seemly ordering, but in accord with another geometry than that of the severe shore above. They fall not into water, but into what the water means: a *locus amoenus*, this sheltered grove, the place where being originated, and where the act of creation takes place again in the act of love.

Scott, however, tries to state what union in an ideal state of being means in terms that take us beyond the not unexpected sexual image. His words contradict the watching poet's original vision of the inverted marine world in stanza two, which seemed at first a curious simulacrum of the world above. He writes,

> Silent, our sport is drowned in fact
> Too virginal for speech or sound,
> And each is personal and laned
> Along his private aqueduct.

To see what Scott sees here, we have to go back to two words used earlier in the poem: "amphibian" and "prehistoric," both of which suggest conditions of being and of time that mark the "otherness" of the world beneath the prism wave. What makes this home stir us is the integrity of being suggested by "amphibian": able to

move in both elements. And this integrity of being exists in a world *before* the inception of human time, in fact, before creation. Thus it is that the amorous sport of the naked swimmers is drowned in its turn by the fact of the silent confrontation with true being which is its result: a climax without speech, or sound, and in its virgin character, beyond even the beginnings of things. In this climax, each is created as his own self. He is "personal and laned"; not alone and sequestered, but private within his aqueduct, the river of his own being.

The staring poet has thus, in moving out of his windowed isolation, reversed time. First a frond, he has then become a swimmer, then a perfected primal being as he has returned home. There is a sudden and painful contrast, then, between this tranquil completion and the anguished reversion to the historical body of evolved man which now occurs. The late-acquired lungs demand in their turn the medium for which they were developed, and the swimmers rise towards the prison of their ground, the shore, the pain of unfulfilled desire aching in their bodies. Of the experience of discovering their origins only the mermaids remain, creatures half of one element, half of another, and entirely fictive.

With the swimmers' return, there is a marked change in the rhetoric of "Lake-shore." If we contrast this and the following passages with the opening lines of the poem, we find that Scott has passed from the implicit, the pictorial, the metaphorical, to a poetry of direct statement. At the beginning, the existence of two worlds is set out for us through a direct exposition of the marine one, which in its turn indirectly creates our picture of the world above the waters, in part by making the poet fixed behind his window its exemplar. The verbal medium of the seventh stanza is altogether tenser and more direct: the moment occurs "too soon," the lungs are "tethered," "taut," and "straining," the wings are "undeveloped," the ground a "prison," and the experience of loss is "anguish." It is as if a pressure like the need for air had developed in the poem itself, and in the second last stanza it explodes in a firmly stated, indeed sententious summary of the issues that have been called up by the experience of going underwater and returning:

> This is our talent, to have grown
> Upright in posture, false-erect,
> A landed gentry, circumspect,
> Tied to a horizontal soil
> The floor and ceiling of the soul.

It is the vehemence of the satirist that bursts out here. Scott's vision is one of hopeless disillusion at the consequences of the emergence of primal man into historical time. The image of the talent calls up Biblical associations, yet implies that the gift of this talent brought with it a curse. What follows is a direct and painful exposure of what we had seen before only in the person of the poet peering from his windows at the cave, and trying to name its features in his imperfect idiom. We are upright, but falsely so, powerful in our possession of land, yet (in

a dizzying bit of word-play) "circumspect," somehow possessed by it. Tied to the horizontal plane of earth, we are in fact without dimension, for earth has become both floor and ceiling of our souls. Ruthlessly Scott exploits the language of this impoverished condition to describe our futile attempts to make a new existence in the old image,

> Striving with cold and fishy care
> To make an ocean of the air,

and we are reminded for a bitter instant of the loveliness of the "narrow minnow, flicking fin . . . his doorways open everywhere." In the truth and permanence of the experience of primal being, it is the world of upright man that has become the inversion.

"LAKESHORE" BEGAN WITH THE POET observing the natural world of the lake at his feet: active, organic, and shimmering with prismatic visions. It ends with him looking upon another scene, the crowded urban world of the city street, at once the demonic opposite of the pastoral vision, and the consequence of our historic growth through and past that vision. There is a contrast in the types of moment involved which is worth noticing. In stanza two, the poet says "I stare," and this hypothesizes a single event, which takes place at the beginning of a narrative time in which we are guided from that beginning through a single experience, the descent, towards a single moment of vision, "too virginal for speech or sound." Stanza nine begins "sometimes," and thus changes our perspective on the poem's time of enactment. What happens now happens more than once; not frequently, perhaps, but "sometimes," and it is an experience that the poet can enter again and again as nature continues her processes around the life of evolved man. It is as if the currents of stanza one were still in action, the prism wave still netting and gathering all together, though in the darker and more ironic context of the world of history and experience, not the timeless "still of gravity" beneath the waters' broken sky. But Scott is ruthless here as well. Between the poet and our original element the experience of history does stand. In the early stanzas, we could see the effects of this in the blunting of experience which led to the poet's sequestration behind his windows, between "the floor and ceiling of the soul," and to his inability to describe the cave in terms other than those limited ones he already knew. Here we see it in a different, and in its turn, evolved way. Time and its events *within* the poem have changed the poet's perspective, and we recognize it in the verbs he uses: before, it was "I stare." Now he says, "I feel," "I hear," "watching," "I muse," and the deliberateness of their succession suggests a process of growth, from simple natural sensual perceptions, through

another kind of seeing than the fixed incomprehension of the earlier part of the poem, to thought itself.

As might be expected, the effect of this growth towards the unique human evolutionary development of thought is painful, full of loss, not like the silent sport of the naked swimmers of stanza six. The poet hears the opening of a gate and sees all of watery nature loosed upon the created world around him, and what he watches is a drowning, the apparent apocalypse which God decreed when He saw that "the wickedness of man was great in the earth and that every imagination of the thoughts of his heart was only evil continually" (Genesis 6:5). Yet we remember the meaning of water in this poem — it is our healer, our connector, our originating element — and we recall also the drowning of stanza six, when the experiencing of primal fact from before the beginning of human time led to the recreation of the integrity of being, and each swimmer was "personal and laned / Along his private aqueduct." On this occasion, the poet lives the experience *in* time, not *before* it, and the result is not the discovery of ultimate self in all its integrity, but something less perfect, more tarnished by time and loss. He is simply "alone." But his solitude has a special character. Though alone, he thinks. Indeed, if he is punning on "muse," he writes poetry, and laughs. And though all around him was drowned, he does remain, on Ararat like Noah, an emblem of the compassion of the fullness of being, of timeless nature's entry into the inexorable process of history to ensure the completeness of creation by the saving of the one man who has been "righteous before me in this generation."

Thus it is that though the poet in solitude may be watching the death of the world he knows around him, he is, by virtue of three things, watching its re-creation as well. The first is the richness of implication which the image of water has born for us as a building, connecting, creating medium since the beginning of the poem.[1] The second is Ararat, the sudden but extraordinarily fruitful Biblical allusion that appears covenant-like at the end, to confirm our sense of the value of at least part of our historical experience, and suggest that it will not be swept away. The third is the process of growth that goes on in the poet himself as the poem proceeds from the staring wonder of his first vision of the lake, to a return to his own original being, to the loosing of satiric language that seems to take place as the result of this, to the crowning experience of thought that visits him when, in the presence of the tragedy of historical time, he is able to generate an image of a nature whose processes return to recreate the world again and again, and within which he can meditate on the possibility of new beginnings.

The contexts of "Lakeshore," which we can consider only briefly here, seem to me of two sorts. The first comes to Scott from Wordsworth, I believe. In "Tintern Abbey," as in "Lakeshore," the poet gazes upon nature, and in so doing takes possession of the "beauteous forms" of being, in an experience strikingly like that of Scott's naked swimmers:

the burthen of the mystery
In which the heavy and the weary weight
Of all this unintelligible world
Is lightened . . .
Until the breath of this corporeal frame
And even the motion of our human blood
Almost suspended, we are laid asleep
In body, and become a living soul:
While with an eye made quiet by the power
Of harmony, and the deep power of joy
We see into the life of things.

And like Wordsworth standing on the bank of the sylvan Wye, Scott at the end of "Lakeshore" dares

to hope,
Though changed no doubt, from what I was when first
I came among these hills.

What distinguishes Scott's poem as a genuine achievement, and not merely the working out in a modernist vein of the important Romantic theme of a crisis in the development of imaginative power, is the intervening history of the motif in English Canadian poetry, where the question of how to penetrate nature's world has assumed the urgency of a major preoccupation. The problem is made explicit by another heir of the tradition of "Tintern Abbey," Sir Charles G. D. Roberts, in "The Tantramar Revisited," which for its beauty of movement and exposition is perhaps the finest short poem in English-Canadian literature before the modern period. At the visionary level Roberts' poem of course has a major difficulty, the failure of nerve in its last lines, where the poet says,

Yet will I stay my steps and not go down to the marshland,
Muse and recall far off, rather remember than see —
Lest on too close sight I miss the darling illusion
Spy at their task even here the hands of chance and change.

That Roberts' "musing" leads to a reluctance to enter nature may be symptomatic of the poet's own problems or those of his age. What is more interesting is that the act of entering nature to discover its secret of being has become one of the most persistent themes of modern Canadian poetry, a theme whose history has yet to be written. Its most startling results are a series of cognate poems on going underwater, some pre-dating Scott's like J. F. Herbin's "The Diver" or W. W. E. Ross's poem of the same name, others contemporary with "Lakeshore" or later than it, poems like A. M. Klein's hilarious and brilliant "Lone Bather" (which for many reasons bears fuller comparison with "Lakeshore"), Dorothy Livesay's fine "Fantasia: For Helena Coleman," with its forthright observation that what is under the water is "imagination's underworld," Pratt's "The Deed" and Scott's

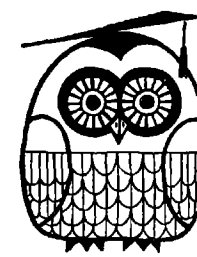
own "For Bryan Priestman," Atwood's "Younger Sister Going Swimming," Ralph Gustafson's "On this Sea Floor," Irving Layton's and Gwendolyn MacEwen's poems both called "The Swimmer," P. K. Page's "Element," Bill Bissett's concrete poem "i herd ya laffin in th water," and most important of all, Klein's magnificent elegy, "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape," which takes as its model not Wordsworth, but Milton's *Lycidas*, a poem from another tradition which considers loss by water and regeneration.[2]

Scott's "Lakeshore," seen in this setting, sends between event and observer a signal of a special sort, for more than any of his contemporaries he opens up the possibility that to go underwater, beneath the surface of time and experience, is to generate new possibilities in the naked swimmer who seeks for light in the water's deepest colonnades. What is generated in "Lakeshore," however, is not only vision, but also the speech in which that vision can be uttered. Not frozen in fear like Roberts, or locked in exploration of his own solitude, like the divers of many of the other poems, Scott's poet, as the result of his descent and return, is able to confront the world that exists around him with the power of a renovated, truth-speaking language, and in so doing, earns the right to rest, however much alone, on Ararat, as nature renews the world yet again.

NOTES

[1] Scott's poem "Water," also in *Events and Signals*, seems deliberately paired with "Lakeshore," and constitutes an important gloss on it. For a different reading of "Lakeshore" in the context of Scott's treatment of the theme of evolution, see M. Constance Higginson, "A Thematic Study of F. R. Scott's Evolutionary Poetry," *Journal of Canadian Poetry*, 1 (1978), 37-48.

[2] Important aspects of some of these poems are discussed by Milton Wilson in "Klein's Drowned Poet," *Canadian Literature*, No. 6 (Autumn 1960), 5-17.



BEING THERE

Irving Layton

Though a lawyer's serpent wiles
gets him hurled headlong out of Eden
he yet remembers the blameless garden,
its plants vivid with the hues of life;
he will inform the ignorant cop on the beat
the city tree droops towards death
and just before he trudges on the water
he'll — did you notice? — firm up a failing sprig.

In a world where God has just died
and men and women each shocking day
grow more coarse and brutal
plainly he's all for life, making him unfit
to live among thieves and hypocrites
unless beneficent chance plop him
smack into a chauffeured limousine to sit
beside a millionairess whose name is Eve.

Echoing everyone's voice and secret thought
he's the mirroring image to president
and dying tycoon, the best relief
of themselves this side eternity;
why, even the hard-nosed Russian ambassador
sees a Krylov in his simple presence.
Still, not even the CIA can learn his origin
but labels it a mystery, baffling everyone.

Of course he's the green child and poet
whose solipsistic fantasies are realler
to him than the flawed world outside his head.
And yet — mark this — he names himself a gardener
who knows both politics and nature
are severely bound to growth and brief decay
though, loathing death, he'll cry when an old man dies
and will not stay to see his corpse interred.

Niagara-on-the-Lake,
March 27, 1980

THE LION IN WINTERS

Irving Layton at York

David O'Rourke

IT IS FREQUENTLY POINTED out with some degree of disparagement that a large number of Canadian poets are also university teachers. The people who are concerned with this phenomenon, most not employed by universities, argue that an academic appointment ranges in the vicinity of dangerous to insidious. They worry that the established Canadian poet will become "too soft." They fear that this country's poetry will become "too academic." They are of the opinion that the true poet ought to be "on the street" and "with the people." Sitting in cafés, they lament their brothers and sisters with university chairs. The fact that their own poetry is often not that good seems inconsequential; that students may be considered "of the people" — irrelevant; that university employment does not preclude contact with "the street" — beside the point; and, finally, that established poets might rebel against the "academic poetry" — not quite conceivable.

Still, there is some cause for the hysteria. A poet employed by a university does run the risk of realizing any of these forecasts. So might a poet employed by a bank. Fortunately, these people tend to be cognizant of the situation and usually guard against it. Less aware of the "dangers," however, may be the potential, or aspiring, young poets coming through the school system. Of those who make it to university, most can thank one good high school teacher. But, once arrived, these students are likely to find English classes run like laboratories, critics talking like scientists, and the skilled technician at the head of the room looking down upon the concept of a creative writing programme. Poems are then submitted to microscopic analysis and the poets, who are given to esoteric articles, placed on pedestals. While this may sound facetious to an academic audience, a "layman" looking on would not think it so humorous.

This, regrettably, is the area in which the established Canadian poet finds himself. Often frowned upon by his colleagues, the people who continue to dismiss Canadian Literature courses, the established poet is able to offer a different perspective to those young people running the gauntlet of university ranks. He tends to be supportive of creative writing, a touch cynical of the academic process, and frequently more informed about the art of poetry than a number of the depart-

mental specialists. Louis Dudek is one example: influential in having taught or first published Daryl Hine, Leonard Cohen, Michael Gnarowski, David Solway, Pierre Coupey, Seymour Mayne, and Peter Van Toorn. Earle Birney, Frank Davey, D. G. Jones, Ralph Gustafson, and Fred Cogswell also deserve attention as educators who have helped, and continue to aid, creative writing in this country. Yet another poet comes to mind: ranting and raging and telling everyone that he knows what's best, a natural teacher — Irving Layton.

FOR APPROXIMATELY HALF his life, Layton has taught in educational institutions ranging from parochial school to university. For the period from 1969 to 1978, he was located at York University, concluding one of his most productive periods as a poet in Winters College. Students expecting to find in Layton a prolific drinker or, at least, a body in heat have encountered a serious poet, an arrogant idealist and, in many respects, a conservative in the tradition of the self-made man. Whether Layton has ever been any of the characters he has paraded before the public is a question to be considered. For one thing, the seedy bars and succession of full-breasted women would not have left a great deal of time for some thirty-five books, as well as those which he has edited. Also, the somewhat hedonistic stereotype which is often projected for the benefit of the newspaper reader does not do justice to what is certainly one of the most wide-ranging minds in Canadian letters. This is not to say that Layton has "pranked" the public, though his sense of humour is constantly underestimated; nor is it to suggest that there is not a bit of truth behind each of the masks. It is merely to point out that the nature of Layton's personality is frequently as protean as many consider the bulk of his work to be.

Like Ken Kesey's powerful protagonist, McMurphy, Layton's "poet" does battle with the sterile forces of anti-life; though, with Layton, this can mean culture, gentility, castration, Xianity, the SS, technological society, and almost anyone living in Canada. The opponent is awesome: it has chloroformed mankind, driving those with vision to alcoholism, insanity, or suicide; it turns on anything that is sensitive or creative; and, lastly, it has made the Jew, both as person and as symbol, into an endangered species. What is curious is that Layton's identification with his poet is complete to the extent that they become interchangeable — from a boy pounding with a broom to order the chaos (if not the gods) to a man plugging the void with his phallus.The role of the public persona is an extension of Layton and/or his mythological poet, and must be viewed in the prophetic tradition; that Layton has often sensationalized this voice (not unlike Norman Mailer) is a technique that has proved functional in stirring the very people it is his vocation to reach.

It has often been said that Layton is a didactic poet. In an era of experimental virtuosity, this may not be entirely unhealthy; but, regardless of one's aesthetic bias, Layton has a vision, and will continue to articulate it. For the less perceptive reader, he offers the "Foreword": a prologue, or handbook of instructions, to prevent one from missing the point. It is ironic, given his conviction that what is being said is ultimately more important than the approval of academics, that Layton remains one of Canada's most misunderstood poets. It is as though people would rather discuss what they dislike about Layton than actually read his work: a practice accentuated by his rise to national and, now, international prominence.

It would be convenient, but to some extent untrue, to suggest that Layton considers the classroom a microcosm of the universe, or that he views his students as the members of a personal congregation. In fact, he is more interested in what his students think and have to say, and endeavours to maintain a low profile. Fortunately, this is quite incompatible with his personality — with the result that classes tend to be lively exchanges, frequently off the topic and often past the time. Toward the end of his 1977-78 graduate course on Montreal poetry, however, a rather unique situation presented itself: Irving Layton, in the role of teacher, lecturing on Irving Layton, the man and the poet. In this article, I have divided into three parts my notes from these lectures: the first section adding to the biographical record; the second, the artist on fourteen poems; and the third, an edited transcript of Layton's last class at York. The distinction between man, poet, and teacher is not so obvious in reality: a fact that should be evident in the third section.

It is interesting to note that Layton's vision has changed very little in the last couple of decades, that his current themes and stances amount to a progression of former insights into the nature of man and society. This exploration of fundamental problems in depth has produced what is easily the most unified body of poetry in Canadian literature. It has also resulted in the critical work of Wynne Francis and Eli Mandel remaining the best in the field; the latter's 1969 *Irving Layton* offers what is still the most complete perspective on Layton, and is helpful in coming to terms with even his most recent work. Future comparative studies might view the way in which Layton, Cohen, and Klein explore the post-Holocaust psyche of modern man, or investigate the differences between Layton's and Leonard Cohen's conception of the poet as Christ.

I should point out that, for the most part, in this article Layton has been allowed to speak for himself; only in the third section is a narrative framework provided, and that to underline the retrospective nature of the class. Layton's words have been left unchanged, as has the order of the poems taken up in the flow of discussion. Where repetition or duplication may be found, it has been allowed to stand in order to mark the poet's own points of emphasis. Lastly, I should like to

thank the other students in the course, whose leading questions gave Layton the range required to address with passion that which he has considered of significance in both his life and work.[1]

Biographical Notes

Right. Early poetry was framed in Montreal, English and French Canada. I felt alienated: all my teachers were English, not Jewish. My home was poor. My father was a visionary, a scholar. He entertained angels, didn't give two shits for the kids — said about six words to me.

I was the youngest in the family. My mother couldn't spend too much time with us, maintaining the grocery store. She wanted us to be like Mrs. Steinberg's sons down the street. She had to cut off her hair and wear a hideous wig. My beautiful mother. It was traditional — to keep the husband's mind off his wife's beauty and on religious thoughts.

I rebelled very early against the piety and orthodoxy in the home. Refused to be bar mitzvahed, refused to say Kaddish when my father died. Strul Goldberg was the great influence on my life. He was the ideal I was supposed to look up to after the death of my father. He was successful — made a lot of money peddling religious articles. My father once said, "If you spit in his face, Strul would say it was raining."

It was so important to be living where we did — under that flat (a semi-brothel), surrounded by Poles, Italians. I got out of the city to the country market early with my mother: that's where I got my sense of colour and smell — great effect on my poetry. In school, I found out the English didn't live up to their "fair play" maxim. I got expelled — was in trouble from the day I was born. David Lewis lent me $10.00 for my matriculation fee, introduced me to A. M. Klein. They were the famous debating team in Montreal; Lewis was the serious orator, Klein the great wit. Klein tutored me in Latin on the side of Mt. Royal.

I learned politics and literature in Horn's Cafeteria, frequented by Trotskyites, Stalinists, Socialists, and Communists. At the time, I was a member of the Young People's Socialist League, which was one of the tributaries of the CCF. Frank Scott used to come down and give lectures. There was little separating politics and literature then. In the thirties, Marxism was the dominant ideology: a good writer helped the revolution. I used to get on a soapbox in Fletcher's Field and give lectures on poetry, and on the revolution in factories. My girlfriend, Suzanne, a Communist, used to come down and yell all sorts of names at me — I had to know my stuff — then, after, we'd amorously get together. The early interest in politics gave me my life-long distaste for English gentility.

The best thing to happen was me going to Macdonald College instead of

McGill. I had to do a lot of science — and not just English. When I brought in a Communist to speak, I was harassed by the R.C.M.P. — even though I had also, a fortnight earlier, brought in the head of the Bank of Montreal. But the other students were worse. When I was in residence, they used to dump garbage on my bed and throw my books on the floor. Every day. I could never catch them. But the B.Sc. made me a well-rounded person, and you can see the agricultural images in my poems. I worked on farms for three or four summers, something significant for an urban Jew.

My first marriage was a disaster. I was an idealist and a Socialist. I married her because she was scarred. It was my way of coping with the injustices of the world. . . . Stupid.

So there's the picture. Early poems born of scorn, hatred, opposition, rebelliousness: all notes you find in my early poetry. The tremendous joie de vivre is from my mother. I can have the most morbid thoughts and not lose the joie de vivre. It has nothing to do with the brain, but everything to do with the physical constitution. So you get the two boats going in the same direction: with the rebelliousness, a celebration. I enjoy living — women, wine, sewers. Up until now I've had more than my share of disappointment, hardship, but it doesn't affect my temperament or joy. It's very Hebraic. No poet except the one in *Ecclesiasticus* has had such a sense of nullity. Very early the trick was to fill up the nothingness. You have to make up your own code and live by it. Never in my life have I been guided by externals. I've never been influenced by others. I fill up the void with my own idea of what's right and follow it.

In the later poems, there is a deeper note. The Holocaust really began to hit me about fifteen years ago. I began to meditate on what makes men so destructive to do such things. It becomes the black thread which runs through my poetry.

The "pole-vaulter" is Nietzsche's overman: to go beyond life. I don't believe in God, but I do believe in divinity. We know there's a divinity through truth, beauty, and creativity. This is what allows me to go on despite the records of Hitler, Stalin, etc. It doesn't matter: they come and go. Death takes them away in his green bags. Nobody escapes death and that's why I love it. Chance, Appetite and Death, are my three gods — they allow hope.

And then there's the unfairness of the cosmos, the poignancy, especially as it affects little creatures. Did I tell you the story of the kitten? Responsible for my first marriage and many other things? The most influential thing in my life. My cat gave litter to four kittens when I was a kid: one was crippled but it didn't know it. It would drag its inoperative hind legs trying to play with the others. He was so brave. I've never been able to resist someone being brave and defiant despite some great hardship. Even today, I am still vulnerable to this kind of situation. Hence, you find so many poems dealing with wounded birds, mosquitoes.

Fourteen Poems

"Prologue to the Long Pea-Shooter"

This is a broadside against the literary establishment as it was in '52 or '53: a kind of academicism, an English sort. Dudek was not originally in, but was put in later on. Jasper Shittick is Sutherland, Bowell is Powell, a reviewer at the time for the *Montreal Star*; genteel, narrowminded, anti-erotic — he was representing the fashion of the time: puritanism. When he cut down a poet, it was a compliment — worth another two hundred books to be sold.

Here I'm having a good spoof, though there are serious parts. I'm attacking most people for being lousy readers. I'm also attacking other poets who would rather see a rival poet's book bomb than be successful as, at that point, the friendship comes to an end.

Second and third stanzas, I'm being ironic. Don't try for greatness, go for fame — people don't understand greatness. Be genteel: that's what the people wanted. Women were into romanticism, something to take them out of their modern homes. Then I attack the cultural philistines: the people who worship Eliot because everyone worships Eliot. In the fifth stanza, I'm ironically telling poets: despite the Holocaust, be genteel — write like Le Pan.

From "clergymen" on, in the last stanza, I attack culture in general. Someone should go through my stuff, prose too, and see my constant attack on culture. Torture, mutilations, beatings, never decreased attendance at operas. Culture is the great lie which enables people to forget, to live with, the atrocities of this age. The erudite cannibal of tomorrow will very likely be cultured. Retired clergymen ravage life to spiritualize. In a later poem, it's not chicken or fowl which inspires people, but the broken skull of a Jewboy. So far as I know, I am the only poet who has as a theme the infinite adaptability of people to live with a Holocaust.

"Now That I'm Older"

The capacity for assimilating murderers' bullshit is limitless for people.

"The Improved Binoculars"

What I am concerned with from the beginning is aggression. Man is condemned to be either creative or destructive. Since only a small minority is creative, the rest engage in destruction. It's an apocalyptic poem. Goethe, when he was dying, asked for more light — the irony in the poem. "Improved binoculars" is the symbol for modern technology.

"The Executioner"

These poems are never picked up by genteel Canadians — they're European, Mediterranean. Europeans read my work and identify. I am a Canadian by accident of birth.

"My visitor . . . absence of theories": a theme you'll find in many of my poems. Very Kafkaesque, but I hadn't read Kafka then. Another theme in my work: the contrast between the storm trooper and the genteel thinker — the visitor has no doubts. "We agreed . . . the condition . . . murder of others": the condition of our century — we kill for someone else's theory. We've arrived at a point where one man will kill another, not even knowing him, for a third man's theory. The "executioner" is my symbol for the sensibility of the 20th Century.

"The Cage"

This is an important poem. The black irony, the humour, is maintained throughout. People will get together, love one another, as long as there is a victim. "Mythical cage": Socialism, Communism, religion — any Utopia. The virtue of altruism is like an orgasm for them. The function of the half-holiday is to blind me. It takes something like that for people to see how much generosity there is in their souls.

"For Andrei Amalrik"

Another theme in my work: the forgone mediocritization of thought in everyone. Passion, original thought, is penalized. The unusual, the extraordinary, the unique, is being punished across the world — Russia, Poland, China. People will have to be chameleons if they want to be original.

"Elegy for Marilyn Monroe"

The odd, eccentric individual is persecuted almost as much in North America. The Russians send them to insane asylums; we make them crazy so they have to go on their own. Sexton, Plath, Lowell, Klein, commit suicide or go crazy in this world. Anyone who can see, anyone with talent, has to go. The pigmies are the commissars.

The sensitive original cannot kill: he has not fortified himself against others — hence, the helpless Jew. The person who can see is defenceless *because he can see.* The little man derives a great feeling of power from persecuting others and our society, technology, is making nothing but little men: elevator operators, secretaries, etc.

"At the Iglesia De Sacromonte"

An actual story — what Christianity has done to passion. Another theme: the contrast between pagan vitality and energy versus what religion has done to it.

"Icarus"

The difference between true poets, prophets, and false poets. The poet is Icarus; he doesn't hang around cafés discussing literature. To be a poet is tragic. He'll never make it, never get there, his wings will be melted, but the difference is that he'll try whereas others won't.

"Piazza San Marco"

Il Duomo is a magnificent structure in Venice. I'm saying that these people will never produce a cathedral like that again; instead, they have it hanging on medallions from their wrists. The diminution of modern man — mankind is no longer capable of the greatness which has produced such monuments. You have heroes from the Bible to the Renaissance, but downhill since then.

"The Mosquito"

Nature as a battlefield. Butterfly over a dead mosquito: a war is going on under the innocence of nature. "Crooked Star" is the Soviet star — I was then still somewhat of a Socialist. Bloodshed and star: my symbols for life — torture/death and illumination. Injustice, blind cruelty, defiance, illumination, gallantry, occur again and again in my poetry.

"Like A Mother Demented"

The most anti-Wordsworthian poem I have ever written: my vision of the cosmos. Note the black irony, the dark mocking vision. I'm answering the riddle of, Why man? Answer: nature needs an audience to see its tragedy. My verdict on man: "nature's most murderous tool and accomplice."

"The Poet Entertains Several Ladies"

First stanza: hunchback/deformity can throw a bigger shadow than anyone, ironically attracting children. Ugliness and beauty. "My dog . . . torn ear": brutality, torture, mutilation, goes on all the time in nature. Second stanza: I accept the Heraclitean notion that all is flux, change, rotting driftwood. Beauty is momentary, flux forever. Humans discover this, but nature does it. Third stanza: mankind has a momentary radiance, but again nature, "My dog," goes on. Fourth stanza: never resting, never ceasing . . . I am full of pity to all this. Fifth stanza: mind can touch memory, turning it into fire — poetry. "I," the poet who puts bells on machinery. "My dog licks his bruised fur / paws his torn ear": nothing overrides this fact — "bruised" is in for impact.

"Orpheus"

Here the savagery and the celebration are fused. The rebel statement: God is neither Christianity, nor Judaism — God is blood. The sexuality enables me to forget nature's strife; look at "The Tamed Puma" in *The Covenant*. My favourite theme: men sing best when they are cruel. Human beings are very creative: they will pluck out your eyes; they will use your spasm to break their prison; they will kill out of love. The poet reconciles the death wish with the love wish — living with the reconciliation is like divinity.

Last Class at York

Enter Layton, five minutes late, looking like a Jewish Zorba. He sits down, belly protruding a little over his belt. "Right!" he says, "Last class . . . I believe we're still doing me." He gives the impression of a professional wrestler.

A discussion takes place on "coffee house" poetry. Layton summarizes, "Yes, it's a very good thing for suffering poets to get together, but there has to be a good poet or two among them; otherwise, the bad stuff will multiply. Look at the Montreal situation: Harris and Solway are besieged by bad stuff. You only get one or two good poets every ten years. What is happening now is quantity — inferior poets financed by the Canada Council. Harris has been around for a long time. Was in my class in 1967. Works hard on his craft. Produced a good book like *Grace.* Same with Solway — a master craftsman. They bring their poetry to Hottentots and are told it's not poetry. That's dangerous! At least in Russia they know who the good poets are — they put them in insane asylums. In North America, the good poet is swamped by mediocrity. In Russia, they know what good poetry is and stop it; in Canada, they trivialize it: surround the flowers with weeds and choke them. It's terrible. . . ."

Layton says this not so much in conversation, as trying to explain that something has gone wrong. The class has only started, and his adrenalin is pumping.

A student asks what he thinks of W. D. Snodgrass's essay, "Tact and the Poet's Force."[2] Layton listens to a passage, then offhandedly replies, "Snodgrass is being English and polite." It looks as though he's going to leave it at that, but then the tempo beings to build. "Tact is something a *minor* poet is concerned with. Can you imagine Milton, Dante, Shelley, talking about tact? Those bishops and those cardinals burning. It's context, not tact. In one context you overstate like Byron, in another you understate. I've never heard Pushkin talk about tact. 'Tact' has come into being because of minor poets like Snodgrass. The academics love it! Have you ever heard anyone getting excited about Snodgrass?"

Layton continues more calmly, "There are no rules to poetry, only contexts. The only thing is to be effective. Subtlety and vulgarity may be used at different times when necessary. You can't make a rule to be subtle all the time — look at Blake!"

The student unrolls another quotation, this time from Peter Hunt's "Irving Layton: Pseudo-Prophet":

> The same cannot be said of 'Whom I Write For' which exemplifies a central defect in Layton's work. The very barbarism he deplores (at Hiroshima and in Nazi Germany) is present in his own vision and method:
>
> I want you to feel as if I had slammed
> your child's head against a spike;
> And cut off your member and stuck it in your
> wife's mouth to smoke like a cigar.

> He does not integrate the sense of moral shock with the description of the horrors he hates; rather he attempts to shock the reader by overt obscenity and sadism.[3]

Layton leans forward with his hands clasped together, and answers slowly and deliberately, "The man is not capable of understanding a poem or why it was written. Hunt is illiterate. When I talk about stuffing a man's penis into a woman's mouth, I'm shocking because I've seen it. When I write about Auschwitz, *am* I being as bad as the SS? My aim is to make people aware that they're living in an age of atrocity. I'm trying to tear away the veil of culture. In the Preface to my forthcoming book,[4] I talk about the self-horror it masks: man's hatred for life. Man has a hatred for sexuality because he cannot master it. He's arrogant. He wants to be God, Master of life, and — when he can't — he tries to rub it out.

"I'll tell you an interesting story. People have written reviews of my latest book,[5] some good and some bad. I went to an Italian Embassy party, because I wanted to say goodbye to my translator going on vacation, and see an Italian girl doing her M.A. thesis on me at Toronto. She tells me she's fascinated with my idea of a poet. I deal with it throughout my work. She says what she's really interested in in my later books is that Christ becomes the archetypal poet. It took an Italian woman to see something as plain as the crooked nose on my face! That Christ is the archetypal poet — he stands for love, creativity and, most of all, joy and laughter. All my poetry leads up to Jesus. Like him, I don't intend to be tactful!"

He turns to *The Covenant* and reads "Xianity." "Now how could anybody have missed this?" He is standing up, almost shouting. "It takes an Italian. . . ." Layton slams his book against the table, staring directly at the class. "How . . . ?"

He reads "For My Brother Jesus," gesturing theatrically with his free hand, then turns to "Christos-Dionysos" and "Magdalena," noting that "Yeats would have been happy to compliment me on these . . . I think." He sits down and reads "Disguises," "where I compress the Jewish experience into a lyric," as well as the poem "Bambino," which starts him off again.

"No theory can satisfy me — look at 'The Poet Entertains Several Ladies.' In order to understand me in North American poetry, you have to understand that I have broken all the rules consciously. I accept none of the Judaic, Christian, Canadian tenets. I've been attacking the anti-eroticism and philistinian element in Canada. Nobody likes to have their tenets questioned, much less violated — that's why the critics have been so hostile.

"I distrust the virtuous. I'm anti-ideological — Zionism, Communism, Socialism, Fascism — I'm opposed to all that. I'm concerned with the human soul. What the critics say can't hurt because I've said worse myself. They forget I had a mother who cursed me from the moment I got up. I've heard it all before. What I'm worried about is the damage to the spirit. Sometimes you have to shout, scream, kick someone in the ass, pour a bowl of urine on their heads, dump a

bathtub of shit, to get them away from their tact! If you feel very strongly about the dangers to the human spirit, you're not going to be tactful!

"What is it about the English that makes them talk like that? Snodgrass . . . You'll never find a Russian talking like that!" He calms down a little. "I'm sorry I lost my temper. It wasn't at you. It's just that I've been fighting this attitude all my life — in the thirties, in the forties — and it hasn't changed at all."

There is a long pause, a sort of vacuum after Layton's burst of energy. It becomes a question and answer period.

Didn't someone do a survey, and found out you had the third largest vocabulary in English poetry?

"I'm supposed to have a vocabulary of 21,000 words. Shakespeare had 31,000. Only Shakespeare and Milton have used more, and yet I am cited for using vulgar words."

Do you see yourself influenced by Klein, and influencing Cohen? Is there a tradition of Montreal poetry?

"There's a tradition insofar as we're all Jewish, but the tradition goes further back to the Old Testament. We're capable of drawing on that tradition. Jews throughout history in different nations and different cultures — you'd be a fool not to draw on it. What I say, any Jew will tell you that. Any Jew digging into his history. We've seen empires come and go. We're still here, they're not — some are on the way out. What a fantastic privilege to draw on that unique history. Kenneth Sherman and Eli Mandel are doing it now. In Mandel's latest book,[6] he's looking for his roots.

"In any other sense of a tradition — no. Klein and I disagreed on a lot of things. Klein was orthodox and had visions of getting ahead. The respectable lawyer and the bohemian. If anything, I and we — *First Statement* and *Preview* — influenced Klein. With Cohen . . . influence only in the sense that I kicked open doors for him to write about.

"Technically, there's hardly a poet in North America who I haven't influenced in some way. It took an American, Olson, to point it out. Canadian critics wouldn't understand it if you printed it on their cocks. But I had a disagreement with Williams: they wanted to reject everything, whereas I wanted to adapt it. . . . All Canadian poets have adapted the things I was doing in *Red Carpet for the Sun.*"

So you're trying to change the psyche of Canadians . . . ?

"With *Red Carpet for the Sun,* I achieved an attack on Canadian culture. After that, I got into the soul — man is either a fallen angel or a risen devil. The problem is not sociological, political, or the price of coffee. The problem is man. I began to get into the darker aspects of the soul. Then in '66, '67, during the Six Day War when the extermination of the Jews — a remarkable people, not because I

am a Jew, any historian will tell you they've made more contributions to the world: art, medicine, etc. — anyway, that's when a turn happened. The world was ready to let the Jews be massacred. The genteel, religious West. Then the attack on culture sharpens.

"The academics who attack me today are financed by the Canada Council. The genteel academics . . . In the old days they were right from England, loud in attacking my vulgarity, 'tactlessness'; but they've all gone and have been replaced by Canadian academics. It brings the story up to date, and it will continue. Look at the reviews of my latest books. If you want a sensitive view, you have to go to a European, not an Anglo-Saxon."

How do you reconcile the relation between Nietzsche and the Jewish tradition?

"A tall point. Nietzsche did not influence me any more than D. H. Lawrence did, but they both had arrived at insights and feelings which I arrived at. And gave me more. Nietzsche's been far more a liberator than anyone, including Marx. Nietzsche attacks bourgeois culture. He is the greatest liberator.

"The Jew accepts the moral elite — I'm not saying the Jews are a chosen people — whereas I have improved upon it. I believe in divinity, not God: I rejected all that stuff when I was thirteen. The Overman is the man who goes beyond human nature — more soul and less asshole — and that's very close to Judaism. 'Ought' is the notion that the Jews gave the world. 'There ought to be justice' — Moses, Abraham, arguing with God, telling him he 'ought' to behave better. We are weak, we are fallible, but it's possible for us to attain divinity.

"So there's the theme of rebelliousness between Jewish history and Nietzsche: a dialogue with divinity. Any wonder why Stalin and Hitler hated the Jews? People who have argued with God, do you think a dictator's going to scare them? I smell the stink of the dead corpse while he's speaking. I'm a Jewish Nietzschean. I've said it before, but they've ignored it.

"The whole thing about the Overman is that he does not use violence. He's above it. And since there's been two wars against Germany, it's hopeless that the West will understand Nietzsche. Even Bertrand Russell didn't. Nietzsche's been called the prototype of Nazism, but read him! He has nothing but praise for the Jews — he attacks Germans! See his passages on anti-semites. But the stupidities, the nonsensicalities, are still being taught!"

Layton turns to "The Cold Green Element" in response to a student's request. He reads the last line slowly, triumphantly. "The 'cold green element' is my metaphor for life, my symbol for fecundity. The wind and the satellite represent change, flux. At the end of change is death, so I'm calling your attention to mortality. There's a reference to the A-bomb being dropped on Hiroshima. And then there's the poet who hangs like a Christ-figure, or victim, on the gate.

"The relation between the crowd and the poet is a theme I've always kept: they

go to see him tortured. The second image of the poet, someone who's been blasted by lightning because of his vision or revelations, is that he is crippled — the hunchback — and that goes back to 'The Poet Entertains Several Ladies.' I see my past selves as the leaves on a tree which will also eventually decay. There's an awareness of not being able to divide life and death.

"So the poem's about the poet in a Hiroshima world, an age of atrocities, but it also has old age and death. There's the Nietzschean/Dionysian note: robin chewing the worm. The ending is that you forget all your medical troubles when you hear children. Plus, 'breathless' is ambiguous.

" 'A Tall Man Executes A Jig' and the 'Pole-Vaulter' are two other significant poems. They're about redeemers: people who have experienced pain but don't whine."

How do you see your work in the context of modern and contemporary poetry?

"Modern poetry tends to be pragmatic, not metaphysical, due to Pound et al. Because of my background in philosophy, theology, and science, you hear a different note in my poetry. There's not a single poet in Canada who has my background in the sciences, so I find many of the poems of my contemporaries shallow. Another reason why much of my work runs contrary to contemporary poetry is because of my Jewish background and Hebraic literature. Anyone who is familiar with it will not be impressed with Camus and Sartre. Not after reading *Ecclesiasticus*. Exile is redemption — not Zionism. I don't think we've wandered as far as we have and done things that we have done to settle for a piece of land, an army, and an Air Force. I'm not against a homeland, but your Bellows, Cohens, etc., have that Jewish imagination which is the result of history and the Bible."

Does that mean you have to be Jewish to be a great poet?

Layton laughs. "Well, some poets have managed to survive the terrible handicap of not being Jewish. No, there are other great cultures, but the Jew is very fortunate. He writes out of time and space. He's been everywhere, and is aware of what goes on in the world. He carries with him his history. Isaac, Jacob, Moses, etc., are his contemporaries. My mother used to talk to them like they were members of the family. Same with God."

A student presents a seminar on Michael Harris, David Solway, and Bob McGee: contemporary Montreal poets. Twenty minutes later, Layton notes, "It's true that Harris and Solway — I don't know McGee — are repudiating us, but they've gone to a landscape/Archibald Lampman tradition. That's good, because they have to rid themselves of our influence and because they feel comfortable with it, but they'll have to watch out for the — and I know you're going to kill me when I say this — gentility. Excellent poetry, great poetry, but what are they saying? Where's the satire? That's what bothers me.

"Look — here's a poem I would like to see Harris and Solway write." Layton reads "News from Nowhere"[7] gesturing magnificently. "The poet has a public function to perform as a prophet." He turns to "The Happening" and announces, "Now there's a prophetic poem — it's not the proletarian, it's the castrated intellectual who is going to change the world." He reads the last of his new poems, "Flies," stating that it deals with man's aggressiveness and how it is turned into art: "The fly versus the death of a human being."

"If there's a continuing tradition in Montreal poetry, it's excellence. Harris and Solway are genuine poets: they'll have ulcers, hemorrhoids, troubled marriages, but what I don't want to see watered out is the prophecy you find in Klein, me, Page, and Scott. That's the real Montreal tradition! Stress on craft, being naked, Harris and Solway have all the good things, but it bothers me that they're dealing with things handed down from Lampman.

"We've come full circle from Lampman to Harris and Solway. Tying the country to the mind is 19th-Century. The tradition of Montreal poetry, the other half, is a public one — a concern with the world out there, not navel-gazing. You get a tradition of social awareness, not social realism because the Russians have bastardized that. There's less emptiness in Harris and Solway because they've suffered, but still the poet has that public element they have to keep in mind. When the poet becomes too arty-farty, he's in trouble. Especially in these times.

"It's the prophetic tradition you should shoot for. The good poet always speaks for his generation. . . ." Layton looks down at his watch and realizes he has gone into overtime. "Look, I'd like you all to come over to my place for an evening. We'll have some wine, good conversation. . . . How about it?" He writes the class into a black pocketbook, stuffs his briefcase, and heads for the door, long hair flowing in a white mane.

NOTES

[1] The other students were Maria Jacobs, Jack Urowitz, J. Kertes, and Nancy Gay Rotstein. The lectures in question took place in March 1978, the last class being on the 29th of that month.

[2] W. D. Snodgrass, *In Radical Pursuit* (New York: Harper & Row, 1975); the passage begins with the last paragraph on page 12, and concludes at the end of Jarrell's poem, "Protocols," page 13.

[3] Peter Hunt, "Irving Layton, Pseudo-Prophet — a Reappraisal," *Canadian Poetry*, 1 (Fall/Winter 1977), p. 5.

[4] Irving Layton, *The Tightrope Dancer* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1978); a number of identical phrases would suggest that Layton was very close to the manuscript of this volume at this time.

[5] Irving Layton, *The Covenant* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1977).

[6] Eli Mandel, *Out of Place* (Erin: Press Porcépic, 1977).

[7] The poem was later published in *Droppings from Heaven* (Toronto: McClelland & Stewart, 1979).

ANARCH

Irving Layton

My uneasiness before trees. Nothing
cures me of it or ever will. I'm one
my humanity dooms to gaze at their tall
composed shapes with longing; praying
for bright-wing'd insects to weave me

By their sallies, their senseless thrusts
into the green palmate leaves I see filtering
the viscous sunshine into a rose decanter
each opened bud this tranquil morning
offers the surrounding thoughtless air

My head's too stuffed with griefs
contemporary and classical to know
beneficence today as any grey trunk proud
of its leafy medallions and fluttering them
like a Soviet commander for all to see

A decaying bug-eyed humanist, I rot
into this murderous century, smiling
tolerantly in all directions, my
blue and gentle eyes beseeching forgiveness
for the compost odours rising like a tide

But sometimes I turn my eyeballs around
to see my skull's interior, become
a mad neurologist and probe with poised lens
the mechanism of brainfold and nerve
that ticks towards the bright disaster

That must one day blot out the heavens,
the agony of innocents caught like a lynx
in the steel trap of human malice
or harpooned like those other Jews,
the harried whales of the prosperous sea

THE CONSUMMATION

Irving Layton

When the sun's overhead I exult
and when the sun goes down;
in my queer head they come to one
and marvels never cease or halt.

I'm alive. I have the miracle of legs,
of arms, and of eyes that see.
My soul has more deeps than the ocean;
Greek goddesses have loved me.

For me the stately oak drops its leaves,
midges give me their attention;
this bright morning the air, full of *vivas*,
folds my head in its arms.

My frank look compels the flowers
to parade their most vibrant colours;
in their quiet and holy presence
the grass becomes a green pool of silence.

How miraculous is the shoelace
that suddenly unties and makes me bend;
its defiance puts pyramids to shame,
even cathedrals of imposing stone.

In its lowly insistence
I discern the earliest Christian:
it's Rome that bows to my shoe,
it's Caesar that stares at the dust.

Friends, how much happiness I owe
to love and knowledge, the rebel's stance;
at my first full whistle of joy
all the Jerichos in my skull fall down.

On such days of sunburst,
his heart overflowing with blessings,
a man does not ask: 'Will I result in anybody?'
but accomplisht glows brighter than the sun.

THE COLLECTED PHOTOGRAPHS OF BILLY THE KID

Perry M. Nodelman

WHILE THE INCLUSION of photographs in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* is an interesting experiment, Ondaatje's choice of specific images is bewildering. The first sentence of the book mentions a picture of Billy, but only a blank square is shown; and the people who do appear in later photographs seem incapable of the violence the book describes. They stare lifelessly into the camera, or turn their backs to it; or they hide their faces in shadows, apparently overwhelmed by the empty landscapes surrounding them.

Nevertheless, photographs play an important part in Ondaatje's conception of the book. The first section is a comment about taking pictures, and knowledgeable readers will recognize the naked man on horseback who appears on the book's cover; the picture is from one of the revolutionary sequences taken by Eadweard Muybridge in the latter years of the last century, in attempting to understand the nature of movement. According to Stephen Scobie, the techniques of photography offer "possible analogies to Ondaatje's methods"[1] of presenting Billy's life.

In fact, by interspersing poems and sections in prose with photographs, Ondaatje implies an equivalence between them; the written sections are like photographs also. Not surprisingly, many of them begin with descriptive phrases like those written in an album: "Christmas at Fort Sumner, 1880,"[2] "Blurred," "January at Tivan Arroyo," "Miss Dickinson of Tucson," "With the Bowdres." These phrases often have no grammatical connection with the words following them; they act like titles, or like captions to photographs.

Furthermore, the various sections of *The Collected Works* are not in chronological order. Ondaatje's "photographs" of Billy are a disconnected series of fragmented moments, and the book as a whole resembles an album, organized according to a logic that is not chronological. Ondaatje's obfuscation of temporal development suggests that Billy's behaviour could not be explained accurately by the sequential relationships of causes and effects that fluid narratives necessarily imply. Perhaps he is trying to understand the movement of the whole by breaking it into more readily comprehensible parts.

If he is, then the presence of the Muybridge photograph is important. Muybridge's famous studies of bodies in motion began when he used a battery of

cameras in sequence to photograph a race horse, in order to discover something that human eyes could not see — whether or not a moving horse lifted all four feet off the ground at once. Paradoxically, by stopping motion in photographs the workings of motion could be clearly seen. In *The Collected Works*, Billy's life is understood in the same way.

But photographs like Muybridge's are necessarily incomplete, mere images of movement that do not actually move themselves. The "word pictures" that make up *The Collected Works* are similarly incomplete; the poems and sections in prose are as devoid of emotion as the actual photographs Ondaatje chose to include. The "photographer" keeps his emotional distance from the violent events he is describing, and paradoxically, his dispassionate objectivity is so disproportionate that it amounts to misrepresentation. In fact, it is the unemotional tone of *The Collected Works* that allows Ondaatje to replace the traditional legend of Billy the Kid with his own interpretation of him. The legendary outsider whose exuberance could not be restrained by the petty restrictions of a narrowminded society was at least passionately involved in the act of living; Ondaatje's Billy is as objective about himself as a photographer is about his subjects.

In fact, Billy's photographic objectivity is the key to Ondaatje's interpretation of him. The "collected works" are photographs; if they are the collected works of Billy himself, then Billy himself is the photographer. If that is true, then the unusual structure of the book mirrors its protagonist's vision of himself and the world he lives in; and *The Collected Works* explores that vision.

As I suggested earlier, the structure of *The Collected Works* denies the significance of chronological sequence in the explanation of events. If the "works" are Billy's, then he himself denies the significance of such explanations. In fact, the book as a whole never shows him developing or changing in relation to experience. His character and his attitudes are static, his vision unchanging. For readers of the book, knowledge of Billy grows, as later sections reveal the significance of phrases and ideas present in earlier sections. What follows is an attempt to describe Billy's vision, not as a reader's knowledge of it develops, but as it is finally revealed after all the "works" have been considered, and the connections between them understood. Billy's refusal to consider the influence of events on his behaviour seems to demand such an approach.

BILLY EXPRESSES HIS INTEREST in the way photographs depict the world most openly in his references to an actual picture of himself. The picture fascinates him enough for him to mention it a number of times; but it is not the image of himself that he dwells on. In fact, he is more concerned with what the picture does *not* show. On one occasion, his indulgence in "red dirt" brings the picture to life: "I was pumping water out over the well. Only now,

with the red dirt, water started dripping out of the photo." And later, he says, "When they took the picture of me there was a white block down the fountain road where somebody had come out of a building and got off the porch onto his horse and ridden away while I was waiting standing still for the acid in the camera to dry firm." In both instances, Billy is intrigued by the difference between the motionless world of the photograph and the actual movement of the world it was meant to depict.

In fact, it seems to be the camera's ability to stop things from moving that most fascinates Billy. As the section beginning "his stomach was warm" implies, Billy views things photographically himself to avoid emotional involvement with them. In this poem he remembers putting his hand into a wounded stomach in order to retrieve a bullet, and the last six lines are the first six in reverse order — like a film run backwards. Each line becomes a separable component, like the individual frames of a motion picture. By putting these components into a meaningless relationship with each other, Billy purges their meaning, and gets rid of the pain it causes him. He has stopped time, just as a photographer does when he shoots a picture; perhaps something similar is happening in the disconnected structure of the book as a whole.

In order to take pictures, a photographer needs distance; he must be removed from the scenes he captures. Billy continually expresses an interest in such distance. In one section, for instance, he describes the scene of his death in careful detail, and his description is repeated word-for-word after he says "Again"; apparently he has chosen to re-inspect a photograph of interest to him. Its importance is obvious; Billy could have described the scene so accurately only if he were distant from it: "all this I would have seen if I was on the roof looking." But in fact, he was not on the roof; as another section reveals, he actually views the scene in "the screen of a horse's eye." Instead of taking the picture from a distance Billy is actually *in* it; and his life is taken.

In fact, Billy seems to share the belief of certain primitive tribesmen that having one's picture taken is a threat to one's existence. Paulita Maxwell's comment about Billy's photograph suggests the nature of the threat: "I never liked the picture. I don't think it does Billy justice." Billy seems to agree; the next section begins, "Not a story about me through their eyes then." Billy's "collected works," his own pictures of his life, reveal the falseness of the pictures taken by the eyes of others — pictures like the *Wide Awake Library* version of his life, from which the real Billy has entirely disappeared.

Billy's refusal to accept other people's pictures of him goes beyond a concern for his reputation; his tendency to view things photographically himself is also a matter of self-defence. In distancing himself and in taking his own "pictures," he can protect himself from the attempts of others to capture him.

He seems to use a gun for the same reason. Like photographers, gunfighters

can shoot things successfully only when they are far enough away from them to get them clearly in their sights; and both stop movement. In fact, the similarity between guns and cameras is reinforced by the language of *The Collected Works*, for instance in the opening paragraph when the photographer Huffman says, "I am able to take passing horses at a lively trot square across the line of fire." Similarly, Muybridge stopped the movement of the horses he shot, and the photographers who took the actual pictures in the book captured only motionless beings. Through the book, Billy is concerned with the attempts of others to "take" him, to stop his movement. His response is to put himself into Huffman's or Muybridge's position, to distance himself either with his gun or with the camera of his distancing eye, and to stop their movement.

But Billy's concern with photographs transcends his identification with the people who take them; the machines that make photographs are also meaningful to him. In particular, he is most at ease in the dark rooms which let in blocks of light through small openings, rooms that resemble cameras. His "calm week" in a barn is a good example: "it was the colour and light of the place that made me stay there." But ironically, the colour is almost colourless — "a grey with remnants of brown" — in sharp contrast to the bright light outside, which Billy allows to enter the barn in much the same way that light enters a camera: "when I had arrived I opened two windows and a door and the sun poured blocks and angles in."

Similarly, Billy's description of the Chisum ranch contrasts the "sunless quiet" of the dark rooms with the strong light outside: "in the long 20 yard living-dining room I remember the closing of shutters, with each one the sudden blacking out of clarity in a section of the room." Billy seems to be inside a camera again. Later he reverses the image, but maintains the same pattern. Standing outside in "total blackness," he sees "a house stuffed with yellow wet light where within the frame of a window we saw a woman move . . . towards the window, towards the edge of the dark." Sally Chisum has lost her personality; she is just a nameless woman framed like a photograph, and Billy says that "the night, the dark air, made it all mad"; apparently he identifies light with madness.

Billy explains his preference for darkness in a later section that recalls his stay in the barn: "I am on the edge of the cold dark / watching the white landscape in its frame / a world that's so precise / every nail and cobweb / has magnified itself to my presence." Hidden by the dark and able to see the world of light this clearly, Billy feels safe from it. He mentions his ability to "magnify" objects elsewhere, most significantly when he says, "Strange that how I feel people / not close to me / . . . my eyes / magnify the bones across a room / shifting in a wrist." He knows that he can magnify things to clarity only if he keeps his distance from them; he also knows that if he sacrifices his distance and enters the world of light, he will be exposed — like a photograph.

It is for this reason that Billy sees the world of light as "mad"; if he walked through the "frame" of the barn door he would be vulnerable to light: "I am here on the edge of sun / that would ignite me / looking out into pitch white / sky and grass overdeveloped to meaninglessness" — just as Sally is "overdeveloped" into impersonality when she is bathed in light and just as Billy himself is "overdeveloped" when he sees himself in the screen of a horse's eye, and dies. Symbolically, Billy retracts into a camera in order to avoid being photographed.

But Billy's fear of being "framed" obviously goes too far. His hatred of exposure destroys his relationship with women in particular; he interprets their movements as attempts to take him. When a women lifts a curtain Billy imagines himself framed in a photograph: "the bent oblong of sun / hoists itself across the room / framing the bed the white flesh / of my arm." His response is to try to be a camera: "I am very still / I take in all the angles of the room." Angela D.'s ability to take him is particularly dangerous. Her eyes are so big they "need a boat" for him to keep afloat in them, and he sees her from a distance as "blurred in the dark," moving too fast for him to watch her clearly and therefore dangerous to him. But when she actually captures him, he is "blurred in the dark" himself, having totally lost his clarity and shouting "stop." His fear of being taken causes him to fear the lack of control inherent in his own physical pleasure.

Billy's imagery continually implies that Angela is trying to capture him — "catching me like a butterfly" in her legs. But his real fear is that his physical contact with her leads to his loss of mental control: "her toes take your ribs / her fingers your mind." Without control he is exposed to danger, and he presents his dealings with Angela as a vaudeville act: "up with the curtain / down with your pants." That curtain may be the one raised by a woman in an earlier poem; in any case, Billy is unveiled and made vulnerable to the eyes of his audience, and loses control.

The one woman who does not threaten Billy is Sally Chisum, who always looks to him "like some ghost," a disembodied figure in white moving quietly through dark rooms. Sally never tries to "take" Billy, and he does not have to take her. She represents his ideal; safe in the darkness and privacy of her house, she can let down her guard.

Billy believes that he cannot afford to make himself so vulnerable. When he immerses Sally in a bathtub, wrapped in a sheet, and tells her that it is like "a mad man's skin," he implies his own feelings of constriction, and his desire for freedom from them; his dislike of sexual involvement and his need to distance himself from other people suggest a fear of his own body and the demands it makes of him. In the solitude of dark rooms he can feel disembodied — "like some ghost." But he is convinced that freedom from the constrictions of the body is impossible. Billy's worst experience of vulnerability occurs when his skin is removed, in the peculiar fantasy he has as he rides in the desert after being cap-

tured by Garrett: "the sun turned into a pair of hands. . . . it began to unfold my head drawing back each layer of skin and letting it flap over my ears." The sun's fingers are like Angela's; they take Billy's mind, and the rest of him is turned inside out. Billy's description of this experience implies a peculiar confusion of sexuality and death, and his association of them with light; all three imply loss of control. "My cock standing out of my head": he is literally exposed by the sun, the source of light. And as the sun fingers him to orgasm, he loses control and knows what it is like to be "overdeveloped to meaninglessness." Finally he finds relief "in the shade" of his horse's stomach.

The shade offers Billy security; "a boy blocks out the light" because he is afraid of it. But what he really fears is the world it allows him to see. That "mad" world lacks the control and the clarity Billy so desires. Unlike a photograph, life keeps moving. If Billy is alone, or with Sally Chisum, he can give himself to the movement and enjoy it — as he does "moving across the world on horses." But if he is with other people who might move against him, he must be on guard. Finally, Billy is a photographer of life because he fears what he calls at one point "the pain of change."

CHANGE DISTURBS BILLY because it implies that nothing can be depended on: "in the end the only thing that never changed, never became deformed, were animals." Billy's identification of change with deformity is characteristic; for him, no change is ever for the better. He sees Charlie Bowdre dying with his "face changing like fast sunshine," and purges the pain of the image photographically, saying, "I *caught* Charlie Bowdre dying." But his dislike of flowers is more disturbing. He seems to admire "paper flowers you don't feed / or give to drink," and he speaks of the pollen of real flowers in terms that, once again, confuse sexuality and death. They distress him by bursting the white drop of spend / out into the air at you / the smell of things dying." This smell suffocates Billy, "stuffing up your nose / and up like wet cotton in the brain." For him, the "liquor perfume" of flowers is paradoxically "like lilac urine smell." Even sweet smells disgust him.

In fact, all the smells of living offend Billy, particularly those of other people. He dislikes "the strange smell of their breath / moving across my face," and as he imagines the scene of his death, he says he wants to kill Garrett because he "can smell him smell that mule sweat / that stink." And as he feels exposed in the desert after a drunken night at the Chisums', he imagines that the wind is carrying "the smell off dead animals a hundred miles away and aiming it at me and my body." For Billy, smells are weapons wielded by the world of change in attempting to involve him in itself.

Billy destroys anything that tries to involve him. He distances himself from other people, and sometimes kills them. He moves away from the exposure of sunlight and into darkness. And he crushes the flowers that get at him. As he does so, "the flower gets small smells sane / deteriorates in a hand." For Billy, death smells good. The only true sanity comes with the elimination of a painfully changing thing that smells disturbingly of life.

But Billy's anguished response to the anarchy of change is most obvious as the isolated darkness of the Chisum ranch is disrupted by an evening of debauchery. Billy must be involved; but because, as he says, he is "used to other distances," his eyes burn from "the pain of change" and he compares the situation to a "blurred picture." Not surprisingly, he is forced to be aware of the offensive odours photographs cannot record, and he speaks with disgust of Angela, "the smell of her sex strong now daubing my chest." The photograph has come to life, and Billy cannot bear it.

In fact, Billy is never allowed to maintain the repose he so desires. It is achieved by elimination; like photographs, it removes the smells and the pain of change. Billy knows that "one must eliminate much" to gain peace, and he tries, not just to eliminate his enemies with a gun, but also to eliminate his awareness of some important facts of life. His crushing of flowers is just one example. He also tries to turn away from the deaths he causes, and "see none of the thrashing"; but again and again he must see "wounds appearing in the sky, in the air," "nerves shot out" and livers "running around," veins pulled out of bodies, and so on. Furthermore, his conviction that animals never become deformed is consistently denied throughout the book; their "deformity" can not be eliminated by Billy's insistence that it does not exist. Animals do some of the ugliest things in the book. They eat vomit, and their smell in death attacks Billy. Dogs are transformed into monsters by the mad breeder Livingstone. Mild-mannered chickens become sinister as they pull veins out of human bodies. Above all, even the animals which share the calm of Billy's barn become deformed.

Ironically, it is their deformity — the fact that he refuses to acknowledge — that disrupts his calm. For that calm is not what Billy claims it is. It depends, not on the clarity provided by distance, but on a curious form of numbness. Removed from a world that might move against him, and believing there is no need to keep his eyes conscious of possible danger, Billy eliminates even his awareness: "I began to block my mind of all thought." He drops his guard, loses his distance, and finds peace as just another animal; he says, "We were all aware and allowed each other," but the awareness is not convincing. Billy achieves the same numb repose here he has in "moving across the world on horses" or in the undemanding company of Sally Chisum.

But that repose is built on a false conception of reality. Billy has eliminated the possibility of the animals changing; the rats that turn on each other in the barn

imply that animals are no more capable of being both aware and allowing each other than human beings are. To be aware is to be aware of change, and some change is painful. Billy's photographic calm explodes into movement, its falseness made obvious. Billy shoots the rats in order to stop their movement and restore his own peace. Paradoxically, he performs violence to prevent violence. If one is to achieve a perfect, unchanging world, one must use one's gun, or one's camera, to "eliminate much."

But the act of destroying the rats does not restore Billy's repose. He is on guard again — no longer an unthinking animal among animals, but "the boy in the blue shirt," who is, ironically, framed by the doorway and forced to look at the changing world outside. If that world moves and he does not, then Billy is not really in a camera; the door that frames him makes him into a photograph — the one unchanging thing in a world of change.

Billy's insistence that the change inherent in living is always painful is clearly unhealthy. If he needs to eliminate the smells of flowers and of other people, and even his own sexuality, in order to achieve repose, he actually aspires to be something less than human. Not surprisingly, his images of perfection are inhuman, and frequently mechanical. His tendency to describe rooms as cameras and himself and other people as photographers is only one manifestation of a general pattern. For him, "the stomach of clocks" that "shift their wheels and pins into each other / and emerge living" is preferable to the nauseatingly "warm" stomach of a human being, and he admires the "dark grey yards where trains are fitted / and the clean speed of machines / that make machines / . . . the beautiful machines pivoting on themselves." He admires them so much that he tries to transform himself into one of them. Garrett's description of Billy doing his finger exercises recalls Billy's description of the train yards, "each finger circling alternately like a train wheel." Billy's left hand is a mechanical extension of the lethal machine it holds, and even his fear of sexual involvement is expressed in terms of his losing control of this machine: "my hand locked / her body nearly breaking off my fingers / pivoting like machines in final speed / later my hands cracked in love juice / fingers paralysed by it arthritic / these beautiful fingers I couldnt move / faster than a crippled witch now."

BUT IT IS NOT SEXUAL INVOLVEMENT that finally destroys Billy. In fact, Ondaatje's presentation of Pat Garrett, Billy's killer, implies that his real enemy is his own mad vision. For Garrett seems to share that vision, and he can take Billy only because he understands him so well.

Garrett finds the movements of Billy's fingers "the most hypnotising beautiful thing I ever saw," and for good reason; Garrett also has turned himself into a

machine. "His mind was unwarped," but only because, like Billy, he refuses to acknowledge the complexities of living. Billy himself admires "morals" that are "clear and open," achieved by eliminating much; similarly, Garrett "decided what was right and forgot all morals." Furthermore, Billy's mechanizing of his hand is paralleled by Garrett's mechanizing of his life, his "schedule to learn how to drink" and his refusal to allow his emotions to gain control over him.

Above all, Garrett shares Billy's dislike of change. If Billy admired paper flowers and killed real ones for smelling of life, Garrett "became frightened of flowers because they grew so slowly that he couldnt tell what they planned to do." They both believe that all movement is potentially dangerous to themselves. Billy admires assassins because they "come to chaos neutral," and for this reason, Billy is as much a "sane assassin" as Garrett is. Ondaatje reveals the deficiency of that cool sanity by repeating the phrase "sane assassin" until it turns in on itself, the "in-" at the end of "assassin" joining onto the front of "sane" and revealing the truth; the real madmen are those who believe that sanity is total control and total lack of emotion.

If the man who kills Billy is a mirror image of him, Billy is actually destroyed by his own vision of life. In fact, understanding how Billy will react, Garrett "does the one thing that will save him." He leaps into Maxwell's bed, and Billy, knowing that there are no other women on the ranch, assumes that Maxwell is sleeping with his own sister. Revolted by this evidence of humanity's subservience to its own anarchic sexuality, Billy is put off guard. His need for control causes him to lose control, and he is killed.

Ondaatje's investigation of Billy answers the question Billy himself raises at one point: was there "a motive? some reasoning we can give to explain all this violence? Was there a source for all this?" Billy's explanation of that motive is the killing of his friend Tunstall. But Ondaatje cleverly shows Billy watching Tunstall's death "from a distant hillside." That is the real "source"; Billy's desire for lack of involvement causes him to lash out, to kill things so that he can preserve his distance from them. At one point, he speaks of "pictures of great stars . . . that would explode their white / if temperature and the speed they moved at / shifted one degree." Billy himself explodes whenever life happens; when he loses control and clarity, when his distance from other people is lessened, or when the movement of another creature does not fit the pattern he has imposed on it.

According to Stephen Scobie, "Billy's poetic personality is not entirely distinct from Michael Ondaatje's."[3] As a photographer, Billy's artistry is a matter of stopping change — the dead stillness of the actual photographs in the book mirrors the dead stillness of Billy's own perception of the world; he "fixes" things, either with guns or with the photographic "word pictures" of his collected works. The relation of Billy's methods to the traditional theory that art should be eternal and unchanging is obvious. But Billy's motive for taking his pictures is a disgust

with things that live and move and change; it seems doubtful that Ondaatje's work is engendered by a similarly insane attitude.

In fact, *The Collected Works* may be an exorcism of the poet's admiration for his protagonist. If the child in the cowboy outfit whose photograph appears at the end of the book is Ondaatje himself, then he was in fact once taken in by the usual legends of Billy the Kid and other similar heroes. The portrait of Billy that emerges in *The Collected Works* reveals what is wrong with those legends. The heroic outsider who bravely dismissed the restrictions of society did so only because he was uninvolved and emotionally dead. Understanding this, and, perhaps, realizing its implications in terms of the way legends like Billy's justify the uninvolvement and removed violence of "outsiders" in the contemporary world, Ondaatje frees himself from the legend. The poet himself speaks in the last poem, and he is seen washing away the smoke of a bad night, the night in which he finished the book and purged himself of its hero.

But in the process of disengaging himself from one false image of Billy, Ondaatje may have taken on an even larger burden. Billy's activities *are* identified with the methods of photography, and they might be a metaphor for the work of artists. While the "collected works" are like photographs, the phrase is usually reserved for volumes of poetry, and many of the "works" are in fact poems. Scobie may be right. Perhaps all attempts to fix the fluid movement of the world into an artistically satisfying order are murderous; they may emerge from a disdain for life, and engender nothing but motionless misrepresentations. Perhaps the words with which a poet fixes an image of his world are the weapons he wields against the "pain of change," and perhaps the use of such weapons has the same numbing effect on poets as it had on Billy.

Such considerations seem to surface in *The Collected Works* in a poem that might represent the thought of either Billy or Ondaatje. The speaker of this poem is thinking about the act of writing: "my fingers touch / this soft blue paper notebook / control a pencil . . . / mapping my thinking." Apparently pencils are like guns and cameras, tools that allow one to control confusion by "mapping" it. Certainly Billy's concern about a newspaper interviewer's manipulation of his image suggests such a similarity: "a pencil / harnessing my face / goes stumbling into dots." These dots could be either the reporter's shorthand, or the dots that make up a photograph in a newspaper. In any case, the implications of controlling a pencil are the ones hidden in all of Billy's attitudes — he tries to use the orderly patterns of his mind to give form and stability to a painfully unstable world. His writing — and perhaps Ondaatje's also — is equivalent to his photography. Both retreat from reality into "the mind's invisible blackout," the camera that removes itself from the world and stops its movement.

Ondaatje has written elsewhere of similar concerns, particularly in the "White Dwarfs" sequence in *Rat Jelly*. In the first of these poems, he says, "Our minds

shape / and lock the transient,"[4] thus capturing permanent images of things that are impermanent. But in the next poem, this ability of the mind becomes problematic: "there are ways of going / physically mad, physically / mad when you perfect the mind."[5] Billy is mad in this way, and so is Garrett; they are both "sane assassins." Perhaps the poet is a sane assassin also.

The achievement of total control is insane because it is an illusion; change does not stop, and as the man writing in the blue notebook in *The Collected Works* realizes, the mind's elimination of it is not real. The pencil is really "going its own way," and similarly, "the acute nerves spark / on the periphery of our bodies / while the block trunk of us / blunders." The physical body still blunders despite attempts to control it. In the same way, the pain of change cannot be stopped, either by photographs or by poems; life blunders on despite all the images that try to fix it.

Significantly, Ondaatje's response to this problem, implied later in the "White Dwarfs" sequence, makes use of yet another image of photography. He speaks of "a blurred photograph of a gull. Caught vision. The stunning white bird / an unclear stir. / And that is all this writing should be then. / The beautiful formed things caught at the wrong moment / so they are shapeless, awkward / moving to the clear."[6] Billy's perfectly clear photographs are lifeless; good pictures, and good poems, should be blurred. If they are, the sterility of permanence will not have destroyed the movement of life. In fact, and paradoxically, the "blundering" movement of life is what the poet is trying to capture and make permanent. It is not insignificant that the happiest moment in *The Collected Works*, when Billy takes pleasure in "riding naked" on horseback, is presented in a picture that is unclear — one that Billy calls "blurred." Nor is it insignificant that Billy's enjoyment ends when he looks into the eyes of a bird; that eye stops Billy, just as the eye of Muybridge's camera stopped the movement of the naked man on horseback he photographed. Such still pictures are not satisfactory.

At this point, some history becomes significant. Each one of Muybridge's photographs of a horse was lifeless and unmoving; but as a sequence, these pictures represent an important advance in the development of motion pictures. The sequential viewing of them could appear to duplicate the movement of the horse; they are unmoving photographs that could in fact depict movement. In the same way, Ondaatje's collection of still photographs of Billy the Kid comes together as a sequence to create a moving picture of a convincing human being. In *The Collected Works*, Billy is a "beautiful formed thing caught at the wrong moment" again and again, so that he is always unconsciously revealing the weakness of his own attitudes. His deliberately lifeless photographs of himself contain implications that allow Ondaatje to present a fuller and more believable picture of Billy in the book as a whole, one that moves steadily away from the empty frame that represents Billy's photograph at the beginning of the book and "to the clear."

Obviously, then, Billy's photography is quite different from Ondaatje's. If *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* is Ondaatje's attempt to "present Billy himself as an artist,"[7] it is not for the purpose of defining his own artistry. Billy is being criticized, and Ondaatje is certainly not identifying his protagonist with himself. In fact, by understanding Billy well enough to purge himself of him, Ondaatje has divested himself of a familiar and easy idea about poetry, and forced himself into a much more difficult struggle — to make things live and move in words, rather than simply to capture their image and stop them dead.

NOTES

[1] "Two Authors in Search of a Character," *Canadian Literature*, No. 54 (Autumn 1972), 43.
[2] *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* (Toronto: Anansi, 1970).
[3] Scobie, p. 45.
[4] "We're at the graveyard," *Rat Jelly* (Toronto: Coach House, 1973), p. 51.
[5] "Heron Rex," *Rat Jelly*, p. 53.
[6] " 'The gate in his head,' " *Rat Jelly*, p. 62.
[7] Scobie, p. 44.

THE FILLED PEN

P. K. Page

Eager to draw again
find space in that small room
for my drawing board and inks
and the huge revolving world
the delicate nib releases

I have only to fill my pen
and the shifting gears begin
Fly-wheel and cog-wheel start
their small-toothed interlock

and whatever machinery draws
is drawing through my fingers
and the shapes that I have drawn
gaze up into my eyes
We stare each other down

Light of late afternoon
white wine across my paper
the subject I would draw
light of the stars and sun

light of the swan-white moon
the blazing light of trees
and the rarely-glimpsed bright face
behind the apparency of things

THE TETHERS

P. K. Page

You are my tethers — you and you and you
beautiful, ailing, witty or beloved.
You hold my tent-pole upright
make my tent
symmetrical and true —
you guy-ropes of a tent
that would not be a tent.

Think what a sail I'd make
against the blue —
flying! — for God's sake.
What a splendid din
the whip and rattle
of my canvas wings
flapping me upward
ragged as a crane.

Not as I dreamed:
tent formless, beyond form.
But as I never dreamed:
tent shapeless, without shape.

EMILE NELLIGAN

A Dreamer Passing By

Kathy Mezei

THOUGH HIS FLAME OF GENIUS flickered so briefly, the romantic, tragic and mad Emile Nelligan (1879-1941) captured the imagination of Quebec as no writer before or after. The critic, Jean-Ethier Blais, once remarked, "ne peut-on pas croire que c'est tout notre sensibilité qui vit à son ombre?"

Nelligan spent his youth in Montreal. His father, absent most of the year on behalf of the postal service, was a tyrannical Irishman who refused to learn French, while his mother, a gentle, musical French Canadian, protected her son. As a boy Nelligan seemed indifferent to his studies and as a young man showed no inclination to find regular employment, much to the annoyance of his father. From age sixteen to nineteen he devoted himself exclusively to writing poetry, affecting a bohemian life style. Then he succumbed to the schizophrenia that had been slowly engulfing him and waited out the rest of his days in mental institutions, never writing another word of poetry. One can see, given Nelligan's background and futile rebellion, how his schizophrenia assumed a mythic quality in Quebec, how it came to symbolize the oppressive theocracy and uneasy dual heritage.

Far surpassing any other Quebec author and, in stark contrast to English Canadian writers, Nelligan has been celebrated, analyzed, and immortalized. In his *Bibliographie descriptive et critique d'Emile Nelligan* (1973) Paul Wyczynski painstakingly details the numerous colloquia, conferences, and publications of all types from reviews to films. Nelligan's poems have been translated into English, set to music by Quebec chansonniers, recreated in the watercolours of Louis Pelletier, and inspired pieces by composers. His most famous poem, "Le Vaisseau d'or" lent its name to Mayor Jean Drapeau's restaurant, now bankrupt. He has been the subject of a ballet "Nelligan" by Ann Ditchburn. In December 1974, "Le Patriote" in Montreal presented Monique Leyrac's "Spectacle Emile Nelligan," one of several such spectacles. There is also an "Editions Emile Nelligan" and, in 1979, Le Prix Emile Nelligan for poetry was first awarded. The poet has also been a recurring figure in contemporary literary work — Réjean Ducharme's *Le Nez qui voque* and Lazar Sarna's *The Man Who Lived Near Emile Nelligan.*

Part of this adulation stems from Nelligan's eloquent expression of images and themes that continue to obsess Quebec artists: entrapment, isolation, alienation,

exile, ambivalence towards one's Catholic heritage which nevertheless supplies a bottomless fount of aesthetic images. But this tribute also arises from the recognition that Nelligan heralds the arrival of modernism in Quebec. In his poetry, the fetters of a moribund patriotism and artificial romanticism are thrown off, revealing the possibilities of the symbolic use of language and the psychological examination of one's inner being. This is not to deny that Nelligan was — as any youthful poet inevitably is — strongly imitative of his masters — the French and Belgian poets of the parnassian and symbolist schools, as well as Byron and Poe. Despite the conventional, if well-crafted poetic forms (in particular, the sonnet) and the echoes from continental poets, a desperate and moving inner struggle illuminates Nelligan's poems. Unlike earlier Quebec poets, he sought to portray the state of his soul, to reveal the often divided images of the self; thus he created a landscape of the soul that reverberates in the poems of Alain Grandbois, Saint-Denys-Garneau, and Anne Hébert.

Both Nelligan's and Quebec's literary awakening were occasioned in part by the appearance of the Ecole littéraire de Montréal, founded in 1895 and lasting in varying degrees of intensity until 1935. The story goes that a group of young lawyers, disgusted by the "canadianismes," "anglicismes," and "lieux communs"[1] polluting a political banquet they were attending, began to gather together on Saturday nights at the Café Ayotte on Ste. Catherine St. Because of their addiction to huge glasses of draught beer they became known as the "six éponges."[2] These young men, thus inspired, resolved to undertake to "raviver chez nous l'intérêt aux choses de l'esprit et d'apprendre à notre langage des formules plus neuves."[3] This was the origin of l'Ecole.

The impetus behind the Montreal movement, aside from the desire of several young poets to provide a "foyer" where they could discuss and recite their poetry, was a concern with improving and renewing the French language and literature in Quebec. At first, the school set up a programme of studying ten pages of the dictionary per week in order to improve the vocabulary of its members. L'Ecole was envisioned, particularly by its progenitors, as a movement of artistic awakening; it was to signal a new literary epoch in which the romanticism and patriotism of their elders would be discarded. One of the participants, Albert Ferland, described the society:

> Cercle d'étude, d'un esprit très éclectique qui n'avait pour objet que de grouper, sans distinction d'école, classiques, parnassiens ou symbolistes, tous les jeunes écrivains de l'heure . . . Deux tendances partageaient les tenants de cette école: les uns n'avaient que le souci d'exprimer leur âme (Lozeau, Nelligan, Melançon, Demers, Charbonneau, Beauregard) ; les autres désiraient donner à leur poésie la couleur et la saveur du terroir: c'étaient Albert Ferland, Doucet, Léveillé, Gill, Tremblay, Desaulniers.[4]

With typical French precision and flair, the school set about instigating programs,

inviting members, publishing its lectures and sessions, and holding lively meetings in the Château de Ramezay, formerly the governer's palace, built in 1705. What began as a gathering of a small number of people interested in poetry blossomed into a large organization that included lawyers, journalists, a doctor, a notary, a painter and an engraver.

In 1897, the young Emile Nelligan was invited by his friend, Arthur de Bussières, to join the group. Although he participated only sporadically, l'Ecole gave him an opportunity to present his verse to the public. On December 29, 1898, he gave his first public reading before a receptive crowd. At the third session, April 7, 1899, Jean Charbonneau gave a talk on symbolism, where he eschewed the principles of symbolism, a stance he later regretted. On May 26, 1899, Nelligan read his "Romance du vin," his moment of triumph. Louis Dantin, Nelligan's mentor and dedicated editor, described how: "J'ai vu un soir Nelligan en pleine gloire. . . . Quand l'oeil flambant, le geste élargi par l'effort intime, il clama d'une voix passionnée sa *Romance du vin*, une émotion vraie étreignit la salle, et les applaudissements prirent la fureur d'une ovation."[5] Like a victor, Nelligan was heroically lifted onto the shoulders of his fellow poets and carried home.

Nelligan's verse seems all the more modern when set against the backdrop of nineteenth-century Quebec. Unless one had contacts with France or had visited her, it was difficult in that church-dominated society to keep abreast of new literary movements. The press[6] was naturally conservative, and therefore, not until 1895 and the creation of l'Ecole did the parnassian and symbolist movements, long flourishing in France, combine to influence the direction of Quebec art. The two major dailies, *La Patrie* and *La Minerve*, published articles on art, while two journals in particular, *Le Monde illustré* and *Le Samedi* (both of which published verse by Nelligan), contained poems and articles on literature. From 1884 to 1894, *Le Monde illustré* concentrated on Victor Hugo and François Coppée with rarely a poem even by Lamartine or de Musset. Finally in 1895 Sully Prudhomme, Hérédia, and Rodenbach began to make an appearance and a poem of Baudelaire's — "Le Port" — was published in 1899. *Le Samedi* was a little more adventurous and through 1895-96, poems by Baudelaire and Verlaine were included. Nelligan probably found many of the sources for his poetic inspiration among these poems.

Nelligan's poems were not collected and published until after his incarceration, although his manuscripts show that he had been arranging his poems into a volume. Louis Dantin, at that time still a priest, spent several years compiling a volume of Nelligan's poems. When his disapproving superiors discovered his activities, Dantin handed the manuscripts and printed papers to Nelligan's mother, who along with Charles Gill gave them to the publisher, Beauchemin. These were then published in 1904 as *Emile Nelligan et son oeuvre* with a preface by Dantin. Dantin, partly because of this incident, exiled himself to Cambridge, Massachusetts, and left the church. Then in 1952, Luc Lacourcière brought out *Poésies*

complètes which contained the one hundred and seven poems gathered together by Dantin, plus thirty-five poems that had appeared in journals from 1896 to 1939 (friends who had received poems from Nelligan published them after he was hospitalized) and twenty-one poems from the Nelligan-Corbeil manuscripts now at the Bibliothèque Nationale in Montreal. In 1968, Beaudoin Burger published seven poems from the Carnets d'Hôpital;[7] two were variants of poems in the *Poesies complètes* and one, "Baudelaire," by Fernand Gregh, was incorrectly attributed to Nelligan.

Nelligan had intended to entitle his collection of poems "Motifs du récital des anges" and had listed the sections as follows: "Prélude aux anges," "Clavecin céleste," "Villa d'enfance," "Petite chapelle," "Vesprées mystiques," "Mysticisme," "Choses mystiques," "Intermezzo," "Lied," "Les Pieds sur les chenets."[8] Dantin, apparently with recourse to a later list, entitled the sections: "L'Ame du poête," "Le Jardin de l'enfance," "Amours d'élite," "Les Pieds sur les chenets," "Virgiliennes," "Eaux-fortes funéraires," "Petite chapelle," "Pastels et Porcelaines," "Vêpres tragiques," "Tristia," titles which reflect the thematic and formal concerns of the poet, particularly the religious motif. In his edition, Lacourcière maintained Dantin's order, with the addition of "Pièces retrouvées" and "Poèmes posthumes," culled from manuscripts and journals.

By examining the spatial symbols that dominate Nelligan's poems and tracing their development throughout his poetry, we will have a better understanding of Nelligan's main themes, his poetic process, his modernism, and the reason he has had such a strong impact on the Quebec imagination.

Heir to the three great literary movements of the nineteenth century, Nelligan drew out essential characteristics of each that suited his temperament and his art. From romanticism came the concept of the agony of creation and the significance of subjective impressions; from the parnassians came the emphasis on clarity of image; and from the symbolists, the encouragement to pillage nature for symbols to express ideality and intense subjectivity. The symbolists, particularly Baudelaire and Verlaine, provided the rationale for a complex and unnatural use of symbols from nature: they wished to create a literature "in which the visible world is no longer a reality and the unseen world no longer a dream."[9] Nature, then, became a source of symbolic forms and Nelligan's expression of nature is symbolic and far removed from the natural world. Indeed, the concept of ideality is pervasive in Nelligan who constantly strives to flee "La Matière aux yeux ensorcelants / Aux plages de Thulé vers l'île des Mensonges." With true Mallarmean horror of "la brute nature," Nelligan wishes to escape the ugly realities of winter, stormy seas, and the "earth," symbolically recoiling from "too much reality":

Et ne vous souillez pas à contempler les plèbes.

However, the contours of Nelligan's ideal remain vaguely defined; occasionally, this ideal resides in the golden age — the personal one of childhood or the historical one of days of chivalry and romance, and occasionally in the future, in the golden Jerusalem. Since the ideal can be visited most freely through "le rêve," the loose but implicit coherence of dreams structures the ideal.

In his poem "Rêve d'artiste," Nelligan presents the process by which he seeks the space that is his ideal world. Disarmingly, he describes how, were he to possess the elusive muse "une soeur angélique au sourire discret," he would fashion an equally angelic and beautiful garden — his poem.

Et pour qui je ferai si j'aborde à la gloire
Fleurir tout un jardin de lys et de soleils
Dans l'azur d'un poème offert à sa mémoire.

Invoking the familiar symbolist vision of "un autre pays" or "un pays absolu" through the common image of "azur" which he combines with the religious and romantic images of "lys," "soleil," "gloire" (all symbols of creative energy), Nelligan promises us a distant, ideal space that is both poem and dwelling place. The distance and improbability of the realm are emphasized because Nelligan addresses the reader, not the "soeur bonne et tendre," thus setting the possibility of "poem" and personal "glory" in a remote time and place. The "Rêve d'artiste" is an exposition of the development of the conditions of artistic creation and of his vision of an "ideal poetic space."

Frequently this ideal space is described as "un rêve enclos" or a "jardin sentimental" or a "jardin d'antan" nostalgically evoking the sheltered innocence of childhood and a traditional pastoralism (because derived from literature). However, this ideal space is Janus-faced for, on the one hand, Nelligan seeks refuge in "chapelles" and "jardins" (religious and childhood sanctuaries):

Nous étions là deux enfants blêmes
Devant les grands autels à franges,
Où sainte Marie et ses anges
Riaient parmi les chrysanthèmes.

("Chapelle dans les bois")

Here in an idyllic retreat in the woods, the poet recalls his pure and innocent childhood, the steady rhythmic flow of the quatrains echoing the sad, distant "voix de la petite chapelle." But, on the other hand, the refuge, like Nelligan's soul, has its shadowy, macabre side. In another poem, the "Chapelle dans les bois" is transformed by the poet's delicately balanced imagination into a "Chapelle de la morte." In a manner reminiscent of Gaston Bachelard's depiction of houses as souls, Nelligan's "chapelle" in "Chapelle de la morte" assumes "les traits / De ton âme qu'elle a humée." The fear and trembling within the soul are projected

outward and the abstract blackness of the soul is often transferred to the concrete ruins of "chapelles" and keeps: "mon âme est un donjon noir." A "berceuse," symbol of protected childhood, becomes the deadly "cercueil" and the "tombeau," e.g.:

> De mon berceau d'enfant j'ai fait l'autre berceau
> Où ma Muse s'endort dans des trilles d'oiseau,
> Ma Muse en robe blanche, ô ma toute maîtresse!
>
> Oyez nos baisers d'or aux grands soirs familiers . . .
> Mais chut! j'entends déjà la mégère Détresse
> A notre seuil faisant craquer ses noirs souliers!
>
> ("Le Berceau de la muse")

Similarly the peaceful cloister is occasionally transformed into a ghoulish monastery. "Le Cloître noir" is a haunting and ambivalent portrait of monks filing into a chapel that captures, through the rhythmic correspondence of chants and marching feet, the process of attaining grace and salvation. This sonnet rises to a symbolic, surprise open ending so common to Nelligan, which focuses the entire poem and which sends the startled reader back to explore its symbolic evocations. Note, for example, the significance of the difference in the ending between the original 1897 poem "Moines en défilade" and the revised version "Le Cloître noir." First, "Moines en défilade":

> rien ne les emeut,
> . . . .
> Pas même les appels de l'infernal esprit,
> Suprême Tentateur des passions rebelles
> De ces silencieux Spectres de Jésus Christ.

Second, "Le Cloître noir" which is more positive and affirmative:

> La lumière céleste emplit leur large esprit,
> Car l'Espoir triomphant creusa les solitudes
> De ces silencieux spectres de Jésus Christ.[10]

The two versions of "Le Cloître noir" are interesting in the light of Nelligan's occasionally demonic vision of the "Church" and because we can see how, here as in other places, Nelligan is torn between the black and the macabre and the pure and the holy. Yet which is more terrifying: the vision of hell and temptation in the earlier poem or the ghostly emptiness of salvation in the latter one?

Here, then, are the two facets that balance the scale pans of Nelligan's precarious soul. First we encounter "l'abîme" with its "Suprême Tentateur" and second, l'abîme with "l'espoir triomphant." Nelligan's soul is weighed down on one side with exoticism and nostalgia represented by the "bibelots," "négresses," parrots, pieces of Chopin, Liszt, "missels d'ivoire," and portraits of his mother. The other side is weighed down with morbidity and death, represented by images in which

the past appears "claquant leurs vieux os," or in which the poet gloats over his coffin and approaching death. Either by a retreat into exoticism or nostalgia or by succumbing to morbidity and death, Nelligan seeks to escape reality.

Thus, while Nelligan inhabited and desired to inhabit another reality — a dream world constructed out of his imagination and out of the past recollected in turbulence — that this other reality eventually overwhelmed him is evident in his descent into mental illness. It is clear that Nelligan had little interest in the practical, everyday world and felt trapped and horrified by it: "Je me sens des bras funèbres / M'asservir au Réel." In his recollection of Nelligan, Jean Charbonneau pointed out Nelligan's ethereality:

> Grand, mince, les cheveux en broussaille, majestueux, un pli d'amertume à la commissure des lèvres, les yeux perdus dans l'infini, il n'avait pas l'air de tenir au monde materiel.[11]

Wavering between ecstasy and desperation, Nelligan subscribes to the notion dominant among the romantic and symbolist poets that the poet is seer, that he is possessed by superhuman qualities (poetic genius) by which he can reveal to the ordinary man the ideal lurking in the real world. This "angélisme" is present in Nelligan's ironic description of "the poet" and his reception by society:

> c'est un rêveur qui passe.
> C'est une âme angélique ouverte sur l'espace.
> Qui porte en elle un ciel de printemps auroral.
>
> ("Un Poète")

The poet, a dreamer passing by, goes unrecognized or mocked by the philistine crowd, and achieves recognition only "dans le pays où le bon Dieu demeure." The concept of the poet as more perceptive and tuned to other universes is a recurring motif in Nelligan's poems and further supplements his aura of otherworldliness.

GIVEN THE SYMBOLIST EMPHASIS on the symbolic possibilities of such natural elements as water, trees, birds, autumn, and on the vivid reconstruction of spiritual worlds through the use of these symbols, it is no wonder that Nelligan found in their poems and in their methods, congenial modes of expressing his dream world. But most of Nelligan's nature symbols are developed from his literary experience rather than his experience of the Canadian landscape. Only with "snow" in "Soir d'hiver" and "Hiver sentimental," does Nelligan infuse his image with a local relevance, though cold and even snow are certainly favourite symbolist metaphors. But even with "neige," it is the verbal possibilities of the image that intrigue Nelligan, rather than its "real" properties. As Gérard Bessette has observed:

> On voit donc qu'une analyse foncière des images naturelles de Nelligan confirme ce

> que notre tableau formel nous laissait entrevoir: notre poète ne se sent pas à l'aise dans la nature et l'évite le plus possible.... De même que la nature, parce que généralisée ou effleurée, nous semble chez Nelligan aussi revée que vue.... Il ne s'identifie pas d'ailleurs à eux les [phénomènes généraux], mais les regarde de loin, avec admiration, parfois avec terreur, jamais filialement ou fraternellement.[12]

The world of literature is, for the poet, a sacred space. And so is dream. The sacred space is constructed by the poet and, as Verlaine said, "tout le reste est littérature," all the rest is profane, worldly, and of little consequence. As archetype, sacred space is inner, and profane space, outer. In his use of images Nelligan continually makes this distinction between the inner, sacred reality, and the outer, profane reality.[13]

Although Nelligan is concerned with illuminating the self, he prefers to view the self from the outside as separate and often abstract. For example, when in "La Fuite de l'enfance," the desire of the poet to escape earthly bounds is rendered as "La Fuite de l'enfance au vaisseau des vingt ans," the self is distanced, abstracted as "Enfance." But as Bessette points out, Nelligan's greatness lies in his ability to combine the abstract with the self, and more significantly the abstract with the concrete. Therefore, in this poem, the "vaisseau" become the concrete representation of the soul; it is also a recurring symbol for the soul adrift on the seas of change throughout his poetry.

> au jour où nous prendrons vaisseau
> Sur la mer idéale où l'ouragan se ferle.
> ("Placet")

> dans un grand vaisseau vert,
> Nous rêvions de monter aux astres de Vesper.
> ("Jardin sentimental")

> Et je rêve toujours au vaisseau des vingt ans,
> Depuis qu'il a sombré dans la mer des Etoiles.
> ("Ténèbres")

> Lent comme un monstre cadavre
> Mon coeur vaisseau s'amarre au havre
> De toute hétéromorphe engeance.
> ("Je veux m'éluder")

Through spatial metaphors of the heavens, abysses, seas, the self is indirectly revealed. These often clichéd metaphors catch our attention first because they do reveal the self, and second, because of their fine verbal quality.

The spatial direction in Nelligan is predominantly vertical: up to the heavens, down into the abyss or the sea; and it is complemented by those metaphors of space (sea, abyss, heavens) that are the recipients of this vertical movement.[14] This preference for the "vertical" further emphasizes Nelligan's desire to evade the real world and to escape into higher realms of being. Although Nelligan does

deal with universal themes — "La Fuite du temps," death, nostalgia — it is always within the frame of the self; to intimate the stages of his soul and the tenuousness of his life is the concern of Nelligan's art.

As a consequence, Nelligan's nature pieces are symbolic inner landscapes avoiding any direct involvement with the natural world which is distanced either by window frames or by literary convention. Bessette comments that

> Tout moyen lui est bon qui le délivre de la réalité. Il n'hésite pas à recourir à des réminiscences littéraires ou mythologiques plûtot que de peindre directement.[15]

Nelligan does not develop a region-spirit or genius loci; he is a visionary poet who projects the poetic genius which absorbs his whole vision upon place rather than seeking to merge his poetic spirit with the spirit of the place. Moreover, although his "space" is inevitably shaped by clearly delineated Catholic and conservative forces, Nelligan creates a psychological or inner space that requires little in the way of concrete physical ties to the outer space in order to express itself. Thus Nelligan's landscapes are conventional and symbolic. Enclosed gardens, pastoral vistas, and winter scenes predominate, frequently succumbing to macabre visions or formless and vacant landscapes where the Baudelarian nightmare of "le gouffre" affirms its dreadful primacy. In Nelligan's poetry, the line of development, therefore, is from "le rêve blanc" to "le rêve noir," from a fanciful to a gloomier symbolism: the morbid strain is always present in Nelligan's symbolism and, in "Paysage fauve" or "Le Corbeil," verbal and thematic elements reveal more of the morbid than of the fanciful or idyllic.

In Nelligan's hands, the pastoral constitutes an artificial world where simplicity, love, the golden age and rural retirement are ideals bolstered by traditional symbols of pastoral flocks (cows), shepherds, and shepherdesses (Gretchen), Pan, song, gardens, flowers. The motifs weaving their way through the pastoral poems are childhood (the past, the golden age); the season of loss and sadness (autumn), the season of death (winter), and of love (summer and spring); song, gardens, and religious faith revealed by the recurring image of bells. These themes and images unite and intermingle to represent a sense of longing, usually for a simpler, happier past. When the tone saddens and the vision darkens, the longing turns towards death.

In "Les Angéliques"[16] the shepherd-poet, "un berger-poète au coeur sentimental," wanders nervously in the forest of his mind. The forest is hardly local ("des forêts de santal") but because of the presence of "chapelles" and "angélus" a sense of place is created. The landscape is symbolic, its contours associated with certain memories, and with faith. First, the poet portrays an angelic landscape where natural and angelic objects merge in a dreamlike fashion:

> Et les Anges, à flots de longs timbres moroses,
> Ebranlent les bourdons, au vent occidental.

Nelligan's clever play on the word "angélus" and "angéliques" suggests that the ringing bells become, in the poet's mind, the singing of angels. But the landscape is not merely angelic, it also projects the inner landscape of the poet, and Nelligan uses "lande" in both these senses: "j'errais en lande hors du hameau natal" and "ta lande intime." The onomatopoeic metaphor of "mes troupeaux de névroses / Vagabondaient le long des forêts de santal" completes the association of the inner and outer landscapes by comparing the poet's anxieties to a flock of sheep.

Nelligan takes advantage of the sonnet form to organize the inner and outer landscapes. In the octave he describes his wanderings through the moors, while in the sestet he then draws an analogy between those nocturnal wanderings and the poet's progression through life, and crystallizes the landscape of the octave into a memory in a corner of his soul. The poet has framed the poem by his images of evening, bells (angels), and moors — images of desolation and passage; but the larger frame is dream, "la nature parce que généralisée ou effleurée, nous semble chez Nelligan aussi rêvée que vue."[17]

Three winter pieces, "Soir d'hiver," "Hiver sentimental," and "Frisson d'hiver" contrast the cold outside with the warmth inside (a living heart): sacred and profane spaces. However, cold and death (in life and love) slowly invade the heart, and the poems "Paysage fauve" ("Pastels et porcelaines") and "Soirs hypochondriaques" ("Poèmes posthumes") become hallucinatory and wintery landscapes.

In the section "Virgiliennes" Nelligan repeats his themes of nostalgia, melancholy, innocence, childhood and longing after the ideal. The ringing of the angelus ("Automne," "Jardin sentimental") accompanies the poet's melancholy mood and signals the awakening of memories of the past. For Nelligan, the landscape, as seen repeatedly in these poems, is associated with churchbells and chapels; thus the countryside has a strong religious significance. In "Jardin sentimental," the continual reference to the angelus brings the garden close to another metaphor of enclosed and sacred space, the "chapelle" (which Nelligan portrays in the section "Petites chapelles"). The sacred space of the garden and the chapel are places for the poet to construct his dreams; they are also temporal in that they are places of childhood memory.

"Presque berger," along with "Petit hameau" (from "Poèmes posthumes") which may be a variant version, praises the bucolic life:

> Les grands boeufs sont rentrés. Ils meuglent dans l'étable
> Et la soupe qui fume a réjoui la table
>
> ....
>
> Oui, c'est délicieux, cela, d'être ainsi libre
> Et de vivre en berger presque. Un souvenir vibre
>
> En moi ... Là-bas, au temps de l'enfance, ma vie
> Coulait ainsi, loin des sentiers, blanche et ravie!

In these two poems which are a "juxtaposition de réalisme paysan et de rêverie poétique,"[18] there is, first of all, the conventional pastoral idealization of rural life in contrast to the city. Nelligan, in "Presque berger," compares the peaceful and distant peasant life to his idyllic youth, "ma vie / Coulait ainsi, loin des sentiers, blanche et ravie!" But another deeper level of meaning lies behind these poems: in these two bucolic poems, and, in the insistent repetition throughout all the pastoral poems of the ringing of the angelus, are firmly entrenched the central myths of Quebec: family, farm and priest. Inevitably underlying these poems is the agrarian myth (heightened by the messianism of the post-Confederation period) that idealized the continuation of rural life, the importance of large, closely-knit families, and the influence of the priest. Mother, land, and church are the binding images of this ideology which Nelligan defies by turning to the French symbolists. However, his bucolic poem eventually submits to "la hantise du noir" and the peaceable kingdom turns into a nightmare vision in a kind of anti-pastoral: "Un farouche troupeau de grands loups affamés" prowls the winter landscape in "Paysage fauve," and "Le Boeuf spectral" ("Vêpres tragiques") "hante là-bas la paix des champs."

In the sixth section, "Eaux-fortes funéraires," the sombre landscape dominates. The title recalls Verlaine's section in *Poèmes saturniens*, "Eauxfortes," which is also composed of gloomy landscapes. Surely there is verbal play in the composition of the phrase "Eaux-fortes": etching are pictures printed from an etched metal plate, the process being one in which "impressions" are produced from the plate. The process of etching, therefore, implies an objective distance since a landscape is being observed and recorded. In these poems, a scene is ordered by the poetic eye in such a way as to "impress" itself upon the reader. With the adjective, "funéraires," the motif of death appears and a macabre landscape is composed.

In "Tristia," the tenth section, "Rêve fantasque" ("Pièces retrouvées"), reminiscent of Verlaine's "La Nuit du Walpurgis classique"[19] with "Les beaux ifs langoureux" and "l'ypran qui s'attriste," the "jets d'eau moirés et fontaines bizarres"; "des cygnes blancs et noirs," "un cerf bronze," is a nocturnal landscape of the soul. Like Verlaine, who describes "Le jardin de Lenôtre' and then envisions his thoughts as phantoms dancing sadly, wildly, around the formal shapes of Versailles, Nelligan pictures a formal park against a melancholy night sky — "le ciel triste," "un bien sombre contour," "l'ypran qui s'attriste." But his thoughts are not directly objectified into phantoms; instead vague and distressing sounds rise up to disturb the poet, and he dreams of the sweetness of death until

> Avec ces vagues bruits fantasquement charmeurs
> Rentre dans le néant le rêve romanesque.

The poem is enclosed, as are the poet's dreams and thoughts, by the trees — les chêneaux, les ifs, et l'ypran; the landscape is an objectification of the state of the

poet's soul, and the symbols, literary and "unnatural" as they are, are meant to evoke, not to describe a mood.

The other pastoral image that Nelligan constantly employs is "Eden," generally associated with the colour gold. Always an evasion, it assumes many forms:

> . . . jardin de rêve où je m'en vais
> ("Sérénade triste")
> Serait-ce qu'un nouvel Eden s'opère en nous?
> ("Communion pascale")
> Et dans l'Eden de sa Louisiane,
> ("Fantaisie créole")
> Et l'Eden d'or de mon enfance
> ("Clavier d'antan")
> Que ton piano vibre et pleure
> Et que j'oublie avec toi l'heure
> Dans un Eden, on ne sait où. . . .
> ("Chopin")

Eden is an eclectic symbol, a hortus conclusus, which is occasionally a physical place (Louisiane), occasionally a manifestation of religious faith, a dream, a haven for artists, childhood, or musical ecstasy — but always imagined and always the poet's joy and despair to seek and to inhabit.

IN THE SYMBOLIST POETS, symbolic landscapes are essentially dream landscapes in which the reader follows a progression that is not logical but associative, and through the unusual combination of images, reinforced by inverted syntax and bizarre juxtapositions of words, is drawn into the poet's mental space. Symbolic dream landscapes were an appropriate mode for Nelligan, who in company with the French symbolists created

> dreamscapes in which despair, a sense of loss and fear, hunger for beauty and release, and a horrible awareness of sullen leaden reality pervade their work. Such awareness will lead to dream, to nightmare, to seeing the beautiful in the ugly (and vice versa) to boredom, to fatigue — *and* to the magnificent visions that lie beyond the window pane.[20]

These landscapes like the "Eden d'or" are enclosed gardens, sheltered from nature, located in another realm, beyond reality. For Nelligan, the wilderness that is both desolate country and the winter season, is a fearful, not a creative solitude, inhabited by fierce wild beasts and gruesome spectres. In keeping with his temperament Nelligan also has a predilection for the dying season, autumn, while winter becomes the season of despair when the landscape turns to nightmare and is haunted by ghosts. However, because of his ability to draw nuances from com-

mon symbols like roses, trees, pools, and to combine them in a rhythmic movement, Nelligan's symbolic landscapes arouse powerful emotions. The precision with which Nelligan treats language is shown in his emendations. In "Rêve d'artiste," the last stanza reads:

> Et pour qui je ferai, si j'aborde à la gloire
> Fleurir tout un jardin de lys et de soleils
> Dans l'azur d'un poème offert à sa memoire.

The earlier variant is less concrete and imaginative:

> Et pour qui je saurai, si j'aborde à la gloire
> Fleurir un immortel jardin plein de soleil
> Dans l'azur des beaux vers d'un livre à sa mémoire.[21]

The poem "Soir d'hiver," perhaps Nelligan's most celebrated, after "Vaisseau d'or," gives us the best example of his intricate use of the verbal and rhythmic qualities of images:

> Ah! comme la neige a neigé!
> Ma vitre est un jardin de givre,
> Ah! comme la neige a neigé!
> Qu'est-ce que le spasme de vivre
> A la douleur que j'ai, que j'ai!
>
> Tous les étangs gisent gelés,
> Mon âme est noire: Où vis-je? où vais-je?
> Tous ses espoirs gisent gelés:
> Je suis la nouvelle Norvège
> D'où les blonds ciels s'en sont allés.
>
> Pleurez, oiseaux de février,
> Au sinistre frisson des choses,
> Pleurez oiseaux de février,
> Pleurez mes pleurs, pleurez mes roses,
> Aux branches de genévrier.
>
> Ah! comme la neige a neigé!
> Ma vitre est un jardin de givre,
> Ah! comme la neige a neigé!
> Qu'est-ce que le spasme de vivre
> A tout l'ennui que j'ai, que j'ai. . . .

First of all, the poem is united by the image of "neige" which is both noun and verb, and by the rhythm provided by the repetition of the soft "g" which recurs in "j'ai," "gisent," "gelés," "Norvège," "genévrier." In the opening stanza, the first three lines describe the scene: by "la vitre" the poet separates himself from the described scene. The objective world is framed, but it is framed by the subjective, the self, "ma vitre." Ma vitre is also his soul which in its state of despair suggests a garden of ice — "Ma vitre est un jardin de givre." The next two lines are a "cri de coeur" aroused by the cold, distressing landscape outside.

The second stanza clarifies the relationship between the inner and outer landscape: the two are merged. First, the poet portrays the frozen ponds, "Tous les étangs gisent gelés," then shifts to his black soul. In the third line, the landscape becomes subjective when étang is replaced by espoirs — "Tous les espoirs gisent gelés." Although Nelligan does not hesitate to attribute human characteristics to natural objects, in this poem, the melancholy human state is portrayed by comparing it to a desolate landscape. The poet becomes, finally, wintery Norway deprived of sunlight as he completely transforms himself into a paysage.

Thus, in the third stanza, nature in the form of the birds of February is directly addressed — they are part of the same sad landscape — and requested to weep for the dying roses of the poet. The "roses" like "le spasme de vivre" are overwhelmed by cold and snow and so the poet succumbs to the sorrow of winter, or death, and of incapacity.

The last stanza, echoing the first, encloses the poem as the window frame encloses the frozen soul. Pain, "la douleur," however, has become "l'ennui" of the symbolists. In this poem, the poet appears to be looking out the window, but in actuality he is looking in, at his own soul. Here is the paradox of enclosed space. Except where it provides a vocabulary for the soul, nature, in Nelligan's poems, is stylized and conventional ("neige," "roses"). Bessette has pointed out that Nelligan was attached not to nature, but to artificial objects, particularly objects of cults and of music.[22]

The continual use of exotic and alien images rather than authentic native images to describe the self can be seen as another way of expressing alienation. Being derived from another culture, another land, these images project a distanced and alienated self. Moreover, exotic images of Paris salons, Louisiana, Egypt, Vienna, Spain are twice removed from the poet's reality because they are drawn from literature not experience.[23] This alienation is even more directly and consciously expressed by the images of death, mourning, and enclosure.

To mirror the separation of the subjective from the objective and to project subjective feelings onto a distant and objective space, Nelligan employs formal and imagistic devices in a persistently recurring pattern. His predominant mode of distancing is the window, particularly the frame of the window, which allows the poet to compose the landscape. The window is also a common symbolist metaphor for the poet's realization of the difference between himself, his ideal world and the reality besieging him, and one finds the poet looking out the window, not at the landscape, but at himself: he is

> alienated from an ideal world and also forever acutely conscious not only of this separation, but also of the sordid reality from whose perspective he is obliged to seek the azur of the ideal world. In short, the poet is trapped between his impulse to recover the transcendent world and his awareness of the utter impossibility of ever doing so, except by resorting to the illusion of windowpane.[24]

The window separates the sacred from the profane space, while permitting the poet, seated behind the window, to see both spaces and to follow a controlled exchange between the two different impressions. As already seen, Nelligan prefers to view the landscape through the window; in "Soir d'hiver," the "vitre" becomes a metaphor of the soul which is a framed, composed, winter landscape. To use this image is to deliberately separate subjective feelings from the objective phenomena. Even a metaphor as fused as "ma vitre est un jardin de givre" which makes a direct association between the self and the landscape (that is, the poet does not use a more detailed and conscious form of simile such as "ma vitre est *comme* un jardin de givre") insists upon a separation of the self and on the inevitability of a divided self. The self, because it is symbolized by a "vitre" which looks both inward and outward and is transparent, does not belong wholly to itself but is torn between the inner and outer and hovers at the fringe of the two worlds.

In "Hiver sentimental" (original title, "Le Givre dans les vitres") the poet beseeches his "mistress" to move

> Loin des vitres! clairs yeux dont je bois les liqueurs
> Et ne vous souillez pas à contempler les plèbes.

The window, slight and transparent protection though it be, serves to close the poet inside; it also composes and separates the reality outside. "Vieille romanesque" with its faded romanticism is a further variation on this theme. Later echoed in Anne Hébert's poems and stories on the anachronistic aristocracy of Quebec, this poem by Nelligan paints a scene in which Mademoiselle Adèle reads her Dumas novels inside a veritable museum of antiquities, "Cloître d'anciennetés, dont elle est le modèle." Absorbed in a romantic and nostalgic previous age, she does not see outside, "Dans la rue, un passant au visage moqueur / . . . / Le joueur glorieux d'orgue de Barbarie!" Nelligan was not without irony or perspicuity in this portrait of a retreat from life and the present.

Another frame image to reflect the troubled soul is the eye; he describes the monks in "Le Cloître noir":

> et dans leurs yeux sereins
> Comme les horizons vastes des cieux marins,
> Flambe l'austérité des froides habitudes.

Since the eye is a window to the soul, in these indirect ways, Nelligan is seeking to express essentially the same thing: a perspective on the inner state of a sensitive being.

GIVEN HIS BACKGROUND, Nelligan was naturally haunted by Catholicism; it pervaded his images, his invocations to prayer, his despair over salvation and the other world. This combined with his delight in visual imagery

provided another variation on "le vitre" — that of "le vitrail" or stained glass window. This image was particularly rich because "le vitrail" possessed its own integral design and colours as well as permitting the outer world to be reflected upon the inner sanctum. "Le vitrail" presented a clearly defined barrier to outer realities:

> Où de grands anges, peints aux vitraux verdelets
> Interdisent l'entrée aux terrestres scandales.
> ("Le Cloître noir")

In religious iconography and emblematic literature the church is a type of the soul, a constructed sacred place enclosed from the profane, as is the garden. In several poems Nelligan resorts to the image of the church as sanctuary and as symbol of the soul; thus "le vitrail," like the eye, is a window onto the soul, as is evident in the sonnet, "Amour immaculé," in which the poet describes a church:

> Je sais en une église un vitrail merveilleux
> Où quelque artiste illustre, inspiré des archanges,
> A peint d'une façon mystique, en robe à franges,
> Le front nimbe d'un astre, une Sainte aux yeux bleus.

Then, here, as in "Les Angéliques," the sestet internalizes the physical place:

> Telle sur le vitrail de mon coeur je t'ai peinte,
> Ma romanesque aimée, ô pâle et blonde sainte
> Toi, la seule que j'aime et toujours aimerai;
>
> Mais tu restes muette, impassible, et, trop fière
> Tu te plais à me voir, sombre et désespéré
> Errer dans mon amour comme en un cimetière.

Outside the sanctity of the church, unredeemed by love, beyond the glorious colours of the stained glass, lies "un cimetière." Similarly, in "Chapelle de la morte,"

> Et dans le vitrail, tes grands yeux
> M'illuminent ce cimetière
> De doux cierges mystérieux.

The images of the window and "le vitrail," by their very physicality, draw attention to another kind of space — the enclosed space of stuffy rooms or churches or trapped souls. Throughout Nelligan's poems, the enclosed space denotes a sacred place within the profane world of "brutes laideurs," a place in which to dream. While gardens, "au jardin clos, scellé, dans le jardin muet," are separated from the real world by paths, "Chapelles" ("le cloître noir"), circled by woods and warmed by prayer, are divided from the profane world by their stained glass windows. Houses, in the shape of villas, châteaux, castles, are protected by windows and represent the spaces of family life, dreams, idyllic childhood days, and sincere religious faith ("Prière du soir," "Devant le feu"). Associated with either

the cozy domesticity of familial houses or the glamorous relics of celebrated homes are the even more enclosed spaces of rooms and salons. Within these "circles" lie other small objects that have both temporal and psychological significance: cabinets of dusty memories ("Vieille armoire,") and vases ("Potiche,") containing relics of the soul and of the artistic endeavour —

> Mon âme est un potiche où pleurent, dédorés,
> De vieux espoirs mal peints sur sa fausse moulure;

Nelligan is more at home with objects, images, and scenes of the "inside" — of salons, cupboards, hearths with their lingering memories of the past than with the vast and energetic "outside." Another metaphor along these lines is the celebrated ship, the vaisseau d'or, both a vessel of salvation and a vessel of death, that carries the soul to its destiny.

> Ce fut un grand vaisseau taillé dans l'or massif:
> Ses mâts touchaient l'azur, sur des mers inconnues;
>
> . . . .
>
> Que reste-t-il de lui dans la tempête brève?
> Qu'est devenu mon coeur, navire déserté?
> Hélas! Il a sombré dans l'abîme du Rêve!
>
> ("Le Vaisseau d'or")

These enclosed spaces are claustrophobic as well as creative.

> Enfermons-nous mélancoliques
> Dans le frisson tiède des chambres.
>
> ("Reves enclos")

The vacant, airless chambers mirror the soul of the poet:

> J'ai toujours adoré plein de silence, à vivre
> En des appartements solennellement clos
> Où mon âme sonnant des cloches de sanglots,
> Et plongeant dans l'horreur. . . .
>
> ("Musiques funèbres")

This image of claustrophobia, a symbol of alienation and withdrawal from the creative forces, is also found later in Anne Hébert's and Saint-Denys-Garneau's images of "chambres de bois," tombs, and decaying ancestral manors, and may be symptomatic of the intellectual trapped by a stifling Quebec milieu. Thus, the metaphors of enclosed space degenerate from symbols of nostalgic memory to symbols of death and entrapment as the poet grows more despairing. The poet then emphasizes the morbid spectrum of metaphors of space such as "cercueils," "tombeaux," "corbillards," "chapelle de la morte," "chapelle ruinée" (as in "Banquet macabre," "Le Corbillard," "Le Cercueil," "Crêpe," "Tombeau de la négresse," "Homme aux cercueils," "Le Spectre"). Coffins and tombs are "closed" eternally.

In the celebrated destiny of "Vaisseau d'or" — "sombre dans l'abîme du rêve" — is epitomized the dream that has turned to nightmare and which has capsized the soul into death. The image of the empty and terrifying void of the Baudelairean gouffre permeates Nelligan's verse, a reminder of the perils of the imagination:

> Et nos coeurs sont profonds et vides comme un gouffre
> ("Tristesse blanche")
>
> Ainsi la vie humaine est un grand lac qui dort
> ("Le Lac")
>
> Dans le puits noir que tu vois là
> Gît la source de tout ce drame.
> Aux vents du soir le cerf qui brame
> Parmi les bois conte celà.
> ("Le Puits hanté")
>
> Rentre dans le néant le rêve romanesque
> ("Rêve fantasque")

From this outline of Nelligan's predominant symbols of space, one can see that his imagination is directed inwards into the self, into enclosed spaces which are unrelieved, for the most part, by the energizing and creative "green" (except for the bitter-sweet "La Romance du vin") and which eventually become the black and eternal enclosures of madness and death. The complex and yet coherent symbolic inner landscape Nelligan created struck and continues to strike a responsive chord in the imagination of the Quebecois. Although his own imagination became a macabre prison, his eloquent expression of it proved to be a liberating force for those who followed.

NOTES

[1] Jean Charbonneau, "Fondation de l'Ecole," *L'Ecole littéraire de Montréal* (Montréal: Albert Lévesque, 1935).

[2] A.D.L., "Aventures véridiques d'un groupe d'éponges," *Le Samedi*, 24 août 1895, p. 10; "Deuxième saturnale," *Le Samedi*, 21 septembre 1895, p. 3.

[3] Louis Dantin, "Préface" in Charbonneau, p. 8.

[4] Paul Wyczynski, "Héritage poétique de l'Ecole littéraire de Montréal," *La Poésie canadienne-française. Archives des lettres canadiennes*, t. IV (Montréal: Fides, 1969), p. 75, quoted from a ms. note of the poet, Albert Ferland, located in the "Centre de recherches de l'Université d'Ottawa."

[5] Luc Lacourcière, "Introduction," *Poésies complètes, 1896-1899* (Montréal: Fides, 1952), p. 15, quoting Louis Dantin.

[6] See Jean-Charles Bonenfant, "Le Canada français à la fin du XIX[e] siècle," *Etudes françaises*, III, 3 (aout 1967), 263-74.

[7] See Wyczynski, *Bibliographie*, pp. 27-30 for details of these manuscripts.

[8] See Lacourcière, *Poésies complètes*, pp. 279-82. All quotations from Nelligan's poems will be made from this edition.

[9] Arthur Symons, *The Symbolist Movement in Literature* (New York: Dutton, 1958), p. 3.

[10] Another version occurs in Louis Dantin's Les Débats 24 août 1902; see *Poésies complètes*, p. 297:

L'imposture céleste emplit leur large esprit:
Car seul l'Espoir menteur creusa les solitudes
De ces silencieux spectres de Jésus Christ.

[11] Jean Charbonneau, "Emile Nelligan," pp. 119-20.

[12] Gérard Bessette, *Les Images en poésie canadienne française* (Montréal: Editions Beauchemin, 1960), pp. 246, 244.

[13] Mircea Eliade, *The Sacred and the Profane*, trans. by Willard R. Trask (New York: Harcourt, Brace & World, 1959).

[14] Paul Wyczynski in *Emile Nelligan, Sources et originalité de son oeuvre* (Montréal: Univ. d'Ottawa, 1935) discusses "le rêve horizontal" which moves to the left into the past, and to the right to the future. The "rêve vertical" rising upwards, carries the poet into the contemplation of God and mysticism, and plunging downwards into the depths, results in hallucination and despair. He shows Nelligan's primary direction to be horizontal (that is, his dreams revolve around the past and future) until the poet's disturbed state predominates and "ce ne sera que la suite du rêve horizontal que l'on verra cependant s'enfoncer dans les ténèbres de l'abîme" (pp. 161-243). But, in this discussion, we view dream as vertical, in that it probes the depths of the sub-conscious.

[15] Bessette, p. 224.

[16] The revealing earlier titles are: "Soirs angélisés," "Angélus du soir," "Soir de névrose."

[17] Bessette, p. 223.

[18] Wyczynski, in *Sources et originalité*, p. 196.

[19] See Wyczynski's phrase-by-phrase comparison of the two poems, ibid., pp. 56-61.

[20] Edward Engleberg, *The Symbolist Poem* (New York: Dutton, 1967), pp. 32-33.

[21] Lacourcière, *Poésies complètes*, pp. 287-88. Note also the two versions of "Soirs d'automne," p. 119 and p. 217 ("Rhythmes du soir"). The latter is the earlier version: "les soirs bleus" changes to "les longs soirs" to continue the nasal rhythm of the line; "le rêve lent des oiseaux solitaires" becomes the more visual "le rêve blanc des oiseaux solitaires" where the adjective connected with rêve actually describes the birds and thus creates a more complex mood. Similarly, "le lys cristallin épris du crépuscule" becomes "les lys cristallins pourprés de crépuscule." The last stanza shows the subtler art of fusing self and object in the second version. The substitution of "où" for "dont" in the last line "Pleurent les souvenirs dont mon âme se baigne" fuses the flowers and the soul and memory into a more integral relationship.

[22] Bessette, p. 249.

[23] Marcel Bélanger, "Poésie québécoise et l'art egyptien," Comparative Canadian Literature Association Meeting, Université Laval, Quebec, 26 May 1976.

[24] Engleberg, p. 32.

THREE POEMS

Dorothy Livesay

FEVER

Frenetic beat foam flying
on the stoned shore
Do not ask me to answer:
we are here: there's nothing more
we are born bare

As the old rain-hammered logs
  unshipshaped spavined
shooting at fantastic angles distorted
silver in the sand's caves

These logs and stones
are free of human names
Catholic or Protestant, Muslim or Christian
They exist
wholly as bones

In this unnamed unlanguaged
unvoiced world of rocks
gritty-tasting earth
man leaps and laughs
returns at morning
to rub out all evidence
of foot prints
mouth burning against mouth
song rising beside song —
careless
destroys his histories.

FRIDAY'S CHILD

I endowed you with the contents
of my anxious state
and it was not good

I willed you my brush and
my fine-toothed comb
with their dusty hairs
And it was not pretty

In the afternoons of my discontent
I pulled up weeds in the back garden
and dressed you in them

When I walked at the seashore
moaning with the gulls
I pinned a black crow
on your shoulder

You have inherited all my pain
but only half my laughter
And it is not good

You are burdened, my little sister
And I cannot lift the stone
from your heart

A SOFT ANSWER TO BORGES

What vast world
shaking its fist at us
or turning its back
has to be caught
and kissed
sucked in and
swallowed
(made visible)
dimensioned down
to man?

What world he strode in
thinking the circled path
was his to play in
that rest — that thundering sky
tempestuous sea
fathomable
touchable?

He has now to seize
the void in his hands
shaped to his mouth
and through that horn of immensity
bellow out
his defiant song

THE ANNUNCIATION

Irving Layton

What angels will we meet on the way to the post-office?
What kisses will the leaves rain down on your neck?
Your footsteps leave no shadows on the ground
for the morning sun makes a bale of them
which he tosses over the first white fence that we pass

The announcing angel robes himself in ordinary dress.
What name does he whisper in your perfumed
and delicate ear? Judith? Deborah? Eve?
When you incline your fragrant head to listen,
the storewindows blaze and shine and the village street

Robed in its summer foliage resounds like a West Point
salute with the sound of uncorked champagne bottles;
all the birds in the street take the happy noise
for cues and suddenly whole orchestras of them
and the singing choirs of girls and boys

Make such a jubilation, it frightens off
all evils and sorrows forever; your burgeoning form
parts the air before us like a sorcerer's wand
and the angel in ordinary dress extricates a wing
and blesses its bounty with his own bright feathers

Niagara-on-the-Lake,
June 4, 1980

books in review

A NET FULL OF ONDAATJE

MICHAEL ONDAATJE, *There's a Trick With a Knife I'm Learning to Do.* McClelland & Stewart, $5.95.

ON THE COVER OF Michael Ondaatje's selected short poems, there is a photograph of a seated man using his left foot to throw knives around the body of a woman who looks like Dorothy Livesay. Whether or not that says anything about the course of Canadian poetry, it does suggest the nature of Ondaatje's wit: that is (especially while we notice that the title of the book is nowhere noticed in the poems), the poet's "trick" is to use an edge that seems to miss its target, barely.

When Ondaatje, while learning, comes closest to success there is much to admire in his performance of these left-footed poems. The newest ones, particularly, are intent upon a dislocating settlement, a resolute oddity. The last line of each poem sounds like your most adept friend's final smack of his hammer on his fifteen-storey birdhouse, or the last knife thudding into the board above your own pate. See especially "Farre Off" and "Country Night."

The book, "Poems 1963-1978," is made up of Ondaatje's selections from his two Coach House books, *The Dainty Monsters* and *Rat Jelly*, plus thirty-five pages of later work called "Pig Glass." We see the work of the lyric poet from age twenty to age thirty-five, a bracket that always seems interesting in the careers of Canadian poets.

That Ondaatje has always been interested in animals as figures is apparent from the three titles just mentioned (as well as his recently reprinted anthology of animal poems). In his twenties he explored the violence implied in the confrontation between people and animals, but with a spectral uneasiness rather than the advantageous exposition of Pat Lane's lyrics. Lane says that man is naturally murderous toward his fellow beasts, but Ondaatje is interested in the experiential philosophy developing from a paradox pronounced early in his verse: "Deep in the fields / behind stiff dirt fern / nature breeds the unnatural."

So did Ondaatje, especially in his earliest poems. Here is a typical example of his early predilection for the wry metamorphosing of the Anglo-American academic poets in the post-Eliot age, the sort of exterior design then found in the Donald Hall anthologies:

> I have been seeing dragons again.
> Last night, hunched on a beaver dam,
> one clutched a body like a badly held
> cocktail;
> his tail, keeping the beat of a waltz,
> sent a morse of ripples to my canoe.

Ondaatje was a British immigrant student then, at the Waspy English departments of Queen's and Sherbrooke. His poetics during that time might be characterized by a stanza from another poem:

> I would freeze this moment
> and in supreme patience
> place pianos
> and craggy black horses on a beach
> and in immobilized time
> attempt to reconstruct.

But he was to become involved with the Coach House poets (this book contains a wonderful poem about Chris Dewdney), and a poetics that espoused a non-Euclidean order. Compare to the above quotation this passage from " 'The Gate in his Head,' " a poem addressed to Victor Coleman, a leading voice from the other side of Canadian poetry:

> My mind is pouring chaos
> in nets onto the page.
> A blind lover, dont know

what I love till I write it out.
And then from Gibson's your letter
with a blurred photograph of a gull.
Caught vision. The stunning white bird
an unclear stir.

And that is all this writing should be then.
The beautiful formed things caught at the
wrong moment
so they are shapeless, awkward
moving to the clear

The earliest poems have a dictum that is formalized, literary, or British; at least it signifies an elevation into printed language. But right from the beginning the poet shows us a sure sense of what a line is, not just a length, not only a syntactic unit, but a necessary stage in knowing and surprise. It is telling that when he comes to contemplating a painter's work, it is the work of Henri Rousseau, with his defined wonderment. Thus, even while the subject is eerie or terrible, the words suggesting the man's observations of them are "exact," "exactness," "order," and "freeze."

In *Rat Jelly* there appear some family poems, with constructed metaphors; i.e., what is this (thing, experience, feeling) like? It's like a ——. It is still a geocentric world, in which the poet's invention is the earth, albeit an unusually interesting one. But the opening poem, "Billboards," seems deliberately to exhibit a promising progression of the poet's means, from fancy to phenomenological imagination. Its two pages end this way:

Nowadays I somehow get the feeling
I'm in a complex situation,
one of several billboard posters
blending in the rain.

I am writing this with a pen my wife has
used
to write a letter to her first husband.
On it is the smell of her hair.
She must have placed it down between
sentences
and thought, and driven her fingers round
her skull
gathered the slightest smell of her head
and brought it back to the pen.

The last part seems tacked on, but it is really the emerging achievement of the poem.

Other poems, such as the famous "Notes for the Legend of Salad Woman," enact wonderful images without any academic superstructure, but perhaps a Laytonic exaggeration, and lots of robust humour. There are still some laconic poems about men's mistreatment of wild animals, as well as the poet's amused admiration for his dogs. But Ondaatje is still looking for a magically charged world, a world with Margaret Atwood's immanent peril and Gwen MacEwen's legerdemainous nature. "Burning Hills," an important piece, suggests, on the other hand, the self-reflexive narrative put to such good use in his major books, *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid* and *Coming through Slaughter.*

The new section, "Pig Glass," partakes of their concern with the ironies inherent in the act of composition, the acknowledgement that a writer who partakes of motion cannot "freeze" a scene for the universal literary museum. In "Country Night" the poet notes the liveliness of the unseen creatures of the farmhouse while people are abed. He finishes by saying, "All night the truth happens." But when is he composing this? During the continuous present of the poem's night-time verbs, or out of bed in the daytime? Then is this poem truth, and is that last line from it?

As before, the poems are usually one page filled, a regularity that suggests that the author is working on a contract, as both entertainers (book title) and bridegrooms (photo) do. The section sports some travel-to-roots poems, some family poems, but more important, some departures from the regular observing lyric, in the direction of "Elimination Dance," his peculiar pamphlet from Nairn. There is "Sweet Like a Crow," two pages of outrageous similes, and there is "Pure

Memory," the non-sequential meditations on Chris Dewdney, and the poem of Sally Chisum's recollection of Billy the Kid thirty-seven years later. These are all good signs that Ondaatje is bringing to his shorter verse the engaging fabrication of his longer works.

In his career to date, Michael Ondaatje has been a poet who makes art that is like the best of Canadian poetry; as a novelist he writes stuff most of our more respected novelists don't begin to dream of. As a novelist he is superior; as a poet he is one of our most proficient.

ED PRATO

SINCE 1940

MARCEL BELANGER, *Migrations*. L'Hexagone, n.p.

NICOLE BROSSARD, *Le Centre Blanc*. L'Hexagone, n.p.

GECILE CLOUTIER, *Chaleuils*. L'Hexagone, n.p.

GILLES CYR, *Sol Inapparent*. L'Hexagone, n.p.

JEAN ETHIER-BLAIS, *Petits poèmes presque en prose*. Hurtubise HMH, n.p.

RINA LASNIER, *Matin d'Oiseaux*. Hurtubise HMH, n.p.; *Paliers de Paroles*. Hurtubise HMH, n.p.

GUY MENARD, *Fragments*. Hurtubise HMH, n.p.

FROM PIETY TO PERVERSITY, from late Symbolist-Parnassian reflections to a disintegrating syntax, these volumes comprise such a wide range of styles and experience that they might be said to represent, in miniature, the development of poetry in Quebec since 1940. There is one common thread, not a shared political stance as one might expect, but a certain attitude to language which has no real counterpart in the literature of English Canada. The Quebec writer is highly conscious of the place language plays in the conservation of a culture threatened by anglicization in North America; survival is the question. This understanding is vital. But another, equally important factor lies in the literary tradition inherited from France to begin with, an influence which continues today in the movement of ideas about language which are sophisticated, self-conscious, and in some ways alien to English speakers.

Is this a simplication of a complex phenomenon? I don't think so, although one could reasonably argue that Nicole Brossard's most recent work bears no relation at all to Rina Lasnier's poems on the Trinity. But Brossard was thoroughly steeped in her own cultural tradition before rejecting it for linguistic games and collages which are just as much of a convention as the forms she found unsatisfactory. The difference between the two cultures can be illustrated by contrasting the place Rina Lasnier now occupies in Quebec with that of Dorothy Livesay in English Canada. Livesay is, of course, more experimental than Lasnier, and her career has taken a different course both philosophically and politically. But except in academic and related circles, it doesn't matter to anyone in English Canada whether Livesay writes poetry or not. As a poet, one is superfluous to the society one lives in, sad though this may seem. Whereas in Quebec, whatever the very real internecine struggles, poets have come to represent in some way an affirmation of a national identity.

Rina Lasnier inherited the general principles of the aesthetic movements in France which were influential at the end of the last century and the beginning of this — a respect for the poem as the *thing made*, a shaped form rather than a casual personal diary, a concern for harmonious sound values, a habit of thinking symbolically without being a Symbolist. The distinction is important. Lasnier's original dependence on traditional forms has gradually given way to a control over unrhymed and irregular lines depending

for their effect on subtle interior echoes and rhythms which flow in organic rather than metrical patterns. In *Matin d'Oiseaux*, images of birds, of the sea, of flowers, merge with transitory states of sorrow and joy to create a poetry which is close to the perceptions of Paul Valéry. Much of her work is closely-knit, abounding in those untranslatable abstractions which French handles so easily.

> le volcan viole l'ultime altitude
> l'argile de feu brûle ses génèses
>
> (Volcan)

and

> C'est lui oracle de nuit et d'orage,
> croissance sûre, sa fuite lente,
> ne touche pas sa lumière pileuse
> ta main décompose un nimbe d'or.
>
> (Pissenlit)

In the second volume, *Paliers de Paroles*, we find Rina Lasnier's profound religious feeling expressed with sincerity in a series of short poems which deal with biblical subjects. Only a few writers are capable of making poetry out of religion — Dante, Vaughan, Eliot are examples — and I don't find any kind of real poetic intensity in these verses.

Jean Ethier-Blais has had a long and honorable career in the intellectual life of Quebec, from the "Refus Global" to the present day; his poetry is only part of his activities as journalist and teacher. Influenced also by French poets, he says,

> Peut-être un jour quelqu'un lisant négligemment ces vers y retrouvera le noir plaisir et la douleureuse joie d'Apollinaire ou de Verlaine dont j'aurai un peu ressaisi la voix.

One could add Laforgue as well. There is an objectivity and a pleasant strain of self-mockery in M. Ethier-Blais, which makes a nice change from some of the narcissistic infantilism pouring out of today's presses. He is also realistic. "Grand' mère au Salon" is a charming evocation of the past, a vignette which takes its place among all the other pictures of Grandmother which have been appearing in English Canadian verse for some years. The poems which are most successful, where imagery conveys the feeling immediately and directly, include "Au Loin," and two suites entitled respectively "Dies Irae" and "J'ai beaucoup lu."

By the time one reaches the middle of Guy Ménard's *Fragments*, one is overtaken by an inexorable and deadening sense of "déjà vu," in spite of occasional strong lines such as "Alors me revint le goût du même sel / et quelque chose hurlait en mon absence." It is strictly literary poetry which proceeds not from an urgent poetic necessity, but from a series of associations which form a kind of self-perpetuating flow based on classical and religious references and cliché:

> en criant ton nom et l'écho de tes hanches étroites sur la nuit de mes chastes extases.

The net effect is curiously old-fashioned, recalling inevitably the world of Pierre Louys and Gide, circa 1900. Even when the poet reaches Paris and Amsterdam, and the ecstacies become less chaste, there is no change in the quality of the imagination or the intensity of the verse.

With *Sol Inapparent*, by Gilles Cyr, one takes a quantum leap forward into a different universe which is light years away from the preceding one. I use the term "universe" to indicate the creation by a writer of a unique place which exists solely by virtue of the words and their disposition on the page. The air is bracing, if rarefied. *Sol Inapparent* consists of a short suite of poems written with an extreme economy of means, a severe discipline in the choice of images, and a deliberate self-restraint one associates with artists of calligraphy, Actually, the word "image" is almost too strong to use in this context, for the expressions "air, montagne, vent, route" have been stripped of all associations with the pic-

turesque to become like notes of music in a series of Bach variations played with one careful finger. The modulations are produced from very slight shifts in the poet's angle of vision, and poetry more bared to the bone, more ascetic, could hardly be imagined. Jouve, Bonnefoy, Reverdy, and the *nouveau roman* theorists are probably all behind this subtle, but strong work, which seems to be a first book.

Suites of poems also form the basis of Cécile Cloutier's *Chaleuils*, but they are all more solidly anchored in the somewhat ambiguous term "reality" than those of the previous volume. The title-word means a small lamp used in the interior of Quebec houses in earlier times, and indicates in this context that the poems are tiny, luminous bits of experience crystallized into short forms found in other literatures besides the French. Cécile Cloutier is a brilliant writer and academic whose acquaintance with verse forms includes, as well as English, Inuit and Chinese. Although Japanese is not mentioned among the languages she has studied, the Haiku form has evidently been influential:

> Le jazz du sang
> allume
> la patience
> esquimaude
> de ta danse
> de jade.

Some older readers may remember Lionel Haweis' "Little Lanterns" (1923) "things lanternized and arranged," which sprang from similar influences. Cloutier's poetry is, however, the product of a modern sensibility, although this volume does not give one any idea of the range of her interests.

In two collections of considerable length, *Migrations* by Marcel Bélanger and *Le Centre Blanc* by Nicole Brossard, one sees more clearly the real thrust of contemporary poetry in Quebec, different though these writers are in their concerns. Bélanger's work (the book represents the 1969-75 period) illustrates what has already been mentioned, that regard for the phenomena of language itself allied to the acute awareness of consciousness which Valéry did so much to analyze and reveal in both his poetry and critical prose. Add to that an exposure which all modern French writers have had to structuralism and other linguistic theories (to say nothing of *le nouveau roman*) and you arrive at poetry whose self-consciousness risks aridity. In the first section of his book, the poet groups poems about language — subject, object, and medium at one and the same time. The titles proclaim this: "Petite Théorie de la dérive des mots," "Décomposition du moi" (an examination of the letters), along with lines such as "Un texte éclate de la tête," "la foudre et le fragment habitent le poème," "Un instant suscita un aube en forme de phrase."

But this poetry is not arid at all. The poems, based in a delight in the physical universe, are beautifully shaped open structures anchored in sensations which use quite simple things to create complex effects. The reality of gestures, skin, veins, flowers, sky, becomes a way for the self to explore itself and its relationships with experience, without in the least falling into the trap of isolation and narcissism. Bélanger has absorbed the best of the moderns, and made his own statements which appear to dictate their own structures, to be inevitable. If we hear far-off echoes of French poets, they are simply a background to this rich and subtle collection of original poetry.

As the controversial editor of *La Barre du Jour*, Nicole Brossard is an experienced, experimental writer with many different publications to her credit. She has been vocal in her political opinions, and prominent particularly in the fight for women's rights against accepted

opinions and the establishment in Quebec. Although her early poetic work is not far removed stylistically from that of her contemporaries, she has deliberately moved from an evocation of personal feeling through normal syntax to a position which treats grammar and vocabulary as part of a political position. It is a highly intellectualized approach to writing, influenced in part by linguistic studies on the relationship between thinking and grammar, partly by pop art with its signs, partly by Marxism. Her most recent statement that I have been able to find speaks of her goal for literature in Quebec, "une littérature ... délictueuse dans sa grammaire, inopérante qui pense le présent comme le passé."

The prose poems in *Le Centre Blanc* (1965-1975), along with others whose typographical disposition on the page is more typical of verse, illustrate her revolt against traditional forms of grammar, poetry, and love. But the word-games played, their puns, their chopped-up sentences (the text itself becoming almost a linguistic-erotic image) all this runs the danger of turning into a self-defeating process. If the essence of propaganda for a point of view is communication to the uninitiated or indifferent, then language structures should surely be the kind that will carry the message in terms which are understandable.

Nicole Brossard is certainly one of the most important writers in Quebec today. Her work reflects the increasing use of contemporary experience, contemporary life in a contemporary vocabulary, along with anglicisms and expressions in English which Quebec poets are inevitably drawn to as North Americans. As suggested in a recent number of *Ellipse* (23/24) there is a real kinship now between some poets in English Canada and new poets in Quebec through the international influences in linguistics and art which have moulded them both. One of the conclusions one can draw also is that speed of communication, travel, and television are producing a faster rate of exchange between intellectual centres than used to be the case. The time lag is no longer, for Quebec, marked by generations, if indeed it still exists. These poets from *Editions de l'Hexagone* are proof of an intellectual vitality which need fear no comparison from anyone.

G. V. DOWNES

A VULGARIAN VIEW

ERIN MOURE, *Empire, York Street.* Anansi, $5.95.

SUSAN MUSGRAVE, *A Man to Marry, A Man to Bury.* McClelland & Stewart, $6.95.

PIER GIORGIO DI CICCO, *The Tough Romance.* McClelland & Stewart, $6.95.

MOLIERE'S BOURGEOIS gentilhomme is delighted to be told by his mentor that what he is writing is prose. His happiness in the confirmation of that natural talent is harder to come by today, when so much prose takes the form of poetry, and vice — to name but one — versa. Some of Erin Mouré's poems slip across that invisible border, heavily disguised by verse form but speaking with the unmistakable accent of the prosaic. Those in this volume that do qualify as poetry will appeal to admirers of the T. S. Eliot style: the brittle and somewhat dehydrated emotions of the world seen as wasteland. Even the compatible in taste may be put off, however, by the poet's irritating mannerisms:

> An entire week I lay
> in a room above the traffic of Madrid, above
> the avenue w/ its scattered proclamations.
> & sometimes the voice was a penitent, at
> the gate
> of the cathedral....

Perhaps shorthand is part of the contemporary malaise, but with repetition it

creates the suspicion that Ms. Mouré belongs to the Pitman School of Poets. That suspicion is not entirely, or even marginally, deserved. She is a poet of considerable sensitivity. The themes of her poems wander about the globe restlessly, searching out the incident that illuminates the loss of empire — both temporal and spiritual.

Too, the fresh imagery is there. What it cries out for is sharper focus, and a greater variety of tone. Even when life seems a monochrome, art must discover and rejoice in its shadings. It seems likely that this artist will enrich her palette.

Susan Musgrave writes with a zest for living and, avoiding prejudice, for dying. Her themes have admirable variety, and she is not ashamed to employ rhythm as a percussion instrument. Indeed, she is bold enough to rhyme. The result is a directness that suggests strength of invention even when other evidence is lacking. As in "Non-Status Indians Bingo Song":

> ... I did it because I loved him
> I did it because I'm White
> I did it for Johnny Bingo
> I'll do it again tonight.

This simplicity of treatment of the experience of sex and loving in our time hits home. The lean style is altogether appropriate to the sentiments expressed. The poet trudges bravely through recollection of emotion, with the small pack on her back, recording the carnal encounter that is doomed to be fleeting but that is all the more poignant for being the victim of its time.

If there is a criticism to be offered — constructively — to Musgrave, it is that she shares the young poet's preoccupation with death and dying. Violently. The suggestion: pretend that you have grown old and have no good reason to dwell on your own mortality, and only mediocre cause to be charmed by that of others.

The metaphor-loving mind can be dangerous in the wild, plundering analogy in terms of other worlds that have been discovered by no space explorer but the poet, with his private life-support system. Di Cicco is an imagist who keeps us in touch with the recognizable. His figures are startling without being so esoteric as merely to baffle.

As for this poet's approach to the contemporary comeuppance, it has a bravura style that contrasts agreeably with the all-too-prevalent sound of the whine rampant, of the versifiers who compete for the distinction of uttering the terminal whimper. Di Cicco's private world ends with a bang:

> I will forgive you nothing, to stay ready for the next time / the tap on the shoulder says, look love, one more heaven, / open your mouth and sing.

The flaw in Di Cicco's verse, to the eye that wilfully searches for such, is that at times the poet is self-indulgent in being clever with his words, at the expense of

feelingful message. Free verse depends on a certain firmness of structure. To Di Cicco as to many other poets one longs to whisper "Yes, you do have something to say, but for God's sake do introduce your muse to the peanut butter contest that requires you to 'describe in 25 words or less. . . .' "

ERIC NICOL

SLIM, SLIMMER . . .

MICK BURRS, *Children on the Edge of Space.* Blue Mountain Books, $4.95.

JOHN V. HICKS, *Now Is a Far Country.* Thistledown Press, $12.00; pa. $5.00.

LORNA UHER, *Crow's Black Joy.* NeWest Press, $10.95; pa. $5.95.

READING THE PRESENT gathering of volumes of poems by three poets does not cause abandonment of all hope, but with one exception it is far from a joyous enterprise. The entrance into them does not lead to the circles of hell, but into a mostly tacky little bungalow in which the furnishings are cheap modern and sparse, and the colors clash. Perhaps it would be best to begin at the top — which is certainly not a dizzying height, at that — and then drop into deeper depression from there.

John V. Hicks' *Now Is a Far Country* is by far the most sensitive, articulate, readable volume in the group. The power of his collection is diminished by his propensity in many poems to say what oft has been thought and frequently better expressed (his "No One at the Door," for example, is very much a flat echo of de la Mare's "The Listeners"); in many other poems, though, his mind ranges lightly and his pen thrusts deftly. "Create Away," for instance, is a tantalizing, kaleidoscopic examination of the creative process in which obverse intrudes on every surface and a definition of creation necessarily dances just out of reach:

> I and my chisel make a stone
> woman. Do I say make? Rather
> unmake; the chisel is the destroyer.
> At a sharp blow it bites,
> spits, chips, chips, chip-
> chip, chip-chip, chip, chip, and there
> is my stone woman, left
> of all I uncreate. Do I say
> there? Where? And when
> did she take existence on?
> Was she in the block present
> all this while, or was she in
> the mind? Did the hands work
> chips, or woman? She is beautiful;
> I could love her for her pure
> unregenerate silence. Do I say
> silence? I think epigrams surround her,
> and one labours to be spoken.
> Ear to the lips, I hear her say
> to pare the dross is to create away.

Hicks is a genuine poet. He can work at the limits of language and challenge ideas and values with wit, and insight, and a freshness of imagery that sometimes springs from his interest in music. If he is not always successful, he offers a reason in "Offensive to Some," the third of his "Cautionaries":

> . . . if you prefer
> the light breakfast, you may find yourself
> excusing yourself in advance of others.

Mick Burrs, in *Children on the Edge of Space,* speaks in a poetic voice, too, but prefers a lighter breakfast than Hicks. He is capable of capturing a moment with delicacy and force, and occasionally with irony, but he tends not to probe deeply or to discipline his lines, and he wastes time with throw-aways. A thin Santa who fails to attract customers, he tells us adroitly enough, must be fired and replaced by

> an ample Santa
> a portly Santa
> a corpulent Santa
> one who can smile — one
> who can sell.

But he risks yawns, declaring in "Autobiography: I Have Been to War" that

> I have been to War.
> Didn't learn till I passed ten

War's a game for children
also played by men,

and in "After the Landing of Vikings: September, 1976," he cloyingly quips

Under the pebbles of Mars
live little invisible beings
taking pictures of us.

When Burrs disciplines himself further, his poetry may well grow strikingly.

Lorna Uher, in *Crow's Black Joy*, is another who betrays her potential. Margaret Laurence proclaims her, on the back cover, to be "a poet to be grateful for," and, indeed, Uher has included a number of fine poems in the collection. That is precisely why her self-indulgence is a great pity. The sexuality in her work does not become universal but turns the reader to *voyeur*. "My drawer is stocked / with dildoes wrapped / in panties fragile phalli / in nests of silk," she declares in "I Am Ready," and the audience does not know what to do with its eyes. Yet her prairie imagery can be sensitive and powerful, and, however much maturing she has left to do, such a poem as "Consummation" alone explains what at first seems to be the aberration of the judges who awarded her the 1978 Saskatchewan Poetry Prize:

The wind began the camouflage.
Through its teeth it sifted
fine topsoil over her body.
It blew seeds into her pores
but the season was fall —
the wrong time for a planting.

When snow smoothed the land
she lay silent and shrouded,
but in the spring she could feel
the sun yellowing the snow
to sparkling noises
and tiny grass blades sprouted
from her skin.

In the summer
her hair blew from the mouths
of the crocus.
Her nails sharpened to the points
of Russian thistles.
Her eyes were sky and water.
No longer cold no longer quiet
she was motion she was prairie.

ALAN R. SHUCARD

PREMATURE POETRY

NICHOLAS CATANOY, *The Fiddlehead Republic.* Hounslow Press, $4.95.

LEN GASPARINI, *Moon Without Light.* York Publishing, n.p.

SEAN VIRGO, *Deathwatch on Skidegate Narrows and other poems.* Sono Nis, $5.95.

THREE OR FOUR, or even a dozen, competent, well crafted poems do not justify the existence of a book of poems fifty, *or* a hundred and fifty pages long. Quantity can not apologize for lack of quality; if anything, it makes the few good poems stand out like orange beacons.

Gasparini's collection includes several fine poems, accomplished, moving, unpostured. In Virgo's book, the title poem is frequently impressive despite several weak sections. In each case, the publishers are to blame for the shortcomings; each book needs rigorous editing, a culling of the trite, self-indulgent, silly, or just plain bad poems. Premature, careless publication will not help the reputations of these poets; and given time, Gasparini and Virgo might well develop the talent their work promises.

As for Catanoy's long poem, except for the very rare striking image, there is more real poetry on a roadmap of New Brunswick than in his series of jottings about various places in "the picture province." But unfortunately there are no pictures to accompany the commentary, no magic lantern shining through the poetry.

One might wonder how Catanoy can call a profoundly Loyalist province a "Republic"; or is one supposed to take the term "Fiddlehead Republic" on the same level as "Banana Republic"? Kinder

perhaps to dismiss the problem as indicative of the poet's lack of command of language itself, for surely any ambiguity found here is purely accidental. Trite and shallow, insulting to the maritime sensibility, pale in comparison to the writers of Atlantic Canada, Catanoy does nothing but perpetuate the stereotype of the backward maritimer. There is more on Grand Manaan than Dulse, more on Campobello than Roosevelt (who?), and not all New Brunswickers eat their potatoes with the skins still on.

By contrast, Len Gasparini's "Sonnet on my Thirty Sixth Birthday" is finely crafted, despite faint echoes of Dylan Thomas:

> Now would I atone
> For everything but love on my birthday
> If I could, singing God's incarnate word
> Till death, broken-winged in a bright
> meadow,
> Echoes each feathery note back to clay.

Equally undigested are the echoes of Tennyson and Thomas in "Separated" although here the subject perhaps merits the allusions to *In Memoriam*:

> Is it for this your blameless absence
> suspends me like a bell?
> My heart could be that bell
> ringing, ringing . . .
>
> I remember reading Rapunzel to you
> in our make-believe forest tower,
> when the night wind was the Wicked Witch,
> When the magic word was Daddy.

Not an unmoving evocation of a separated man's loneliness for his daughter. But far too many of the poems are passionless — despite the ardent claims of Irving Layton's "Epistolary Preface." There is, after all, a difference between self-indulgence and the outpouring of passionate poetry. But by the end of "After the Divorce," some poetry is just beginning to happen:

> In the morning
> you awake
> and find yourself
> on the wrong side
> of the dream.
> It is called divorce.
> It is called alone.

Here the passion is personal and lyrical, expressing effectively the mood. Many of the poems are like this, succeeding only in part because the poetry contained in them begins to happen too late in the poem. But some of the poems are entirely successful. "Love Poem" manages an original splash in a worn stream: "You are pregnant with love / and it truly becomes you"; and one of the most noteworthy poems, "Azaleas for an Out Patient," memorably depicts the emotional ambiguity of some medical procedures, and creates a thematic unity among some of the poems:

> You are a garden in winter,
> and the gynecologist
> will see to it
> that no flowers grow
> in your garden in spring.
> . . .
> I think of your garden made barren,
> and the azaleas I gave you.
> I think of their odorless pink language,
> and their apt etymology —
> so named as growing in dry soil,
> like metaphors for modern love.

There is a tenuous mood progression as the subject moves from divorce to new love, to the fulfillment inherent in the recognition of the dualities of life and death, growth and decay in the human physical and emotional cycle. A recurring image is the grave and the garden juxtaposed: "Let the cosmos dance / to the rhythm of your womb / your womb which is a grave and a garden" ("For Mary Jane"), and in a longer, more powerful passage from "Logos":

> What fish ever breathed the ocean
> That my seed could flourish
> In a rhythm of stars?
> . . .
> I cannot say, or guess, for I know only
> A grave beside a garden,
>
> Where the moon gapes, and the fir tree
> Grows taller than Christmas,

> The owl goes hungry,
> and we become as fertilizer, after death.

An obvious conclusion, but satisfying in context, and given force by the sustained poetic expression.

Sean Virgo's *Deathwatch* consists of four sections, only two of which are important. The first section, "The House by the Swamp, "is a series of vague and obscure poems in which the persona grows toward loneliness and withdrawal from society, until by the end he is swallowed up by nature. Nothing wrong with this, but the poems are of uneven interest and quality. As the following lines demonstrate, the good bits are hard to match: "Someone has poured the sea / full, it bulges / like a dead eye" ("Grey"). Few other poems stand alone, but "Midnight" is excellent: "The nightmare of a bird / plucked from an inner branch / by the prowling cat." Also, despite the flaws in fully half its stanzas, "She" stands out from the others:

> You bring the rainstorm
> inside these walls,
> Junipers heaving under the steep clouds
> and shingle crowding back down the strand
> where the mountain falls.

The cycle is completed, the self is lost to some dark Earth Mother, and part one closes.

Part two should never have appeared, being made up of Virgo's contribution to the "Kiskatinaw Songs" (originally a collaboration with Susan Musgrave). There is little poetry in this section, where the poet dons fake Indian garb and chants nonsense like "Mmmmh — earth word / Wo-wo-wo — berry word / Tss-tss — leaf word" ("Lost at Night Song"). Occasionally, Virgo changes method, adopts a stance nearer the monologue and creates a nearly convincing character as in "Granny Yaga," "Taunt to a Rival Chief," and "Shaman's Song."

"Deathwatch on Skidegate Narrows," the third section, is a long poem that almost justifies the publication of this book. In its various component parts, the poet leaps back like a squirrel from the present distance to explore retrospectively his experiences on the west coast. "Deathwatch" is a satisfying poem with plenty of meaty substance. "Deathwatch" and the final chorter poem "Runners," if left by themselves, would have constituted an impressive book. "Deathwatch" is subdivided into six major sections, and not all are equal in quality. The opening lines are captivating and promise much that is hard to live up to:

> The squirrel jerks his rump, his frame
> feints against invisible reins, one moment
> he is a tethered dog, eager at master
> or prowler or cat, the next he's launched.

Even Virgo's approach to the Indians has matured with distance, become more objectively poetic:

> They cut the tree and they flayed the tree
> and gralloched it out as the coals
> cooked its heart into fish meat
>
> So they spread its flesh, like a salmon
> set out to cure, and canoe was born,
> the very first craft of all.

One part of "Deathwatch," "Tanu," lapses into the phoney Indian poetry of the "Kiskatinaw Songs," but the long poem returns to seriousness, and the lapse, over-all, is not a serious detraction. The final section, "Runners," four pages long, is a successfully sustained display of poetic virtuosity. One can only hope that Virgo will learn which dregs to cast out, and which gems to polish.

Both Gasparini and Virgo could have produced books that are completely satisfying. The potential is there in each case, latent amongst the excesses and lapses of taste. I look forward to the time when patience and caution will bring forth from these poets the quality of books they are capable of producing.

DAVID S. WEST

WINNING SPIRIT

MARGARET AVISON, *Sunblue*. Lancelot Press, $3.95.

IT IS NOT ENTIRELY atheistic to say that where *Sunblue* succeeds, it does so largely in spite of religious fervour. Admittedly, between Christ and the Muse there has more often seemed to be an alliance than any fundamental incompatibility. But Margaret Avison's finest poetry and her particular sort of Christianity are set at odds by the same rift, aesthetic and philosophical, that distinguishes a Hopkins or an Eliot from an Anita Bryant.

The wages of faith, one might say, are intellectual and linguistic diminution. Too often we hear, in certain poems, the buzzwords of the born-again Christian: "trusting the silent Glory," "now in glory / quickening love and longing," "the glory has not filled / His long appointed place." Yet *Sunblue* scarcely impugns Avison's reputation for brilliant verbal invention. The pedestrian piety of beseeching Christ to "keep our courage high with You / through steep and storm and wild" is well redressed elsewhere. Such vivid, mouth-filling clusters of sound as "crisp / drought-barnacled grass-crust," or "salmon-stream / crop-green /rhubarb-coloured shrub-tips," continue to spike Avison's poems. They are at once pure verbal music and rhetorical devices to push and pull the reader.

In the following verses (from a poem on guerrilla warfare) distant rhymes and loose hexasyllabics provide a framework for writing that seems to strike off continually in new directions, though spiralling tightly towards epiphany:

> Thump and faint dab of fire
> from the great powerfuls
> is ungermane; a far
> din defines silences.

Come as it may, the clinch
finds ones, gashed (shin or forearm)
but longing for the once
winning, the lustral corpus.
("Embattled Deliverance")

Four perspectives in as many lines: from straightforward observation of distant artillery, to an ironic view of world affairs (the great powers are only transient "powerfuls," after all), to cool philosophical judgment, followed by a sudden drop into the quiet centre to which the noise of events is mere horizon. Why "ungermane," though? The cryptic answer in the fourth line, its import stressed by its sound, demands the elaboration provided by the next verse.

In the sixth line, Avison plays upon linguistic expectation to heighten our response to rhythm and meaning. Because we expect the indefinite pronoun "one" (equivalent to an indefinite "you" or "us"), we read "finds ones" first of all as a trochee (as though it were "finds one"), then as a spondee (as we note our mistake), and finally as a heavily accented iamb: "finds ONES." That is, in the clinch we are not nations or armies, but individuals with souls and spiritual needs. In the seventh line, the emphasis placed on "once" — by its position and the double rhyme with "clinch" and "ones" — focusses attention on the ideal of winning definitively on the spiritual plane, as opposed to winning and losing repeatedly on the battlefield. Finally, a phrase from an earlier stanza, "elusive corps," is turned by a sort of transubstantiation into "lustral corpus." Though the reference may be specifically to the taking of communion, that trick of words suggests that Christ is immanent in an elusive band of guerrillas, as peace is in war.

Cracking out the immanent seems to be Avison's special poetic task, one which at her best she approaches with verbal hammer and chisel. Aggressive, rhetorical, analytical, a poet of unpolished surfaces and sudden apertures, she will pry apart a rhyme until an entire poem speaks in that opening. "Stone's Secret" begins, "Otter-smooth boulder," and ends, "this very stone / utters." The more than a page dividing the rhyme (otter — utters) is an expressionistic gesture of her sense of the gulf between outward and inward, skepticism and faith.

It is unfortunate the number of poems here that exhibit not aperture but closure. Closure of word, in the uninventive illustration of Biblical themes, and closure of mind, in the too-pat reaching of foregone conclusions: "nothing is made / except by the only unpretentious, Jesus Christ, the Lord." It is through cracks in the evangelical plaster that poetry pokes out again and flourishes. In "As Though," for example, faith is seen as a form of gradual self-destruction, like the "rotting with reaches" of a seed. Through that unoptimism, the poem unfolds organically towards a tiny, cotyledon-like affirmation. It is formally and rhetorically perfect.

Inevitably, there is a certain thematic familiarity to that part of Avison's new work that must be called devotional. One wonders whether that will enhance the accessibility of her poems, or restrict their appeal. Certainly the latter would be regrettable; there is so much here of real value. If occasionally Avison expects a suspension of disbelief in too literal a sense, she continues to demand — and reward — the full application of those critical faculties essential to close reading.

ROD WILLMOT

EARLY OATES

G. F. WALLER, *Dreaming America: Obsession and Transcendence in the Fiction of Joyce Carol Oates.* Louisiana State Univ. Press, $12.95.

ACCORDING TO Gary Waller, the fiction of Joyce Carol Oates frequently has been

either misread, miscategorized, or undervalued. Too often, critics have drawn misleading links between her work and the tradition of naturalism; they have missed the point when they have attacked her for failing to create "the perfectly suggestive shapes that modern art and fiction have taught us to generate" (as Alfred Kazin writes); they have been myopic when they have contrasted her forms unfavourably with the radical creations of the metafictionists; they have observed superficially when they have seen in her multigeneric productivity only compulsiveness or insecurity.

In opposition to these opinions, Waller points out that, although she has been at times openly critical of writers such as Donald Barthelme, she herself has occasionally been brilliantly experimental; her "Nabokovian" *Expensive People*, for example, "employs a range of comically alienating techniques such as internal commentary, reviews, fictions-within-fictions, and frequent dislocations of scene and tone." Oates is hostile, therefore, only to writers whom she has called "monastic" — who refuse to "deal with the utterly uncontrollable emotions that determine our lives." Commenting on her fiction's powerful affectiveness — its tendency to "force upon readers an often frightening sense of our own fears, obsessions, and drives" — Waller suggests, "we can see how her fiction is experimental in the most radical way — by entrusting the enactment of its meaning to the reader's responsiveness." And, accounting for the ostensibly "slapdash" quality of some of her work, Waller suggests that she, like D. H. Lawrence, may be writing out of the deepest recesses of her personality, which she "refuses to shape into perfected and so completed art." Finally, objecting to the label of naturalist, Waller argues that, even in her earliest work, "America is not so much a place as an experience of surging volatility"; consistently she has attempted to penetrate the surface of America to the "spirit of the place," and to make her environment seem (to use her word) "transparent."

Waller frequently compares her fiction to that of D. H. Lawrence. Both writers create landscapes with emotional and spiritual dimension, both are powerfully affective, both concentrate on "sexual desire as an unpredictable and awesome force for change in the personality," both dramatize sex's potential to connect individuals with the "most mysterious and vital cosmic movements," both centre their fiction on the dominant issues of their time and thus "evoke for us the chaos within, exorcising and exhorting at once, providing the reader, one would hope, with a challenge of a profound waking dream." And in the works of both writers a prophetic relevance is obvious — a "deep, unshakeable faith in the transformable quality of all life."

A weakness in Waller's study is his tendency to exaggerate when discussing the positive elements in Oates's fiction, too often taking her own words about the purposes of the novel in general (as expressed, for example, in "New Heaven and New Earth") as a description of her own work, which many readers find intensely depressing. Waller writes, "Oates's dream of America is an enticement to a 'new heaven, new earth' by participating in dreaming itself, a celebration of the potential triumph of the imagination that, paradoxically, only America embodies." In light of the spate of gruesomely violent acts which assault the reader in most of her novels, words like "celebration" and "triumph" seem hyperbolic, something which Waller himself seems to recognize, as when he writes, for example, "the radical breakthrough into final transcendence of *Do With Me What You Will* is a rare note in her fiction."

Another weakness in Waller's study is his failure to see that the critics who have

tried to beat Oates into insignificance with the label of "naturalism" have misunderstood the mode's complexity (as critics like Donald Pizer have argued). Many naturalists (Frank Norris is a good example) would angrily reject the theory that they have only been "carefully reflecting the passing surfaces of society." The phantasmagoric city in Dos Passos' *Manhattan Transfer*, for example, is extraordinarily evocative. Even Dreiser's urban world in *An American Tragedy* becomes a powerful symbol. Writing of Jules and Nadine in *Them*, Waller concludes, "despite the crassness and chauvinism of his conception of her, there is within his lust an intensity that drives it beyond the possessive: what she represents is the spark of the transcendent." A similar statement about Clyde's obsession with Sondra in *An American Tragedy* would not be misleading. Oates is most clearly naturalistic when she dramatizes the often spectacularly violent collisions between forces like chance, environment, and "temperament" (to use Mark Twain's term from *What Is Man?*) and human thrusts for freedom.

Despite these problems, Waller's study is generally excellent. His willingness to draw many parallels between Oates's novels and those of other writers is continually suggestive: between *Them*, for example, and the "non-fiction novels" of Truman Capote and John Hersey, or between Shakespeare's *Troilus and Cressida* and *With Shuddering Fall*. His close analyses, in fact, are almost always perceptive, particularly his long discussion of *Do With Me What You Will*. And illuminating comments such as the following appear frequently in his study: "The 'them' of the title is not primarily the poor, the underprivileged, for whom most of us variously feel pity, compassion, anger, or derision. It is the 'them' that may without warning invade our sheltered and static vision of our selves"; or of *The Assassins*, "We are in a world of accumulated spiritual violence, distorted energy, and thirsting egos so that the violent, even apparently random, becomes seemingly the inevitable outcome"; and, "the real assassins may equally be those grasping, destructive egos with which we are burdened and with which we collide." In Waller's concluding chapter, after speculating that Oates's fiction may come to exhibit a "continuing concern with religious experience and mysticism" or with "possible sources of transcendence," he writes, "It might be hoped that this study will be regarded in the future as a stimulating account of the *early* Oates." Whether or not she will go on to write the kind of novel which Waller predicts is of course open to question. What is clear, however, is that his account of the early Oates is stimulating.

W. MACNAUGHTON

COHEN

STEPHEN SCOBIE, *Leonard Cohen*. Douglas & McIntyre, $4.95.

STEPHEN SCOBIE'S *Leonard Cohen* makes an important contribution to our understanding of one of the most popular, yet elusive, figures in Canadian literature. Scobie divides his study by genre, dealing separately with the poetry, the novels, the songs, and then concluding with a chapter, "Postscripts and Preludes," on Cohen's most recent works. His divisions also parallel Cohen's development as a creative artist.

Scobie sees Cohen's central vision as

> a harsh and disturbing one. It begins in a broken world, the world of the death camp and the slave, and, finding no solutions in the social and political vacuum of the fifties, it proceeds to the broken self, which it celebrates with a kind of fierce and human joy. This vision provides a symbolic language

which creates a hermetically sealed world, a closed-system view of reality.

In a clear, coherent, and readable style, Scobie traces Cohen's main themes through his work, demonstrating its continuity and its culmination in *Beautiful Losers*. *Beautiful Losers* also heralds the end of a period in Cohen's development. As Scobie says, the fact that the novel is ultimate and unique means that it is also a dead-end. In it, Cohen more or less exhausted one set of themes; he also exhausted, at least temporarily, the form of the novel. If he were not to lapse into complete silence, his work had to find a new direction and a new form; and he emerged in a new role, as the composer and performer of songs.

According to Scobie, the songs continue the same central vision, but in a gentler and more humane way, and present the same themes and imagery. The detailed examination of Cohen's songs, usually given little attention by literary critics, is one of the most interesting aspects of this study.

The Cohen of the 1970's is still difficult to assess. In Scobie's view, *Energy of Slaves* (1972) is a book of "anti-poems," its central statement self-disgust. Yet he defends the book from its critics (notably Tom Wayman, whose clever and witty review in *Canadian Literature* No. 60 attacks Cohen's views on women and politics), maintaining that Cohen's poems are about himself, and his disgust with his own sexual and political position.

I find it hard to accept Scobie's defence of this book. His explanation that one offensive, bad poem is included because Cohen is "once again trying on the mask of the anti-poet" and his reference to some poems as "deliberately bad (which is a form of aesthetic control)" seems overly generous.

At the beginning of his study, Scobie makes the point that the facts of Cohen's biography are "largely irrelevant to an understanding of his writing" and that he has therefore "made little attempt to research Cohen's life," nor has he interviewed the poet. It seems to me that the facts of Cohen's life and background are indeed relevant. As Leon Edel says, "When a writer sits down to write, all his past sits behind his pen" (*Literary Biography*, p. 54). When the writer is as egocentric as Cohen this past is of considerable significance if we are to discover what makes him the man he is, if we are to discover the basis of his poetry.

Yet this study is an enlightening one, particularly for its fine analysis of many of the poems. Scobie acknowledges critics who went before him, including Dennis Lee, with whose interpretation of *Beautiful Losers* he disagrees completely. He provides us with the most useful study of Cohen yet available.

LORRAINE MC MULLEN

A PLACE IN TIME

DOUGLAS LE PAN, *Bright Glass of Memory.* McGraw-Hill Ryerson, n.p.

MOST OF US OF A CERTAIN age have over the years had a soft spot in our hearts for Douglas Le Pan. Since World War II we have watched him surface from time to time, like a friendly dolphin, and each appearance has brought us, whether in his books or in the record of his presence in the world of government and diplomacy he has frequented, the reassurance that comes from renewed encounters with integrity and humane concern and a nice sense of what the ancients called decorum. Nothing splashy. *The Wounded Prince* and *The Net and the Sword*, slim volumes of allusive and sophisticated poetry published in the late forties and early fifties, probably reached a very small audience, but many of the poems, including the much anthologized "A Country Without a Mythology," were to leave a lasting mark on the record. His novel, *The Deserter*, also very special, won a Governor-General's Award in 1964. When we were at a loss to account for the appearance of an elegant and lucid prose in certain federal documents, as for example in the Gordon Report on Canada's Economic Prospects, it was good to know that the redeeming hand was Mr. Le Pan's. We were pleased, as one is pleased in the presence of a fitting action, to hear of the later appointments as teacher at Queen's and as Principal of University College, Toronto. Who was this gentle and cultured man? What was his larger life?

When we pick up *Bright Glass of Memory*, described on the dust-jacket as "memoirs by Douglas Le Pan," we may think we will get some answers. To some extent we do, but this is certainly not the kind of book I had hoped it might be. I am not sure what kind of a book it is, and I don't think Mr. Le Pan is either. His most apparent intention is to find some conjunction between the personal and the public, between himself and "history." The four parts of his book, he suggests in his introduction, are to be seen less as "memoirs" than as "essays," and the subjects are to be "people and events that have their place in history," and at the same time "their place in my life, too." The "people," as it turns out, all presented as in some way heroic, are General A. G. L. McNaughton, Maynard Keynes and T. S. Eliot; the "events" which are the framework for the final essays (Lester Pearson hovering unheroically in the background) are the meetings in Sri Lanka preliminary to the launching of the Colombo Plan in 1950. It is of course the "place in my life, too" that determines the cutting of the cloth and the making of the suits. Mr. Le Pan was at McNaughton's staff-headquarters in the early part of the war. He was at King's College, Cambridge, in 1945, where Lord Keynes was masterminding plans to save the post-war British pound by the negotiation of massive American and Canadian loans. He was at Faber & Faber and the Carlton Grill for visits and lunches with T. S. Eliot between 1943 and 1948. And he was later at Colombo, where he served as Canadian representative at meetings of economic officials of the Commonwealth gathered to broach the portentous problems of what were then called the "underdeveloped" countries of south-east Asia.

The hazards open to this kind of scheme are obvious, and I believe Mr. Le Pan must have been aware of them. The introduction, which takes the form of a rather apologetic "letter to my sons," produces, after the affirmation of the "place in history" and the "place in my life, too," a rash of reservations. The book isn't really history, though he hopes it will "contribute to history." Nor is it a book of "diplomatic memoirs." Is it autobiography? Not really, Mr. Le Pan says,

at least not in the sense (and Yeats is cited) that it sets out "to create a carefully calculated impression." One thing for sure, he tells his boys, this is not a "book of confession, where everything is laid bare, where every sin is remembered, etc." What is left, we ask?

The book tallies its author's uncertainties and indecision. It spreads in many directions and has little cumulative strength. The father-figures (for that is what they seem to be to Mr. Le Pan) emerge truncated; they are glimpsed, never deeply perceived. McNaughton fares best, his craggy bearing and fierce integrity making him perhaps the most amenable of the three to the limitations of a sketch. Of Keynes' brilliant and versatile mind we get some notion, but he is tethered to a particular aspect of the sterling crisis and, despite Mr. Le Pan's efforts to supply colour, remains largely embedded in his monetary theories. Eliot is carefully posed but has so little vitality of his own that he has to be propped up by a mini-lecture on his poetry and repeated assurances that he was "a great poet who was also a very nice man." Meanwhile, the demands from the side of "history" and "diplomatic memoir," despite Mr. Le Pan's protestations, compete for place. Pages are filled with the author's despatches and memoranda, paraphrased or quoted, and indeed over most of the length of the book there are simply more anxious explanations of international monetary theory and diplomatic manoeuvring than we may care to cope with. One comes to dread the notice posted more than once: "some knowledge of the background is necessary, which I will try to sketch in as summarily as I can."

As for Mr. Le Pan, it will be evident by now not only that his larger life is not forthcoming, but why it is not forthcoming. It is shut out by the book's design and by the residual role accepted by the author. By profession, Mr. Le Pan has been for the most part a civil servant and a diplomat. The barriers, the discretions and withdrawals, that these callings imply, necessary and by no means mean-spirited, carry over into *Bright Glass of Memory*. What we see here is an amanuensis, a keeper of official records, a writer of despatches. Worse, because courted by the very conception of the book, is the close-by role of "attendant lord" assigned by Mr. Le Pan's favourite poet to Prufrock:

> one that will do
> To swell a progress, start a scene or two,
> Advise the prince . . .
> Deferential, glad to be of use,
> Politic, cautious and meticulous;
> Full of high sentence. . . .

It takes a Boswell (and no doubt, as prince, a Johnson) to transform such a role into something else.

But readers who know the full Prufrock passage will know why I have cut it short. Our man is not the least bit obtuse, and he is certainly nobody's fool. The humane and disciplined virtues suggested in my first paragraph remain intact. I think Mr. Le Pan has tried to recreate a piece of the past by very difficult means. Charles Ritchie, facing a similar task in the writing of *The Siren Years*, came armed with a personal diary, and as a bonus, I think, powers of almost total recall. Neither of these resources seems to have been available to Mr. Le Pan. Sound editorial judgments might have remedied matters somewhat, but these were not forthcoming. For this I am inclined to blame the publishers of *Bright Glass of Memory* as much as I am the author. I think Mr. Le Pan's copy editors, or perhaps his friends, either neglected to advise him when they should have, or advised him badly. Whoever is to blame, the "bright glass" is out of focus.

R. L. MCDOUGALL

VOICES OF WOMEN

JENI COUZYN, *House of Changes.* Heinemann; Douglas & McIntyre, $5.95.

ENID DELGATTY RUTLAND, *The Cranberry Tree.* Turnstone, $3.95.

HOUSE OF CHANGES:

A dazzling peacock, self-proud, tail outspread — so one sees on first looking into Jeni Couzyn's art, a thing not of the human world, an artefact?

But take the word — artefact — and split it up:

art
fact

isn't this what she is doing? Behind the arras of myth, history, anthropology isn't there the *human fact?* We come from this. We possess in ourselves *animal, vegetable, mineral.* As Couzyn tells it, addressing her "spirit":

Dearest light, dearest source
I am your prison warder with
needing you. I shall open these muscles
like roads and rivers
I shall unpick this tangle of bones
to a tree with loose waving branches
I shall clear my mind like a field
for you to walk and lie still in
I shall make a waterfall in my spine
I shall make rock-pools in my eyes
come home.

Jeni Couzyn first became known to Canadians with her third book, *Christmas in Africa,* 1975. It was published simultaneously by Heinemann's and J. J. Douglas of Vancouver, as is *House of Changes.* This publishing hook-up plan is interesting in itself; for few are the Canadian poets who manage to be printed outside the country.

Couzyn was born some thirty-seven years ago in South Africa, met her Canadian husband, David Day, in Turkey, lived two years in Victoria, B.C. and has now moved back to where she first won acclaim as a reader of her own poems — England. Like Margaret Atwood, whose poetry is akin to hers, Couzyn has recently begun experimenting with motherhood — and loves it. Thus she is the prototype of the new woman who, after re-enacting her childhood through poetry, rejects her parents, seeks her own identity, loves and devours men, but finally comes to terms with her androgynous self.

The poems in this book reflect all these "pulls." Often they are dressed up in the fashion of science fiction, our modern way of myth-making. At other moments they are stripped of embellishment or obscurity and glow warmly with love. An example of the first is the poem "Do Androids Dream." Here we have the voice of the mechanical woman:

The factory that made me
and for what
purpose, makes no difference to the way I
feel myself
me, know myself mysterious. I am I as sharp
as the lowest

creeper on earth is himself, whatever egg he
crawled from
or gut he tore open entering, or cell
accidentally
dividing created him. There are many ways
into life.

Let me live.

There follows, in startling contrast, the human woman, Karen, who is being kept alive by a machine:

Lies to call it dead. The little lines
bright and furious
zig zag over the screen: it is dreaming.

Machine breathes it, machine
beats its heart, whoever, whatever it is now
with its thin voice, screaming.

But the medical profession and the law refuse to let this dreamer die:

There is no precedent for pulling the plug
we will not do it, say the doctors.
We are pleading for mercy, says the young
lawyer.

....

She will not be granted death.
This is a court of justice, says the judge
not a court of love.

Death moves in and out of these poems ironically, as a living force. But life asserts itself in the lovely series called "Spells" which recall a similar series called "Graces" (from *Christmas in Africa*).

Titles of these spells are in themselves evocative as poems:

Spell to Summon the Owner of the Shoes
Spell to Soften the Hard Heart of a Woman
Spell to Release the Furious Old Woman
Spell to Curb the Vengeance of the Leprechaun

And here is a very short one:

Spell for Birth

God the mother
God the daughter
God the holy spirit

Triune of love
Triune of grace

Stream take you
Current aid you
Wind escort you
Earth receive you

God the mother
God the daughter
God the holy spirit

Triune of grace
Triune of power.

Thus Couzyn speaks with the immemorial voice of women: Emily Brontë, Christina Rossetti, Edith Sitwell. She speaks through symbol. The result is often dizzying, defying explication; but always rewarding.

THE CRANBERRY TREE

It is perhaps unfair to review Enid Rutland alongside Jeni Couzyn. The difference is like that between a surreal dream and waking to find snow drifting through cracks in the attic bedroom. Enid Rutland's name, moreover, is not known in Canada or abroad, since her tight and thoughtful lyrics written over two decades have never been published till now. The present book contains a long documentary poem, sometimes so prosy that one wonders if it is simply "notes for a novel." The serious intent is there: to record the lives of pioneers in a northern Manitoba mining town; and the effects upon them of weather, poverty, illness, death. There are almost no moments of delight, love, song. In this respect the author could have learned a good deal from a study of Anne Marriott's prairie classic, "The Wind Our Enemy." There the theme of wind and weather is interwoven with the lives of the people so as to reveal not only sorrow and suffering, but enduring love.

However, there *are* sections of *The Cranberry Tree* that come close to this sort of illumination. After the stumbling, flat-footed introduction called "The Old Country" — the poet's impressions of a visit to England — "The Homecoming" has its flashes of metaphor:

In Montreal, in our absence, the highways
have expanded
into wide swooping roller-coasters.
The rusted underbellies of the metallic
animals
harry me.

Penumbras of gin rosy rainbows of
summer's unlimited ice
spread over suburban lawns to evening.
The fragrance of charcoal steaks
grass-smell, gas-smell and the rasping rattles
of dying lawn-mowers.

But the travel diary proceeds to take us across Canada without any of the excitement of language we could find in Birney, Purdy, Acorn. There just isn't enough action, intensity of feeling or dramatic narrative. So why did Turnstone Press decide to publish this book? Because it has a Manitoba setting? Surely not a valid reason! Perhaps also because there are flashes of insight in *The Cranberry Tree* which might indicate that the writer is worth watching. If only she had pruned it all down to a series of vignettes, like this one:

Six in the morning and the wind
trying to shake the shutter from its sash.
A hostile sky black as river mud
clouds with white underbellies.
Across the field, and past my grandfather's
empty cabin
the yard light swings frightened arcs jumps
and swivels.

They told me the night before of the tornado
last week
over Crystal City way. Like the frightened
child I was
I go to my uncle's room and call
"Mike! Uncle! Uncle Mike!"

We never become what we never were,
never lose what we are . . .

Well, not a tornado only a natural sky in
ill-humour.
Icelanders, we sucked our coffee through
sugar lumps
as the faint day sieved through dawn.

DOROTHY LIVESAY

ESSAIS

FERNAND OUELLETTE, *Ecrire en notre temps Essais*. Editions Hurtubise HMH, n.p.

LE MOT ESSAIS, qui figure à la fois en caractères fins sur la page de couverture et sur la page de titre, est pris ici par l'auteur dans l'acception la plus large ou la moins universitaire qui soit, comme Fernand Ouellette lui-même l'écrit finement et subtilement dans ses "Divagations sur l'essai." *Ecrire en notre temps*, qui a bénéficié d'une subvention du Conseil des Arts du Canada, est un recueil de 31 "essais," dont 23 avaient déjà paru de 1972 à 1979, dans la revue *Liberté*, que je lis fidèlement, sans y être abonné, pour connaître et apprécier les dramaturges, les poètes et les romanciers qui y collaborent uniquement. Quatre autres essais sont empruntés aux revues suivantes: *Critère, Etudes Littéraires, L'oeil ouvert, Vie des Arts*. La préface de l'auteur à *Mon Calvaire*, de Michel Salomon, y est aussi reproduite. Le lecteur y trouvera trois inédits: Poésie et Espérance, Le discours de Geneviève, Le 12 août 1952. La maquette de la couverture est de Pierre Fleury. La page quatre, elle, reproduit seulement le premier des trois paragraphes de l'Avant-Propos. Sans doute en est-il le plus important, puisqu'il révèle l'esprit du livre. En voici quelques phrases:

> *Ecrire en notre temps*, c'est-à-dire ne pas détourner la tête d'un temps invivable, ne pas se couver douillettement l'esprit avec des oreilles et des yeux clos. Ce qui caractérise les textes proposés dans ce livre, c'est surtout le fait qu'ils sont à peu près tous marqués au fer par un regard qui ressent vivement son époque comme un *mal*. Nous pâtissons de notre époque. Quel homme vivant ne serait pas angoissé, exaspéré, tourmenté en subissant notre histoire? Que pourrait-il faire d'autre que de dénoncer l'imposture sous toutes ses formes, non par tempérament, ni par laisser-aller pessimiste, mais, au contraire, par volonté de maintenir l'espérance à vif.

A l'instar des écrivains français tels que Marot et Ronsard, Agrippa d'Aubigné et Mathurin Régnier, Pascal et Vincent de Paul, Bossuet et Fénelon, pour m'en tenir à quelques poètes et prosateurs des XVI^e^ et XVII^e^ siècles, qui ont souvent protesté avec énergie contre les iniquités de leur temps qu'ils ont sans doute jugé aussi "invivable" et ressenti comme un "mal," le poète et romancier bien connu qu'est Fernand Ouelette a certes raison d'élever la voix à son tour et de se sentir mal à l'aise aujourd'hui; comme il ruisselle de lectures, il connaît bien les textes auxquels je fais allusion en mentionnant quelques auteurs de deux grands siècles de littérature. Il se trouve donc en excellente compagnie. Et comme lui ils ne ressentaient pas seulement leur époque comme *un mal*. D'ailleurs, toute époque, l'étude de l'histoire nous l'apprend, est à la fois un mal et un bien. Telle est la vie elle-même; l'avers et le revers de l'existence, comme ceux d'une médaille ou d'une pièce de monnaie, ne sont jamais tout à fait iden-

tiques. Ne vaut-il pas mieux réagir contre son histoire ou plutôt y apporter sa propre contribution au lieu de la subir? Par bonheur, Fernand Ouellette parle constamment d'espérance dans son anthologie d'essais; il veut même "la maintenir à vif," comme Jean-Paul Sartre, qui garde toujours l'espoir, ce qui le différencie nettement de beaucoup de ses contemporains et ce qui explique pourquoi Ouellette aime le citer; alors que "la progression du désespoir en l'homme" est un trait de notre temps.

Ecrire est un acte de foi en soi et en l'homme à qui on s'adresse, car on n'écrit pas seulement pour soi, mais aussi pour les autres. Qu'il fasse un compte rendu ou des commentaires en marge d'un volume récemment paru — son recueil en comprend sept, pénétrants et personnels: *Pentecôtes, Pierres réfléchies, Contre tout espoir, Souvenirs II, Une voix dans le choeur, L'Oiseau n'a plus d'ailes, L'artiste et la société, Rapport sur la torture* (ou qu'il décrive l'action et le rôle de la revue *Liberté*: l'essai consacré à ce sujet est sans doute le plus étoffé et le mieux senti du volume) il exprime son amour passionné de l'homme et de sa dignité, de la liberté et de la qualité de l'oeuvre littéraire, de la puissance de l'écrit et des valeurs spirituelles. "Sans espérance, il n'y a pas de travail d'écriture possible." "Le monde se meurt de cette dissociation du politique et des valeurs spirituelles. Il faudra bien qu'un jour la politique rende des comptes au spirituel, et surtout à l'homme qu'elle a broyé avec des "raisons d'Etat." "Glorifier le joual montréalais est une forme de fascisme. . . . C'est isoler davantage le Québec, accentuer ses névroses, aggraver son complexe suicidaire." Au fond, mal parler, comme mal écrire, fait mal à l'âme; nous ne serons jamais une nation, aussi longtemps que nous n'aurons pas compris et ne vivrons pas cette profonde vérité. L'auteur écrit avec justesse: "la liberté de l'oeuvre littéraire, sans laquelle non seulement il n'y a pas d'écrivain, mais il n'y a pas d'homme." Je suis tout à fait d'accord avec lui au sujet de son affirmation sur Israël, où il a voyagé comme moi: "Israël ne sera pas vraiment Israël tant qu'il n'aura pas rendu justice au peuple palestinien." Et pourtant Dieu sait si tous les deux nous aimons Israël, comme nous aimons retourner aux sources! Voulez-vous savoir en clair ce qu'est l'esprit de l'U.R.S.S., eh bien! lisez seulement le paragraphe, remarquable de densité et de vérité, de la page 88; cela ne vous dispensera pas de faire un voyage au pays des Soviets, mais, croyez-moi, vous en reviendrez très vite.

L'auteur est passé maître dans l'art de poser des questions qui remuent l'esprit et font réfléchir: c'est seulement en 38 pages sur 158 que je n'ai pu en relever une seule. Que de citations aussi empruntées aux écrivains étrangers, allemands, français et russes! J'en ai fait mon gibier. L'auteur les laisse couler à l'envi sous sa plume. Il semble aussi aimer André Suarès, écrivain aujourd'hui trop oublié, à qui Ouellette pourait consacrer un solide essai universitaire. C'est le voeu ardent que je forme en terminant.

MAURICE LEBEL

UNEVEN BREATHING

INGRID KLASSEN, ed., *D'Sonoqua: An Anthology of Women Poets of British Columbia.* Intermedia Press, $12.95; pa. $7.95.

JEAN MALLINSON's introduction to *D'Sonoqua* begins this way:

> Anthologies are a sign of vitality: they give evidence of an abundance and variety of poetry to choose from. The present collection is a gathering of poems by women who live or have lived in some part of the Canadian west, primarily in [sic] the west coast and the interior of British Columbia.

I found I reacted sharply with two questions: first, what need is there to make a

case for anthologies; second, why anthologize poetry for any reason other than its quality? Mallinson's statement, "the juxtaposition of different writers, is one that only an anthology can provide. It highlights similarities and increases the intensity of contrasts," invites me to answer the first question by tossing off an analogy that is just as flippantly tautological: "the juxtaposition of different faces is one that only a collection of portraits can provide. It shows how alike, how unalike, people are." The second question requires more discussion.

The Inuit concept of poetry that Edmund Carpenter explains in his introduction to *I Breathe a New Song* I find appealing:

> The ... word for 'to make poetry' is the word for 'to breathe.' It is a form of the word *anerca*, the soul, that which is eternal, the breath of life.

To the Inuit, poetry is as natural and as basic a function as breathing. I can understand the benefit of bringing together for consideration the best, the most successful, ways of breathing, but it seems ludicrous to restrict that consideration to the best breathers of one camp or of one gender. Surely just the fact that there are good poems is reason enough to put them together. I can see some reason for anthologizing poets (good ones) of a certain era or nationality, so that readers can consider the best ways of "breathing" at a given time or in a given country, but would a poet, if her work is good, need to enter the lesser arenas of region and gender? Why judge poetry in such restricted competition? Poets should expect their work to achieve recognition not because it's good "for a British Columbian" (provincial reasons), not because it's good "for a woman" (sexist reasons), but because it's *good*.

And some of the poems of these thirty-two "women poets of British Columbia" *are* good. Judy Copithorne, Marya Fiamengo, Rona Murray, Phyllis Webb — to mention only some of them — have already gained national recognition. Their poems here are no disappointment. Others are interesting in image or theme but are not full-statured in craft. Some are annoyingly trite. Lines such as "Kitty got / the woodpecker," "I had a cat named Nabble Nabble once," "I have swallowed / the battered gold crown / of my wisdom / to the wild dismay of my guts," and "stoned gallbladder / brewing pancreatic juices / raise visions erratic" are evidence of unsuccessful, overly self-conscious breathing.

What it comes down to is that Mallinson's claim that an anthology "increases the intensity of contrasts" is all too true of *D'Sonoqua*. If it were just that the very good poems by already acclaimed poets stand out in contrast to the faultily crafted ones by lesser-known poets, I could dismiss both these categories on the grounds that the former needs no comment and the latter deserves none. However, with a few exceptions, quality varies in poems by one person. That "each poet was asked to submit her own favourite poems, the ones they [sic] liked, published or unpublished" (Editor's Preface), may indicate that people are not always the best judges of any unevenness in their own inhaling/exhaling.

The title, *D'Sonoqua*, itself inadvertently speaks of the unevenness. Although it is intended to convey "the fierceness, the power and the grace and charm" of Emily Carr's "wild woman of the woods" (Editor's Preface), even a quick reading of *Klee Wyck* makes clear that these are qualities Carr abstracts after she describes three D'Sonoqua figures (each a huge woman carved out of cedar) in a rather uncomplimentary way. For her, the woman is not at first powerful, fierce, charming or graceful; she is awkward,

incongruous, even vacuous. Here, in part, is the first description:

> The eyes were two rounds of black . . . and it seemed that the voice of the tree itself might have burst from that round cavity, with projecting lips, that was her mouth. Her ears were round, and stuck out to catch all sounds. . . . Her hands were black, with blunt fingertips.

Of the next time Carr sees her, she says:

> I knew her by the stuck-out ears, shouting mouth, and deep eye sockets. These sockets had no eye-balls, but were empty holes, filled with stare.

After the third encounter, she minimizes the unattractive qualities of the figure, emphasizing instead the overall response it evokes:

> She appeared to be neither wooden nor stationary, but a singing spirit, young and fresh. . . . She was graciously feminine.

After many readings of the collection, I admit that Carr's final response to the totem figure — "She caught your breath, this D'Sonoqua" — is applicable, but only to some of the poetry. For the whole of the anthology, I must agree with Indian Tom, whom Carr questions about the meaning of the figure to the Indians. After he tells her that D'Sonoqua is the "wild woman of the woods" who "steals children," Carr asks: "Then she is bad?" He replies, "Sometimes bad . . . sometimes good."

PEGEEN BRENNAN

POETRY & POLEMICS

SEYMOUR MAYNE, ed., *Irving Layton. The Poet and His Critics*. McGraw-Hill Ryerson, $12.95; pa. $8.95.

AT A TIME WHEN a special edition of Irving Layton's love poems has sold out at $1000 per copy, it seems appropriate that McGraw-Hill Ryerson has released a collection of reviews and articles revealing the stages by which Layton has achieved critical and public recognition. Edited by Seymour Mayne, *Irving Layton: The Poet and His Critics* offers a valuable if somewhat predictable overview of what the critics saw or failed to see from the publication of *Here and Now* in 1945 to the release of *The Unwavering Eye* in 1975.

Much of the predictability stems from the reviewers' preoccupation with Layton's themes, poems, and pugnacity over a thirty-year period. Thus, it is typical to find Gwendolyn MacEwen echoing the tone of earlier critics when she begins her 1975 review of *The Unwavering Eye* with "The impossible Irving Layton, the incorrigible Layton, the indescribable Layton, the poet-for-all seasons Layton. . . ." The vitality to which she responds is the quality in Layton's work which has consistently overwhelmed reviewers and has often obscured a discussion of Layton's strengths and weaknesses as a craftsman and technician. Only in the on-going response of critics like Northrop Frye, Milton Wilson, Desmond Pacey, Eli Mandel, and Louis Dudek has one seen an attempt to consider Layton's work as a changing and developing whole, and even here, as editor Mayne points out, there are limitations in the range of the critics' responses. Mayne suggests that Frye has too often tried to fit Layton into a pattern of mythopoeic interpretation, and, in so doing, has ignored his Jewish heritage and its effect on his poetry. Other critics like Louis Dudek have vacillated between defending Layton's work and attacking it to the point of fastidiousness: "These three quatrains are the *worst* by a poet of any reputation written in the twentieth century." The result, concludes Mayne, is an unsatisfactory body of criticism surrounding a poet whose challenge and influence should command a full critical engagement.

That Mayne attempts to base his judgments on a representative body of criticism is clear from the range of the selections in his collection. There are reviews by the American poets, William Carlos Williams and John Ciardi; the Australian poet, A. D. Hope; and the British writer, Roy Fuller. From *Le Devoir* Mayne takes Gilles Marcotte's "Le Poète Irving Layton Vu d'Ici" and from the *Star Weekly Magazine* June Callwood's "The Lusty Laureate From The Slums." In addition, he creates a careful balance between personal and analytical responses to Layton held by his fellow Canadian poets, and literary-critical evaluations of his work made by academics like Northrop Frye, Eli Mandel, Milton Wilson, and George Woodcock.

Not only does this range of critical sources indicate the shape of Layton criticism over the years, but it also conveys a sense of the polemics surrounding Layton's books as they consistently appeared and demanded attention. That these polemics have been at the expense of in-depth discussions of Layton's work is, of course, part of Mayne's central thesis, but it is a thesis heightened by the editor's eagerness to defend the poet. Certainly, it is indefensible that Layton had to struggle for recognition in the 1940s and 1950s and did not have a book published by a national house until he was forty-seven years old. However, that neglect cannot be offset by Mayne's uncritical support of Layton's work in his introduction to *Irving Layton: The Poet and His Critics.* Mayne speaks of Layton's "purported" limitations and faults, of his work being acknowledged in the Fifties "on the terms of a criticism which Layton rejects," and of Layton's early insistence "upon a full dialogue and encounter [with the critics] on his own terms." All of this suggests that Mayne (and Layton) will engage in critical dialogue only by their own rules, a situation offering little hope of full understanding between the critics and the poet. In the meantime, an impasse exists, according to Mayne, with Layton and his critics "talking past each other":

> The record of reviews and articles must be examined for what it reveals about the limitations of Canadian criticism, for the resistance and even hostility to Layton's writing remains. There is that sense that Layton and his critics, on the whole, have been talking past each other. Layton insisted from an early date upon a full dialogue and encounter on his own terms. When the critics do address themselves to his work, they are often peripheral to it, and they take every excuse to get out from under the words of the poet.

Mayne's unqualified support of Layton aside, his selection and his introduction order and interpret thirty years of critical response to Layton in a style that is both cogent and enlightening. For this reason, *Irving Layton: The Poet and His Critics* is a valuable contribution to readers and students of Layton alike.

GWENDOLYN DAVIES

GEMS & ASHES

RAYMOND SOUSTER, *Hanging In.* Oberon, $15.00; pa. $6.95.

IRVING LAYTON, *Droppings from Heaven.* McClelland & Stewart, $12.95; pa. $7.95.

IT IS DIFFICULT to imagine two contemporary Canadian poets whose sensibilities and poetic perspectives are more widely contrasting than Raymond Souster and Irving Layton; that they are of roughly the same generation only emphasizes the contrast.

Raymond Souster is a skilled but conservative poet; and while his poems often show careful construction, they rarely equal Layton's in energy or impact. Souster has a pervasive concern for dignity, and a penchant for observing orderly

process in both nature and poetry. He seems to seek external referents which suit the flow of his poetic voice, rather than to adapt voice to his subject. The great majority of the poems in *Hanging In* follow a formula: exposition, discord, resolution. The result is a numbing effect, a mental status-quo; the reader "appreciates" the observation, but is largely unmoved by it.

That Souster has a moral integrity and a certain insight into aspects of the human condition cannot be denied. One has to respect the humanity of a person who, watching a re-routed Toronto subway car carry off its unsuspecting passengers towards an unknown destination, can compare himself to "a friend who watched / his mother, his father / loaded on a cattle-car for Auschwitz, / but himself forced to stay behind, to live / their deaths out the rest of his life." Despite the sincerity, Souster's poetry rarely produces any imaginative stimulation. "Fallen Apple Blossoms" ends with the poet reminding himself "how much every inch of this earth / is still worth fighting for!" The statement's delivery is more rhetorical than artistic; Souster's poetry does not invoke his own apparent passion.

Hanging In includes a number of poems dealing with the atrocities of World War II, including a long narrative on the famous Czech partisans who assisinated Reinhard Heydrich, touching off the Nazi massacre at Lidice. The latter poem irritates by repeatedly prefacing stanzas with "Now," as if Souster lacked confidence in the reader's ability to recognize the passage of time. Few of the shorter poems evoke the horror of genocide the way, for example, Layton's early poem "Rhine Boat Trip" does.

There is, in *Droppings From Heaven*, all of what we have come to expect from Irving Layton: his candour, irreverence, sense of justice, impassioned Judaism, his unbridled imagination. And, of course, a volatile Foreword which assails "the older poet [who] comes across as a weak-eyed dodderer full of saws and asides," "canucky schmuckism" and "Xianity" with "its progeny — various kinds of puritanical collectivisms," while championing the "battle for the free, independent individual, for his dignity and waywardness, against the hordes of robots and frightened massmen that a soulless technology is creating in ever-increasing numbers."

"Hurrah for the elephant / who trampled his trainer to death" Layton writes ("Hurrah for the Elephant"), "Hurrah for life's defiance / of all established routines." The danger, of course, is that Layton's own work, against a backdrop of his controversial public persona, can become an "established routine" in itself, a poetic vaudeville.

But while there is a ritualistic nature to his railing against enemies imagined and real, there is no denying how often his aim is true. Layton's perceptions and viewpoints are not markedly different here from those of recent books. What keeps the poetry fresh is that Layton continues to work from new angles / locales / settings. Layton in "Great Gatsby Country" is a treat: a number of poems from California, Florida, and even Banff lampoon and vilify "those sleek impostors with coiffured heads / and upright backs" in the "too elegant, too white, too spacious" synagogue, or the "rich [who] cultivate dullness like an art." Yet it is the impression left by poems such as "Divorce," "Letter to a Lost Love," and "Senile, My Sister Sings" that remains strongest. Here Layton grapples with the conflicts of temporal / lasting love, mortality / immortality, in truly memorable fashion. In "Letter to a Lost Love" he speaks of a relationship which has left "a misery / to last my life," while in "Divorce" a broader perception of human relationships is apparent: "Let the dropped crabapple moulder where it

falls, / the seed will clutch and break the soil. / Is that what love is: to care knowing / stars and blossoms flare to extinction?"

"Senile, My Sister Sings" is a far more eloquent confrontation with (or refusal of?) death than poems such as "Prayer for My Old Age," where Layton seems preoccupied with his own image. In the former poem Layton seems to recognize this, writing of his sister, "Your high-pitched notes must rile him [death] / more than rage or defiance."

In the end, one wishes to cut away the occasional rhetoric and bombast, while preserving the hard clarity that exemplifies many of the poems, but "even as an expurgated edition, / the guts and moodiness of me painted out / I'd make a used condom float into your mind," Layton warns in "Expurgated Edition." Better, perhaps, to enjoy the fire of Layton with "both pitchforks blazing," and sift the gems from the ashes at some later date.

LORNE DANIEL

MAPPEMOUNDE?

JACK DAVID, *Brave New Wave*. Black Moss Press, n.p.

DAVID HELWIG, ed. *The Human Elements: Critical Essays*. Oberon, $15.00; pa. $6.95.

JACK DAVID justifies his anthology on the rationale that the eleven poets discussed "are each gifted in their own way," that "for an Atwood, an Ondaatje, and a Nichol to spring up in one generation clearly marks the maturation of Canadian poetry." His poets are part of the burgeoning of poetry in Canada over the past quarter century — a recent book-seller's brochure, for instance, has 100 pages of selections by Canadian poets, nearly all living. Our problem, of course, is to map out critically this logarithmically expanding country, to find which trails lead to tomorrow, which peter out in swamps. David's Mappemounde is no Rand-McNally road atlas.

Jean Mallinson praises John Robert Colombo's escape into "found" poetry, "like beach pebbles set in filigree," the "found" being a matter of style, not content, in which prose may become poetry. Colombo "is a good citizen of the country of every day," who elaborates a "vulgate version of the visionary world." Sam Solecki feels that Michael Ondaatje maps the world as surreal, absurd, inchoate, without resorting to the fallacy of expressive form such as the concrete poem. Ronald Kiverago reprimands the critics' mere 20 reviews of David McFadden's six books, rooted in *Kitsch* culture, the prose-like texture reflecting the common-man view, and says those readers who see the poetry as trivial are wrong because any other mode would make McFadden's world false to his vision of life — but what if the vision itself is trivial? Douglas Barbour more adequately charts the veering course of Frank Davey's exploration of "our divided, violent, sexist world," from his early Tishish impotence to his 1966 and subsequent virility, including effective use of Arthurian myth, in today's imagery and tomorrow's style.

Ken Norris's language about George Bowering's poetry kernels his criticism: "musical scores," "Creeleyesque," "Williamish," "proprioceptive," "processual," "crack the code of his consciousness," even the Carman Revisited of "incantatory invocation," ending with: "neither the readers nor the poet is ever quite sure of what exactly is taking place" — by way of obscurity one may experience illumination? Robert Lecker similarly eulogizes rather than criticizes Daphne Marlatt; her work, he comments, blends "sight and emotion, heart and eye," "we are what we see," can comprehend reality only in relation to its "phenomenological inundation" which Marlatt finds poetic

voice to fix, a voice which conceives creativity as "a diarrhoea of words," "absolute abandonment to flow."

Jack David's own article claims that bp Nichol's concrete and sound poetry digs back to the auditory and visual roots to bring new life into the language — "if the reader has not heard Nichol chanting 'Dada Lama' then he cannot imagine the donkey-like way these combinations are voiced."

But I like best Len Early's article on bill bissett's rejection of conventions. He quotes bissett: "tastes get stratified and start to stand for / what is permitted to get thru." The examples quoted of the concrete poems mostly fail to compel, though he does say that some at least of bissett "has neither formal nor intellectual appeal, and seems ... essentially the printed equivalent of noise." He finds, however, a religious, ritualistic side — bisset as shaman. I also like Frank Davey's article "Atwood's Gorgon Touch," stressing the sculptural quality of her language, her preoccupation with space, and her way of "discrediting the 'games' by which mankind converts time into space." He sees her as presenting a Gorgon face to her material — at once shaping it and freizing it.

These essays — together with pieces by Jan Barthey and Eli Mandel — reflect one poetic province, but would chart it as the entire "Brave New" world. Mandel's way of putting it — "Poet and audience, once in opposition to each other as art and history, now are coupled in opposition to life itself" — rests on the fallacy that poet and audience are in fact coupled. Neither Mandel's article, nor the book as a whole, offers objective evidence to sustain the point.

From the Introduction to Helwig's anthology one could conclude it a frivolous book, for he says he: (1) reads critical articles only if he expects to enjoy them, (2) has a healthy [sic] distrust of educated opinion, and (3) commissioned articles only from people whose work he knew — uneducated entertainers one could suppose. But the book has some weight, including Helwig's own comment that good critical literature has a tonal quality of poise and urbanity lacking in most Canadian criticism.

Peter Harcourt's article on Allen King as film maker — from *Come on Children* whose "nice kids" say "you're fucking the shit outa me man," to *A Married Couple* where two neurotics become symptomatic of all marriages — concludes that King's "is not a comforting picture of our middle-class world." Harcourt does not prove that King's world objectively represents anything other than King, but does illustrate that at least up to the film version of *Who Has Seen the Wind*, King's films present characters with no culture to sustain them, a culture losing its ability to nurture its own children.

Kathy Mezei quotes Gilles Marcotte ("la littérature fait le pays, et le pays fait la littérature"), then discusses how the Québec novels of the period 1900-1950 reflect rural and traditional values and their collapse, those of the 1950's the alienation syndrome, and those of the 1960's the new world of revolution — style changing accordingly. She speaks of Gaston Miron's role in "inspiring and educating people" towards terrorism, and of the necessity of the writer to be politically *engagé*. In disregard of extant examples, she asserts: "the Epic of Québec remains to be written. And it is strange that it is not yet risen out of the ashes of the October crisis." Her article well documents the rise of feminine consciousness in Québec literature and significantly asks whether that literature is closing in on itself in an incestuous circle.

Naim Kattan, writing of the Canada Council, argues that if the state is to subsidize art, the process must be monitored by the artistic community, not the politi-

cian, that French-Canadian literature has become the literature of Québec whereas in the rest of the country, as small publishers took over from the commercial houses, literature rediscovered "Canada as something other than an extension of Europe" even though what emerged was a regional literature. He regrets that the rejection by some Québec writers of Canada Council awards, constitutes a rejection of the idea of recognizing *literary* merit, and that the new nationalism has generated an anti-Americanism — a marginal phenomenon, he says, but does not discuss inter-regional bias in Canada. He concludes that the country's future depends on those who recognize it and themselves in it.

Bronwen Wallace places Alice Munro in a subject race of women; David McFadden apotheosizes Christopher Dewdney and Robert Fones; Brian Arnott and Stan Dragland, in two excellent articles, respectively explore theatre since 1960 and reassess the "cinematic" poetry of James Reaney.

And George Woodcock extols Margaret Laurence as a Canadian equivalent to Tolstoy, Homer, Cervantes, Chaucer, and Dickens — on the basis, in relation to her time and place, of her versatility of perception, breadth of understanding, imaginative power to personify and give symbolic form, range of collective life interpreted, mythopoeic power, and recognition of "the national imperative and the forces that militate against its survival." He discusses the African writing as well as that set in Canada, and concludes that her vision is that of the true novelist whose plausible world plays a mythologizing role for society. She is, Woodcock says, "the best of our place and generation."

One must at least acknowledge that Helwig selects the intrepid for inclusion in his anthology.

GLEN CLEVER

WORDS & POWER

ROLAND GIGUERE, *Forêt vierge folle.* L'Hexagone, n.p.

PIERRE MORENCY, *Torrentiel.* L'Hexagone, $4.00.

ANDRE BEAUCHAMP, *J'ai tant cherché le Soleil.* Fides, $8.95.

AFTER THE PUBLICATION of *L'Age de la parole* in 1965, *La Barre du Jour* prepared a special issue on Roland Giguère, including statements of his own on his exploration of the relationship between poetry and art. Drawings and sketches had gradually invaded the white margins surrounding his poems, he said, until finally they had chased the words away and occupied the page by themselves.

Suitably, we find the same statement repeated in Giguère's latest volume, *Forêt vierge folle,* which appears as a preliminary synthesis of the poet's efforts to marry art and poetry. In accordance with the programme of l'Hexagone's "collection parcours," *Forêt vierge folle* sets out to trace the development of the artist in the multiple inspirations he has absorbed over the years, in terms of literary influence as well as "tout ce qui remue autour des mots." As a result, the book appears like a brief history, in examples of Giguère's work, of surrealism in Québec, presenting, in chronological order, poèmes-collages, exhibition posters, reproductions of manuscript pages, photographs of Giguère in the "palais idéal du Facteur Cheval," of primitive art in Giguère's possession, of objects he has created himself. Interspersed with these illustrations and always arranged in close relation to them, there are poems and prose-texts illustrative of particular themes and techniques in Giguère's work. In these texts, the poet is often viewed as a privileged being whose creativity allows him to dive below the surface of reality to salvage the images dreaming

there. The artist's work is a perpetual fight against the night (significantly, one of Giguère's exhibitions was called Pouvoir du noir); he opens a window onto an unknown landscape; he constructs a fire escape; he is the mechanic on a motionless train in a dark tunnel. Like most surrealist poetry, Giguère's lends itself to a statistical categorization of themes, since his choice of vocabulary is restrictive and the creation of verbal echoes an important part of his poetic technique. But statistics are, at least in Giguère's case, self-defeating. Words, despite their familiar appearance and sound, are not to be trusted; they may return to their speaker or writer "transfigurées ou défigurés." The writer himself, whom Giguère frequently describes as endowed with magical sensitivities, cannot be sure of his creation and must regard an outsider's attempt at rationalizing his work with pity, "La nature ne nous aide pas. On l'imite quand on le peut, mais c'est tout. Elle pousse, comme elle veut, folle, vierge, va où bon lui semble." For those interested in the development of contemporary art and poetry in Québec, *Forêt vierge folle* may serve as an excellent introduction or reminder, whichever the case may be.

Whereas Roland Giguère bridges the gap between art and poetry, Pierre Morency's work includes both poetry and drama. Although his first published work was a volume of poetry (*Poèmes de la froide merveille de vivre*, 1967), Morency claims that his involvement with theatre came first, and that reciting verse on stage, while a student, has had a lasting impact on his attitude towards language (cf. interview with Donald Smith, *Lettres québécoises* no. 12 [nov. 1978]). Morency's collection of poems, *Torrentiel*, reflects a fascination with language that could, indeed, be termed theatrical. Frequently, the poet's voice manifests itself in the torrential outpour of long unpunctuated lines, structured by the repetition of sound, morpheme, and grammatical structure,

> ces années-là ces années-là craquaient
> je m'en souviens
> chacune avait ses pauvres à la gorge arrêtée
> chacune avait une épouse chiâlant dans sa main etc.

Not surprisingly, water in its various forms and the "périple," i.e., a long and complicated journey, are among Morency's favourite images. *Torrentiel* itself takes the reader on a complicated journey; the short poems introducing the four sections of the volume create an illusion of numerical order, but their insertion appears arbitrary, at least on a rational level. Perhaps the poet is expressing his impatience with a reader who demands the existence of such a level when he threatens in "faubourgs de bayol,"

> je m'en vais
> je m'en vais vous tailler une poésie lointaine
> assez de tous ces bancs faciles sur les estrades.

Unlike Giguère and Morency, André Beauchamp is not a *poète révolté*. The dustjacket describes him as the author of "travaux de vulgarisation religieuse," an epithet which, in a less figurative and more malicious sense, also describes the book under review. *J'ai tant cherché le Soleil* contains a pot-pourri of texts: radio-plays, suspense stories, poems, *réflections*, *contes*, songs, prayers, all roughly held together through an arrangement by seasons: summer, fall, winter, spring. The literary quality of the pieces ranges from adequate to very low, but, in many of them, there is an annoying tendency to chum up to the reader, through a calculated use of sentimentality, jargon, and religious irreverence. Compared to Giguère's and Morency's, Beauchamp's volume appears like an anachronism, a return to Fréchette or the *poètes du terroir*. Language, in *Forêt vierge folle* and

Torrentiel, is a power to be reckoned with; in *J'ai tant cherché le Soleil*, it is often a sorry handmaiden.

EVA-MARIE KROLLER

GETTING IT TOGETHER

ROBERT HARLOW, *Making Arrangements*. McClelland & Stewart, $12.95.

WHAT DO YOU DO when you recognize an author's talent, but fail to respond to what he has written? This is the problem with Robert Harlow's latest novel, *Making Arrangements*, much of which takes place in a seedy hotel in downtown Vancouver, a locale frequented by loveable racing punters and dedicated whores, none of whom fully comes to life. It is a detective story in form, but the tone is comic. The protagonists, headed by an ailing retired detective, desperately seek to crack a kidnapping mystery in order to raise money to put down on a horse that appears bound to win the Friday race. Hence the title. The idea, though not brilliant, does offer possibilities for an amusing yarn. Harlow enlivens the somewhat dull proceedings with a satiric account of the world screwing championship, a hard-fought bout between a well-hung Vancouver lad ably assisted by a lass from Stettler, Alberta, and a sportsmanlike oil sheik from the Persian gulf paired-off with a plucky whore from downtown Vancouver. TV announcers, Phyllis and Mike, give a stroke-by-stroke commentary much in the way they might have reported a dance contest. But this amusing piece of sex fantasy is, I regret to say, much the best part of the novel.

Harlow has a talent for dialogue. He has mastered the language of the horse-racing set and uses it to create a fantastic yet essentially believable world. Unfortunately, Harlow over-extends himself, so that the language becomes, at times, an opaque jargon, delightful perhaps to racing fans, but not fully accessible to the rest of us.

Harlow's metaphoric style is often effective:

> The lobby was like an aircraft. Everybody in his seat between stops. Lennie was doing what looked like stewardess duty, parading the room. She was with them but not of them.

But it frequently lapses into the banal. The passage quoted above continues:

> You don't talk about a woman anymore like I want to talk about her. She was slim but generous all over. She was like an athlete who'd gone a little soft, but with none of the ginger missing. Her face was a moon slightly squashed down. Blue eyes the size of fists, square teeth, and blonde hair so long and thick it always hung down her back like a waterfall.... She did what she called custom screwing, and for premium prices. Goddam, she was a star.

A successful detective story is usually concise and swift-paced, but Harlow slows down the reader with an unnecessary wordiness. I would not object to the author holding me back if he were going to amuse me, or if I felt he had something to say, a perceptive comment on life perhaps, or some skilful characterization. But this doesn't happen. There is little substance to the novel, and the reader is frequently bogged down. William Faulkner also interrupts the action of his novels and forces his reader to wade through convoluted sentences, but Faulkner's over-writing usually has thematic significance; it recreates a special atmosphere, or pinpoints a character. Moreover, Faulkner writes with passionate intensity about issues that he makes us feel are significant. The characters and situations he creates leave an indelible impression on the mind. What we get in Harlow is the overwriting without the humour or the significance. Once I had finished reading *Making Arrangements*, I promptly forgot most of the epi-

sodes and the characters, and when I picked up the novel again to write about it, I found I had to reread it in order to recall the details.

Making Arrangements should have had a rigorous editing before it was set to print. If Harlow can learn to curb his tendency to overwrite, and if he can be more selective in his presentation of characters and situations, he may yet realize his potential as a writer.

MICHAEL BENAZON

SEISMOGRAPH

ROSS LABRIE, *The Art of Thomas Merton.* Texas Christian Univ. Press, $11.00; pa. $8.00.

WAS THOMAS MERTON important enough as a writer for his art to be studied? Since he gained fame with *The Seven Storey Mountain*, does he not belong primarily in the realm of apologetics rather than literature? To such possible objections, Ross Labrie must provide answers. His first chapter, "Contemplative and Artist," implies that Merton was especially significant because he had a well thought out view of the special importance of religious writing in the twentieth century. He countered the prevailing secularism of his world by insisting that art is relevant to religion, religion is relevant to art, and the two of them are necessary to the constitution of society. The artist, like a seismograph, registers the collapse of meaning in his culture, a collapse which extends to philosophy and theology. Perhaps the best way to approach contemporary problems, therefore, is through art. Far from being too materialistic, modern man is not materialistic enough: he does not place enough value on the things around him. The artist is concerned with ontological reality; he tries to give the world another chance, by rejecting the abrasive and synthetic pattern of modern life and trying to restore the face of nature and the rhythm of natural time. If he does not possess a religious vision, however, he may be caught in subjective abstractionism.

In Labrie's exposition of it, Merton's rationale for his art takes on coherence, and if there are parts of it which one might wish to dispute, it at least raises interesting questions.

Merton's own literary career, however, was full of paradoxes and even contradictions. At the end of *The Seven Storey Mountain*, he described himself as seeking the anonymity of the contemplative life; his journey to the monastery of Gethesemani had been a journey towards darkness, the darkness of the great mystics and the presence of God. But Labrie's chapter on his diaries shows his later changes; it is almost as if Newman, having written the *Apologia*, had decided that that classic account of a conversion reflected only a phase in his life and had gone off to join Charles Kingsley in settlement work among the London poor. *The Sign of Jonas*, dealing with Merton's monastic life until 1952, takes isolation from the world as a theme and exhibits a profound sense of community. Not so the next journal, *Conjectures of a Guilty Bystander*, which shows him turning into a social activist of the sixties. What was a Trappist monk, by vocation a silent and contemplative man, doing siding with a dissident priest like Daniel Berrigan, calling the Kerouacs and the Ginsbergs "Pretty big prophets," and trying to develop a poetic style which was earthy, iconoclastic, and profane? If a monk out of his cloister is like a fish out of water, why did Merton take trips to California, New Mexico, and Alaska, before the final one to Asia which resulted in his accidental death? In *The Waters of Siloe*, he himself wrote that the world can take its revenge on those who choose to lead

contemplative lives, and it does so "when the men who live in monasteries pay more attention to the gifts of men than to the gifts of God, when they begin to depend on the example and the tactics of the world. . . ." Did not the world take such a revenge on him, making him a self-divided man? Did he really think he could be contemplative, up to a point?

Out of such tensions, of course, great art could have come: unfortunately it did not. After chapters on him as a narrative writer, diarist, and essayist, Labrie takes up his poetry, in much the longest chapter in the book. One of the considerable merits of this study is that Labrie does not usually claim too much for his subject; in fact, he perhaps under-rates some of the religious writings. In his discussion of the poetry, however, he does see a pattern of development, a movement from verse which is too derivative or glib or even, as Merton himself put it, "just hanging out the wash and letting it float in the breeze," towards the maturity of *Cables to the Ace* (1968) and *The Geography of Lograire* (1969), both of which are long attacks on technocracy and indeed the whole of Western culture. Labrie calls the latter a distinguished poem; his explication of its intricate symbolism establishes its essential coherence, but he is not able to show that this "summa of offbeat anthropology" is sufficiently compelling in its style or subject matter to warrant close critical attention.

In fact I feel that from the first chapter on, the book goes downhill; there are some high points along the way, such as the discussion of *The Seven Storey Mountain*, and *The Sign of Jonas*, but it is a descent from them to summas of offbeat anthropology. The conclusion, which is short and fairly perfunctory, reinforces that impression. Labrie thinks that Merton's writings, whether in poetry or prose, "have a beautiful fullness and integrity," and that *The Seven Storey Mountain*, *The Sign of Jonas*, and *The Geography of Lograirie* reached heights that will secure his place in twentieth-century letters for some time to come. The claim does not seem substantiated. Merton wrote fifty books, none of which, unfortunately, seems likely to secure him an enduring literary reputation. If he continues to attract attention, it will be for extra-literary reasons.

D. J. DOOLEY

EXPLORERS & RUNAWAYS

DAVID WEST, *Franklin and McClintock*. Intermedia Press, n.p.

KENNETH MCROBBIE, *First Ghost to Canada*. Turnstone Press, n.p.

WILLIAM BAUER, *The Terrible Word*. Fiddlehead Poetry Books, n.p.

MARILYN BOWERING, *The Visitors Have all Returned*. Press Porcépic, $5.95.

THESE FOUR BOOKS span a wide range of reference. At one extreme lie David West's poems on public occasions of history; at the other is Marilyn Bowering's fiction of private fantasies.

Enlarging on documents of the arctic voyages of Sir John Franklin and Captain Leopold McClintock, West's *Franklin and McClintock* reconstructs the journeys of these explorers. In 1845 Franklin set out to find the northwest passage; in 1857 McClintock set out to find Franklin, who was at first as elusive as the passage:

> This is the one wreck
> they'll never find,
> those explorers
> and searchers
> after my bones.

Ice caught Franklin's ships ("the undiscovered passage closes on them"), and cold and immobility become the princi-

pal ideas of the Franklin poems. Despite Franklin's attempts to acclimatize himself with ice-water baths, the implacable freeze gets the better of the warm-blooded explorer. McClintock and his company, too, are trapped by ice, but their "fire inside" flickers on through the polar winter until the "pack rolls" and they are released. Finally they discover and enumerate the remains of the Franklin expedition, cataloguing peculiar artifacts left by man in a "no man's land."

West is taken by the "explorer's art": "although / they jotted / prose in yellow journals / one could not say / that they wrote. . . ." To refine the "jottings," he turns to various forms of discourse — dialogue and paragraph as well as concise stanzas — to reveal the diverse voices within these remote events. The story is important to West, but so, too, is its intricate verbal appearance.

So alien is the landscape against which men act in *Franklin and McClintock* that human purpose and human event show starkly. In *First Ghost to Canada,* Kenneth McRobbie pictures a more congenial traffic between man and environment: even in cold and winter he discovers a metaphysical comfort unknown to West's Franklin and McClintock.

Setting absorbs action in McRobbie's poems, with the stylistic result of a high ratio of verbals to verbs. In "The Great Transformation" participial phrases accumulate to arrest images at their intersection with idea:

> A smell of flags
> from clothes hanging
> behind the door
> dark with work, warming as
>
> in through both windows comes
> first daylight straight to the heart
> scraping night's thunder
> from the tongue, casting bloody bones
> out of sky's conserving power of space
> into Rouge river's liberal time.

At the other end of his style, McRobbie develops an accentual regularity to capture complicated notions coming and going:

> The snow is a skin,
> it is the earth
> growing a world
> for the air again.

In *The Terrible World* William Bauer makes some departures from the phenomenal world that attracts West and McRobbie. The first section of his volume contains poems about poems, through which Bauer negotiates the terms on which the reader will accept the poems that follow. In "An Elusive One" Bauer warns that this poem "runs / so far ahead of the praise the world / would give it it is gone." Subsequent sections offer more runaways, careening towards Bauer's vision of hectic licence, as on the "night that Willy Stum / cancelled all the rules." Free-wheeling poems "from *Twelvebelly the Ogre*" tell about a tyrant whose vast castle houses wonders. After dinner, Twelvebelly belches like a "distant battlefield of cannons / And retires to his comfortable den" to sing hugely, deeply, touchingly a "hearty song / Of melancholy woe / And vibrant booming beauty / All compounded."

Especially fine are Bauer's "Elegaic Stanzas in Honour of Mr. Herbert Barber, Barber." With some dire puns and ironies these verses commemorate the deceased, and wittily celebrate his garrulous mediocrity.

Marilyn Bowering's *The Visitors Have all Returned* is "experimental" fiction, but its innovations draw it towards poetry. Bowering presents action elliptically; consequently her chapters have the structural status of poems collected to address a unifying theme. In *The Visitors* the speaker's theme is her detachment from her husband and, eventually and ominously, from her daughter, and her resort to private images of ancient, childless figures traversing a mythic pastoral.

When the plotted connections among narrative units are missing, prose loses some of the ordinary signs of coherence and cohesion. Bowering supplies this deficiency with relentless reference to the narrator, a young woman of inwardly spiralling self-consciousness; the stylistic outcome is an extraordinarily heavy incidence of first person pronouns. A second feature of Bowering's style is related: she writes simple sentences unencumbered by qualifying appositives or verbals. This dearth of ornament parallels the speaker's detachment from her surroundings, for it argues her indifference to audience, and a carelessness about exhibiting any persuasive elaboration that might attract a reader into her world.

Can prose succeed without the conventional materials of cohesion and attractiveness? If the reader can take to this speaker, in all her focussed self-interest, then *The Visitors* works.

JANET GILTROW

NEWFOUNDLAND LETTERS

PATRICK O'FLAHERTY, *The Rock Observed: Studies in the Literature of Newfoundland.* Univ. of Toronto Press, $15.00.

"To EXPLORE THE WHOLE of Newfoundland's printed literature," writes Patrick O'Flaherty in the final chapter of *The Rock Observed*, "is to become aware of the richness of a body of writing long neglected" — neglected, one must assume, by both readers and scholars. The former, of course, have not done so by choice but by chance: until recently the early literature of Newfoundland has simply been inaccessible, even to Newfoundlanders. O'Flaherty himself has done much in recent years to help remedy that situation. The scholars have perhaps always assumed that the literature of Newfoundland was not worth their attention. O'Flaherty now sets out to correct that error: to show that not only is there a substantial "body" of literature to be read, but that it is of a "richness" also unsuspected. Does he succeed? I think not.

To begin with, fully one-third of O'Flaherty's book is taken up with political history which he supposes necessary to an intelligent appreciation of the literature. While such a supposition cannot be dismissed, his method of merely recounting the history and then moving on to the literature — quite often only tenuously linking the two — is unsatisfactory. While I am not at all convinced that the overabundance of historical fact is essential to an understanding of Newfoundland's literary works, I might have been had O'Flaherty merged an analysis of both, thereby achieving a much more efficient cause-and-effect argument.

More disturbing than that is O'Flaherty's primary concern to show that any uncomplimentary literature written by "outsiders" is nothing more than "lies," while that which flatters is the truth. Thus we find him approving of such writers as Laurence Coughlan, who recognizes "the distinctiveness of the people, a distinctiveness evident to Coughlan in the impressive way they had learned the special skills demanded by the Newfoundland milieu." He similarly approves of William Thoresby, for whereas "the primitive scene would produce sneers about 'savages' from the unsympathetic observers, ... Thoresby's observations are marked by gentleness and fairness." By contrast, "the picture conveyed by Reeves in parts of his book of "poor labouring fishermen,' 'spoiled and devoured' by merchants and 'left wholly at *their* mercy' was a distortion of the truth." And Edward Chappell "is simply

not to be trusted as an authority on any subject," because he pictured Newfoundland "as a remote, peculiar, barbarous, and little known backwater of civilization." Such a distinction is simplistic, for it ignores the acknowledged complexities of travel literature — that many of its techniques are fictional ones and its metaphors are often as truthfully-revealing as its facts.

When O'Flaherty turns his attention to native Newfoundland writers he is on surer ground, but he is still unnecessarily preoccupied with non-literary matters. The reader wishing to gain some sense of the development of a Newfoundland literature will be disappointed. Only in passing do we learn, for example, that *Ottawah, the Last of the Red Indians* was "the first novel set in Newfoundland." Not a literary gem to be sure, but, more important, we never do learn from O'Flaherty's brief discussion of the literature dealing with Beothucks that there were two other novels, much more interesting than *Ottawah*, written about the Beothucks and by a Newfoundlander: Arthur English's *The Vanished Race* (1927) and *Ogygia* (1930).

The reader expecting literary criticism or even an evaluation of the achievement of Newfoundland writers (of whom there are several good ones) will be equally disappointed. Harold Horwood, the best of its present-day writers, we are told, has only managed to provide "a distorted picture of Newfoundland to foreign [Canadian?] readers" and E. J. Pratt had, by migrating to the mainland, discarded "his ancestral claim on the Newfoundland experience." The richness of Newfoundland's literature, then — the evocation of the Newfoundland experience in its ballads, folklore, poetry and novels; the artistic perceptions of such writers as Horwood and Janes; the word-wizardry of Ray Guy — is still, in spite of *The Rock Observed*, a woefully neglected subject.

R. G. MOYLES

RETRIEVING THE PAST

HUGH HOOD, *Reservoir Ravine*. Oberon, n.p.

WILLIAM BAUER, *A Family Album*. Oberon, $15.00; pa. $6.95.

RESERVOIR RAVINE, the third novel in Hugh Hood's projected twelve-volume cycle *The New Age*, moves ahead in time to show us Mathew Goderich, fifty years old, alone, and "in the middle way of the misty ravine ... looking at the fading autumn sky" and trying to locate himself through the re-creation of those decades in Toronto preceding his birth in which his parents met, courted and married. We don't learn that this story of Isabelle and Andrew is Mathew's creation until Chapter Eleven, where he begins to speak of himself in the first person and to shift his attention away from the story into lengthy commentary on design, and the relationships between history, philosophy and narrative.

Mathew, an art historian by trade, is more of an artist and less of a historian here than in the earlier books. Whereas *The Swing in the Garden* and *A New Athens* are dominated throughout by Mathew's humourless and pedantic voice, the story here is presented as if by an omniscient narrator until Chapter Eleven compels us to re-examine the whole and to see it as Mathew's attempt at a complete imaginative identification with the events of his parents' youth, engaged in at a time when his mother alone lives on, solitary in a nursing home. Mathew thinks of both reservoirs and ravines as forms of memory; therefore, *Reservoir Ravine* represents an imaginative act of memory at a double remove. It is an attempt to understand the forces which

have made Mathew what he is by re-creating them in fiction. Yet George Woodcock is surely correct in arguing that Hood is much closer to Balzac than to Proust. The focus is almost entirely on the world out there, not at all on its transformation through the mind of the observer.

The story proceeds through a series of memorable set-pieces: Isabelle, dressed as a boy, attends a Hart House debate on the League of Nations; she and Andrew watch the burning of the money after the Domestic and Foreign Bank of Upper Canada goes bankrupt in 1923; Hal from the 'peg tells them of his involvement in the Winnipeg General Strike of 1919; Andrew proposes to Isabelle in a "magical, sunny cave of ice"; and there is the almost mandatory (in a Hood novel) Catholic marriage ceremony. The static quality, suggesting a grouping of illustrative tableaux rather than the dynamic interaction of characters developing through time that we traditionally associate with the novel, seems to come from Mathew's belief, shared by Hood, that although "events seem linear, pure being isn't linear in any way." In each of these incidents, as in all his writing, Hood integrates personal, national and universal history into a religious design which values each detail both for itself and its contribution to the harmony of the whole. Time is seen as at once linear and spatial, depending on the perspective of the viewer; in Mathew's words: "human history requires a double mode of existence, an eternal state prior to temporal being, and that eternal bliss reintegrated through time."

Reservoir Ravine is not entirely successful in suggesting this double mode of existence. Sometimes Mathew's belief that "no voice is wholly lost" makes him the tedious old bore he suspects he may seem. Hood's awkwardness with sex, with ordinary conversation, and with women repels the reader when involvement is most necessary. Least convincing is the novel's claim that "Canadianism is the seeing-of-man-as-religiously-political." Yet despite these reservations, I find the novel and the series of which it is a part fascinating for their ambitious attempt to place Canadian life within the patterns of Western literary, religious and political traditions and to transform our ways of seeing through fiction.

William Bauer's *A Family Album* is a collection of clever stories which self-consciously play about with point of view and the interactions between fantasy and reality, memory and observation. The stories are artifacts, superficially as obvious and ultimately as mysterious as photos in a family album. "How Babies are Made," an excerpt from a longer work, is the least interesting. The pompous narrator is more involved in coining phrases (like "fleshfiction truthlie") and commenting on the nature of fiction (as in the following: "But what people like to fancy is the appropriate or the expected, giving them clear lines to comprehension, giving the tellers of varnished tales lucid plots, is seldom what transpires") than he is in the lives of his adolescent characters. The five short stories are more successful in engaging interest, but only "What Is Interred With Their Bones" is memorable. The narrator's inquiry into the deaths of two old women, named Annie and Anna, parodies the Canadian fascination for family chronicle and accuses the reader of voyeurism for his desire to enter into the lives of strangers. Easy affirmations about the availability of the past are denied us, as are most of the traditional rewards for reading fiction. This is clearly Bauer's intent, yet it seems self-defeating in this collection.

DIANA BRYDON

AFTER DESCARTES

H. C. ARTMANN, MICHAEL BULLOCK, RIKKI DUCORNET, *Contemporary Surrealist Prose*, vol. I. Intermedia Press, $7.95.

ANDRE BOURASSA, *Surréalisme et littérature québécoise*. L'Etincelle, $8.00.

DESCARTES MIGHT BE turning in his grave, but neither H. C. Artmann, Michael Bullock, nor Rikki Ducornet would care. They might even be perversely happy about it. Since André Bourassa is but a scholar it is hard for anyone to know where he stands. He might be sympathetic to the Prince of Reason, just as he might attempt to persuade him of the virtues of surrealism. He has been down and around the many labyrinths of his hallucinatory creations which, by now, must be more familiar to him than his own home.

Contemporary Surrealist Prose offers us a selection of short narratives by Artmann, Bullock, and Ducornet; *Surréalisme et littérature québécoise* is a survey of surrealism in Quebec and an assessment of its beginnings, developments and achievements. Both the collection of prose poems and the scholarly study are tempting invitations into a bizarre realm where corpses are exquisite, or, if one is to believe Michael Bullock, where pale green voices are powerful enough to cut off birds in flight. Surrealist texts usually aim at enchanting as much as frightening their audience. Ultra-impressionable souls therefore should be discouraged from such reading, and only the *amateurs de sensations fortes* will appreciate its merits: a solitary house, creaky floors and gurgly pipes could be interesting, albeit non-essential props. We are in good company here. The three story-tellers as well as critic-literary historian Bourassa take us up and around the tortuous path of the surrealist imagination.

The fiction writers subtly complement each other. Rikki Ducornet has the wittiest mind, and her "Five stories" exhibit two virtues which rarely coexist in prose poems: humour and a flair for drama. Her narratives make us shudder at the very moment when we explode with laughter — not an easy feat. Michael Bullock's style lacks this razor-like tension but it has other merits; it delves, dredges and seduces — slowly: his tales seem written for thoughtful, pensive and maybe clumsy children who have strokes of genius while they bump into heavy furniture. It is writing which lets us hibernate warmly in our souls and return with flashes of quiet illumination. H. C. Artmann (translated here from the German by Derk Wynand) is the least demanding of all three: his complex constructions unfold with a tighter, mechanical rigour which takes away from the imaginative leaps and somersaults that the other two force on their reader.

Bourassa's historical and critical forays into the world of surrealism in Quebec merit very careful reading, first of all because they clarify the intricate and not often understood ties between surrealism and automatism; secondly, because their author helps us perceive them not as a movement (with a beginning, an end, and tombstones to the glorious dead) but rather as a *manière d'être*, a creativity which will express itself in years to come.

The questions that he raises — what was the role and the place of Quebec artists and poets in the development of surrealist aesthetics — are worth careful consideration. His analysis of the ideological forces at work in surrealist manifestos (the rejection of autocratic forms of government such as Fascism, Stalinism or "Duplessisme") is both perceptive and illuminating. Yet it would have been to Bourassa's advantage to have kept the examination of poetic texts separate from his investigation of the art and literary magazines of this period and from his scrutiny of these writers' interactions,

correspondences, and movements across the map of Europe and North America. Literary history has its place — and not a negligible one — in a work of scholarship. But its virtues do not coexist very happily with the more rigorous demands of criticism, and the book as a whole suffers from this uneasy blend.

In spite of these flaws *Surréalisme et littérature québécoise* offers an incursion into a tantalizing universe. One should not hesitate to chart its course — or follow those devised by *Contemporary Surrealist Prose* — without worrying much about Descartes; he, unfortunately, had too much sense to delight in the wonders of nonsense.

CAROLINE BAYARD

HEART/BODY HARMONY

ANNE LE DRESSAY, *This Body That I Live In.* Turnstone Press, n.p.

ALAN SAFARIK, *The Heart Is Altered.* Blackfish Press, n.p.

GYRIL DABYDEEN, *Heart's Frame.* Vesta, $4.50.

DAVID WALTNER-TOEWS, *The Earth Is One Body.* Turnstone, $5.00.

EACH OF THE FOUR books reviewed here has either "heart" or "body" in its title. After I read them it became clear that this was more than a meaningless coincidence for I discovered that these poets share a remarkably similar attitude. All four writers are conscious of a oneness between self and the world. Their poems give voice to a sense of the integrated wholeness of things which is strongly suggestive of the English romantic poets. *The Earth Is One Body*, the title of Waltner-Toews' book, comes close to summarizing this attitude. They use either the body or the heart, an organism or an organ, as a symbol for an "organic" view of life, but manage to express the view only with varying degrees of success.

Le Dressay's book is a collection of short, personal statements written in a colloquial voice. The pieces often unite intimate self-revelation with a sense of epiphany. "The Window-Washer" is a good example. Noticing a window-washer looking at her makes Le Dressay want to deny that the sight she presents is what she really is: "This isn't me you see here / at this typewriter / doing nothing while you work." In this, the first poem of the collection, she discovers a type of alienation. In many of the subsequent pieces she labours to establish a harmony between what she desires and what is. In "October" and "This Body That I Live In" her manner is not far removed from that of Bliss Carman, the Canadian poet who most strongly stresses a correspondence between mood and environment. In both cases her sadness is reflected in nature: by rain or by "the slow death / of the gentle summer." But the pathetic fallacy remains a cliché. Le Dressay is more successful in "Climbing," a piece which voices the Wordsworthian idea of nature as a moral force:

> the strange feeling halfway up
> that if I leaned back
> or even stood up straight,
> the shale would betray me
> and the valley reach up
> to pluck me from the frowning hill
> for my insolence.

Although one is immediately reminded of *The Prelude*, this is not a mere faded copy of an old master. The vigour and vividness of childhood memories create a suspenseful moment. We see the scene; we feel the tension.

There is one teasing glimpse of another side to her writing in "Midafternoon," where Le Dressay reveals a skill for caricature and satire. This is a power she ought to develop.

In Alan Safarik's view "the heart is altered" by all experience and for him experience includes the immensities of space and the narrowness of the grave. Like every metaphysical poet he can see a direct relationship between micro- and macrocosm because "everything is inside the mind" ("Marijuana Flowers"). At his best Safarik can move with breath-taking swiftness from a personal to a cosmic frame of reference:

> On a blanket in the park they lay
> Two people, lovers by the hour they play
> at being soft shelled creatures
> What talk is this she said moving closer
> He put his arms about her
> And held her tight like the grave.
> Beneath the black treed canopy
> Nothing is moving, yet the wind that sweeps
> the sky of clouds and clear moonlight
> turning the grass white is never ending
>
> ("What There Is Is Never Ending")

Two people engaged in the simple act of love are linked by the imagery to both the finite and the infinite. Suggestions of man's enslavement of death and time ("like the grave," "white" grass) are mingled with hints of timelessness ("soft shelled creatures" whose fossils last eons, the "moonlight" that is "never ending"). In the title poem Safarik presents the cosmos as an organism of which every living thing is a cell:

> Millions of years ago, measured
> by the speeding light, an enormous bomb
> smaller than a molecule
> the heavens are the battered heart
> One creature, call it a creature, moving
> wider and wider with every organism born
> multiplication by death is regeneration
>
> ("The Heart Is Altered")

Where Safarik's heart is "altered" by experience, Cyril Dabydeen's is "framed" by it. The title, *Heart's Frame*, suggests a painting: a heart within a frame. According to Dabydeen we learn and understand through the heart, in other words, through the emotions. The book is divided into three parts. The first section, "Open Spaces," is largely devoted to Dabydeen's exploration of the relationship between "heart" and world. In "A Legend" he puts forth the concept of a force, present in everything, which bids and gives motion to all creation:

> There is a man who knows the seasons
> at his finger tips
> who holds the sky at a tilt
> . . . .
> He's in the bone marrow
> beating in the blood
> he's enshrined
>
> in us all.

He also finds that the heart yearns to escape the isolated individual to find union with another in love:

> heart falls in love
> leaving home
> trembling with doubt
> desperation
> heart wants to leave
> the body
> to begin
> in a world of its own
>
> ("Heart's Frame")

Everything is related. A common impulse dwells in every heart.

The second part of the book is, perhaps, a nod to W. W. E. Ross. The title of this section, "Shapes and Shadows," reminds one of Ross's collected poems entitled *Shapes and Sounds*, and many of the poems are in a Ross-like imagism. This is the weakest section. The poems, mainly descriptive, do not work.

"Tropics," the final part, regains the fine quality of the first. Dabydeen is a native of Guyana and in these poems he returns home. The pieces are deeply personal and usually nostalgic. Like many literary journeys this one is really about the artist's self-discovery:

> we'll go back
> once in a while
> opening our hearts
> not to perfect
> hate — only
> conquering selves
>
> ("Crossing")

Before I leave Dabydeen one question comes to mind. Why is such good poetry stranded in such a poorly prepared book? The paper is so thin and the type so thick and black that one can easily see through a page to the print on the other side. Moreover, the print is smeared in places and the cover is extremely unappealing. David Waltner-Toews' *The Earth Is One Body* is the best of these four books. It possesses a richness of language and image which surpasses the other three. Waltner-Toews is a prairie poet and "The Golden Sea" is an excellent evocation of the Western landscape. Lines like the following make it a likely candidate for future anthologies:

> The golden sea between the shining seas
> overseas the warm bread and steaming
> porridge
> of half the landborne world
>
> is more terrible in its expansive silences
> its white-capped storms
> than the hair-mad Viking conquests
> more demanding of its novices
> than the God of Leviticus

The poem is exciting to read. Most of his other pieces are of comparable quality.

Once again we have a poet who is conscious of an organic oneness underlying all things. The middle section of *The Earth Is One Body* is made up of poems about his travels in Guadaloupe and India and his thoughts on Chile and Palestine. He writes of children being born in the streets of Calcutta, of cutting sugar cane in Guadaloupe, and of torture in Chile. The section's title, "The Common Pain," indicates the oneness of mankind through suffering. Waltner-Toews also asserts the idea of unity on a more personal level in poems such as "Marriage (Metamorphosis)" where he speaks of his wife and himself as becoming one maple, of their rootedness in the prairie soil, and of their change with the seasons.

The seventies have been called the "me" decade. These four books, all written in the last year of that decade, belie this description. They show us four poets who have moved beyond isolated self-involvement to a vision of wholeness and harmony. I don't know if this will be the dominant attitude of the eighties, but it is a good start.

D. PRECOSKY

ENDS OF THINGS

ABRAHAM BOYARSKY, *A Pyramid of Time: Selected Stories.* Porcupine's Quill, $10.95; pa. $5.95.

KENT THOMPSON, *Shotgun And Other Stories.* New Brunswick Chapbooks, $3.00.

IN THESE TWO RECENT collections, Abraham Boyarsky and Kent Thompson reveal their growing facility with the craft and technique of the short story. For the most part, these stories are concrete, carefully made works, deftly bringing brief moments to life, conjuring up precise, memorable images of particular times and neighbourhoods (Montreal and Fredericton).

Thompson sees his "stories as consisting of a series of weights.... I am attempting to structure the story by means of emotional weights." Such a strategy is especially effective in the last two stories, which are linked by a common narrator: it sharpens and refines the nuances of a terrified old man's losing battle with his greatest fear — senility. The collection hosts a wide range of narrative voices and, in the best, the tone is perfectly tailored to the characters. Most are survivors, losers trying to make sense out of confused, tawdry lives in which "nothing adds up," before death or a deeper spiritual malaise overtakes them. Thompson allows them fugitive glimpses of recognition, of their own complicity with despair, degradation, emotional paralysis.

Fredericton is another Canadian City of the End of Things. Characters are caught in moments of transition, locked into games that are about to terminate: the collection is initiated by the drunken bellowings of a man bewailing the failed relationships with his "marvellously obscene," adulterous wife. "There is only one solution.... suicide. Kill self. Hang self." Or shoot self, as the senile narrator of the concluding story, which gives the work its title, discovers as he attempts to commit suicide with "the proper symbol of my life" — a shotgun. What exactly constitutes the end of things fascinates Thompson's characters: "what was in fact *out there* at the end of the river, beyond the sea?" ("Two Photographs"); "Portents. What's on the other side?" ("Shotgun").

Violent, cruel death also circumscribes the Holocaust-haunted world of Boyarsky's *A Pyramid of Time*. Although some of these stories have been published separately, here brief, italicized vignettes exist in undefined, unannounced resonnance with the stories they precede and, at times, seem to upend. The first focuses the entire collection in an image of the ordinary metamorphosing into the nightmarish: standing in the YMHA showers, the Jewish narrator "for a terrifying moment" seems to be in those other horrific showers. The terror is echoed in the final image Boyarsky leaves us with: the narrator standing in front of the kitchen wall-oven, his daughter in his arms. "The association is overwhelming. A cold sweat covers my body and I must hand her quickly to my wife."

The first three stories display Boyarsky's considerable descriptive and evocative powers as he depicts the tortuous growth of a sensitive Jewish boy into "terribly weary" adulthood, into his appointed identity as "the guardian of our memories! ... the avenger of our dead!" The sepia tones of a distant Europe give way to "the delusive sparkle of the Gentile world" of Montreal. These initial linked stories act as a touchstone for subsequent meditations on the inextricable blend of joy and sorrow, happiness and pain that informs Jewish existence. As in Thompson, we are again confronted by survivors — of past memories, of old age, of the Holocaust, of anti-Semitism in Montreal, of assimilation. "I am the son of Auschwitz; I did not survive" says the narrator at one point, ironically discovering the locus of his identity in non-existence: "Only if our oblivions match can we hope to be friends."

What is impressive is the assurance of Boyarsky's writing, the mastery of mood and nuance in a manner combining affection and distance. His prose is engaging, at times beguiling, and one looks forward to more stories from this talented writer.

MICHAEL HURLEY

POLITICS & CULTURE

CLEMENT MOISAN, *Poésie des frontières: étude comparée des poésies canadienne et québécoise*. Hurtubise HMH, n.p.

MICHEL MORIN & CLAUDE BERTRAND, *Le territoire imaginaire de la culture*. Hurtubise HMH, n.p.

ROBERT MAJOR, *Parti Pris: idéologies et littérature*. Hurtubise HMH, n.p.

COMPARATIVE STUDIES of the two literatures of Canada have been rare and not without their difficulties, not the least of which is the mutual political and historical distrust that is registered in the very fact that we seem to accept the separation of *Canadian* and *Quebec* literature. (The existence of Franco-Ontarian or Anglo-Quebec writers does not seem to disturb most comparatists, or specialists.) In his aptly named *Poésie des frontières*, Clément Moisan attempts to cross what he sees as linguistic, cultural, intellectual,

historical and geographic barriers both between and within these distinct literary entities. Explicitly expanding and particularizing the general insights of his 1969 *L'Age de la littérature canadienne*, Moisan divides post-war verse in Canada into three successive stages. This more or less thematic division is developed inductively out of the Quebec context: the inward-turning, alienated isolation of Saint-Denys-Garneau, Grandbois and Hébert becomes the characteristic of a "poésie de la clandestinité." With the collective social and literary movements of the 50's and 60's comes a "poésie de la Résistance," a turning outward to discover the reality of "pays" and the threats to it. The 1970's bring a "poésie de la libération" with its political, intellectual and formal challenging of the *status quo*.

This tripartite structuring of modern Quebec literary history, however, cannot be applied very precisely to English Canadian verse, despite Moisan's sometimes heroic attempts. The "poésie de la clandestinité" would be, he argues, earlier in time, in the work of the McGill Group of the 1920's and 30's. But what is hidden? What is there to be clandestine about here? What emerges from Moisan's description is more a difference than a similarity in both social and literary contexts. And attempts to link very different poets such as Klein, Scott, Livesay, and Smith result in generalizations that might upset at least Smith, who probably never really thought of his work as characterized by "la fougue, une certaine démesure." The common "Résistance" of the second stage is to institutions, we are told. Livesay (again), Page, Layton, Birney, Souster, Nowlan, Avison and Purdy are all grouped together here (though Page, Birney, and Avison are later bumped back to stage one) as poets whose alienation is manifest in their satiric and realistic attacks. The "poésie de la libération" in English Canada reveals a return to the Canadian past, often to its Native tradition. Here we find Cohen, Bowering, Newlove, and Atwood (though one is tempted to reclaim Purdy and Birney from the preceding stage). Moisan adds a fourth stage to account for the "counter-culture" to whom language is supremely important. He appears to find this truly revolutionary and labels it baroque. Here he couples two rather strange bedfellows —mythopoeic poetry and concrete verse experimentation.

This four-part historical classification sits more easily on the "Quebec" literature than on the "Canadian." The conclusions arrived at by the comparisons are, as Moisan himself admits, not new. Their Atwoodian character has made them now commonplaces: both literatures are concerned with identity and survival and are therefore full of victims and martyrs. Both suffer from a garrison mentality. What is potentially more original is Moisan's methodological decision to compare pairs of poets, sometimes those already chosen for pairing by *Ellipse*. There is deliberately no common method within this comparative structure, freeing the author to find the level of discussion most appropriate to the pair under consideration. For example, it is the theme of violence that links Paul-Marie Lapointe and Irving Layton, despite their differences of tone. Chamberland and Newlove are linked by a common debt to Ginsberg and entire poems are printed together to show similarities. With Birney and Grandbois, it is upon a common relation of man to nature as revealed in shared images of sea, waves, grass, roots, flowers, and so on, that are based what Moisan calls "étonnantes parentés" between the poets.

This last example points to the main problem of this kind of comparison, for the generality and commonplace quality of the images and themes both tend to undermine the claim of surprising inter-

relations. Newlove and Chamberland both use the image of the caverns of the earth, but so do many other poets. That all Canadian and Quebec poets seem to revel in dichotomies such as life/death and dream/reality is not particularly surprising, since most poets in most times and places have done so as well. The same problem arises in Moisan's claims for the particular stylistic traits in both literatures — "les contrastes abondants, les fréquents parallélismes de termes plus ou moins équivalents ou synonymes et les articulations grammaticales." The questionable value of such overgeneral statements as the one about both Souster and Miron's verse — that "les métaphores abondent chez l'un et l'autre" — tends to work against the author's real insights, which are often into significant differences between poets (such as the same two writers' opposite relation to the collectivity).

One of the problems for readers who are less familiar with the poets' works than Moisan is his method of extracting lines from their contexts. The result is that the reader must take the author's word for what often appear as "unproved" judgments, such as the assertion that two extrapolated lines (Chamberland's "hors du monde saurions-nous encore nous aimer" and Newlove's "you would have loved yourself if others had") are simply deemed "*faussement* poétiques." Sometimes connections between poets appear almost arbitrary: three lines from Lalonde ("Nous allons au bout de la nuit / jusqu'à la plus parfaite étreinte / qui nous détruise") are said to have "leur résonance" in Atwood's "It seems I am always moving."

The fact that Moisan's most interesting remarks are about differences between Quebec and Canadian literature may be revealing. Perhaps the French heritage of Quebec is a cultural as well as linguistic force to be reckoned with. This, in fact,

is the context in which Michel Morin and Claude Bertrand situate their philosophical and ideological investigation into "le territoire imaginaire de la culture," the title of their book. Out of a moribund French, European culture, condemned to repetitive formalism, sterile intellectual fashions, and endless political debates, can rise the new French culture of Quebec. The authors claim to write, not from any theoretical bias, but from the concrete experience of living in the unique part of North America that is Quebec and which constitutes an "impensé" — that is, an openness to cultural possibilities that France and Europe today cannot have, since their "imaginary space" has been reduced by world wars and by the two restrictive ideologies of nazism and socialism.

However, the authors ultimately end by denying even this attenuated French connection, urging Quebec to refuse to conform to the concept of success (as a nation) of what is now a dying European society. Quebec should accept its "marginal," dependent past and present in order to build a new culture. The premise here is that a real culture is more important than political independence. Without the former, the latter will have no "real resonance" in the people. The French Republic is the example given of a legal social contract that resulted from a Revolution which was only made possible by profound cultural changes that preceded it. The Jews are cited as proof that a social contract and a physical territory are not necessary for a culture to exist. It is the "imaginary territory" of the title that is important.

The political message of this book is clear: the energies spent on political independence are misplaced because Quebec has not yet achieved a culture that could sustain social contract. Up to now Quebec culture has been caught in what the authors call an "aesthetic of impotence," trapped "dans des tentatives de définition d'elle-même, d'auto-représentation qui la vouent à une désespérance sans issue quant à son isolement, sa précarité, son délaissement." The same concerns that Moisan has isolated in Quebec verse are here perceived as what actually have worked to *block* cultural development.

Morin and Bertrand feel that culture is only created by individuals working in all fields, not by reductive collectivities. It was the individual will, the will of the people, that was born of the Quiet Revolution; it was not a new nationalism which would subject the individual to the State, as the old nationalism has subjected him to Church and family. This doctrine of cultural liberalism is used to explain what the authors see as the result —and hope— of November 15th: writers have been forced out of their roles as spokesman for the people and have had to face "la pure angoisse de la création en tant que simples individus." Out of this turning inward will come, they hope, a freeing of Quebec culture from the confines of territorial and identity concerns that are only European remnants.

The positive nature of this hope in individual action is set against the more evident need for Quebec to define itself against "l'autre" in a negative way: to see itself collectively as a colony, a victim of someone else. This theory provides an interesting perspective from which to view the "Résistance" work of the *Parti Pris* group and their collective attempt to decolonialize Quebec and its literature. For Morin and Bertrand, these writers are still prey to the "aesthetic of impotence." However, Robert Major's award-winning study, *Parti Pris: idéologies et littérature*, provides a fuller base of data upon which to evaluate such a claim. He attempts here to go beyond Lise Gauvin's 1975 *Parti pris littéraire* in scope and degree of analysis. In this he suceeds, for

he manages to include almost all the journal's articles plus all the books published in his discussion of the common denominators on the levels of theme (*misérabilisme*), style, tone, and formal self-consciousness. All of these elements are in turn discussed in relation to the group's ideology.

Major's focus is on the tension he perceives between the journal's political objectives toward action and the fact that its founders (Brochu, Chamberland, Major, Piotte) were essentially literary writers. In effect, this action/art tension both nourished their art and gave them a political "mauvaise conscience." The four parts of Major's book reflect this focus, as does his title. The first part is a review of the ideological theories of the journal: it claimed to be marxist and revolutionary, but in practice it mixed its marxism with both Sartrean existentialism and the socialist theories of decolonialization espoused by writers like Memmi and Fanon. Aiming at nothing less than a radical reform of Quebec reality, *Parti Pris* wanted to be a centre for both leftist intellectuals and the proletariat. Hence its early links with the Mouvement de libération populaire.

The second section studies the literary results of this view of Quebec colonialized society. The editors tried to play down their personal literary orientation and focus instead on political action, even to the point of denouncing literature. Though bourgeois, they also tried to repudiate their class origins. In literary terms this involved *engagement* as an act of unveiling Quebec reality with the hope that the shock of this decomposition would affect the comfortable bourgeois society — which was, as Major shrewdly notes, the main readership of *Parti Pris*. Although the presentation of sordid social and linguistic (*joual*) reality was not to be an end in itself, Major convincingly argues that the shock value (in terms of the official ideology) was rather unsubtle, given the subtlety with which that ideology itself operates. He also criticizes the group's lack of theoretical cohesion, but his main point is that there is a contradiction between their history of the impossibility of revolutionary literature in a colonialized society and their own continued writing and publishing.

Major reserves his main attack for the literary criticism of the journal. From his long and detailed analysis of the official critics, only André Brochu comes out with any credibility. This is doubly damning because Brochu was the first, the least prolific, and the least accepted. Major values him, however, for his ability to achieve in his criticism what he sees as the European "thematic" critics' integration of phenomenology and the social sciences into literary analysis while remaining an "immanent" textual critic. The others — Euvrard, Duguay, Maheu — have little to recommend them, by Major's standards. Usually it is occasional contributors such as Aquin or Desrosiers who more cogently formalize both the theory and praxis of the group.

The last part of the book reviews the works published by *Parti Pris*, works which are important, as Moisan saw, in the literary history of Quebec. Luckily these works were not the political tracts their editors planned them to be. Major carefully displays both the heterogeneity and the common denominators of the collections. The much discussed, but actually little used, *joual* is particularly well treated here, as Major analyzes the semantic, phonetic, and syntactic levels of its contesting of linguistic norms. He then evaluates its success as limited — both as an ideological symbol and as a shock inducer. The dangers of phoneticizing language do not escape Major. As Hubert Aquin had pointed out, the sociocultural, extra-literary intent of *joual* is

ultimately a threat to literature, and to communication and action.

Major's final evaluation of the achievement of *Parti Pris* is an ambivalent one. With hindsight he can lament its naïveté in thinking that it alone could bring to Quebec the revolutions of Africa, Asia, and South America. His concluding words are these: "malgré ses grandes qualités, malgré ses incontestables réussites, et malgré son enthousiasme communicatif, *Parti pris* rend triste. Comme tellement d'autres aventures québécoises, il aura manqué de souffle, il n'aura pas su aller au bout de ses virtualités et se sera sabordé lui-même avant d'avoir donné sa pleine mesure."

The fact that the journal lasted from October 1963 to the summer of 1968 should be enough to assure its place and significance in Quebec cultural history. But the other fact, that it then disintegrated before its ideals were even close, might give support to Morin and Bertrand's thesis of the unreadiness of Quebec culture, despite its potential. Moisan too felt that Quebec was not yet ready to enter "l'ère révolutionnaire." In any event, we cannot, it would seem, discuss Québécois literature apart from its ideological and cultural context. Perhaps this signals a real difference in our two cultures, a difference whose implications go well beyond comparative literary interests.

LINDA HUTCHEON

** JOHN KENDLE. *John Bracken: A Political Biography.* Univ. of Toronto Press, $17.50. John Bracken has always held an insecure position in Canadian history: a high place among minor politicos, but no place at all among the notable figures of our political past. A good farmer, a sound agronomist, a devoted hypochondriac, he entered the provincial field as the half-willingly co-opted leader of the UFM when it unexpectedly and embarrassingly gained power in Manitoba in the 1920's, and as a local premier he was shrewd and on the whole successful. But always he was the man to fill in where no good rival existed, and just as the inexperienced farmers of the UFM picked a professor of agriculture who happened to be willing, so, when the federal Tories were in the leaderless wilderness in 1942, Bracken was drafted to guide them. Changing the name of the party he briefly led, to *Progressive* Conservative, was his only lasting achievement; otherwise he was a disastrously weak leader, and vanished in 1948 without regret on any side. It would be hard in the best of circumstances for a biographer to make much out of Bracken. But the best of circumstances did not exist for John Kendle when he rashly elected to write *John Bracken: A Political Biography*, since most of the important personal papers have been lost or destroyed, and Kendle was forced to write a biography mainly on the basis of Bracken's public history. The result is a book heavily padded with political facts of dubious biographical importance and little historical interest. Bracken — a genuine populist somewhat rotted by power — might have been a good subject for a brief monograph like the 100-page volumes of the University of Toronto Press's unfortunately abandoned Canadian Biographical Studies; there is certainly not enough of him to justify Kendle's full-sized Life, which notes and other apparatus swell out to 318 pages, all but a few of them dutiful and dull.

G.W.

*** PIERRE SAVARD, *Aspects du catholicisme canadien-français au XIX^e siècle.* Fides, n.p. Savard's essays cover a range of topics, from political ultramontanism to private devotions to Ste. Philomène, and from parish register nomenclature to the significance of Jules-Paul Tardivel. Savard writes clearly, and his work provides an informative background to studies of 19th century literary attitudes in Québec.

W.N.

opinions and notes

VAN TOORN & TIBULLUS

THE ART OF TRANSPOSITION, as opposed to that of translation, has its own exigencies, the first of which is a Janus-like double sensitivity. Responsive to the original from which he works, the transposer must also be attuned to the temper of his times. The tension between these two poetic ideals is all the tauter if the original belongs to an ancient culture, as it does in the case of Montreal poet Peter Van Toorn's "Elegy on War: Invention of the Sword" (*In Guildenstern Country*, 1973). At the same time, the transposition must be a successful poem — or what is the point? Otherwise we should talk of ponies, cribs, and glosses.

The source text consists of the first fourteen lines in the last elegy of the well-known sequence Tibullus devoted to Delia (I, 10). Considered by some to be his earliest elegy, possibly written when he was as young as seventeen, its first lines epitomize the bucolic themes which are the poet's hallmark. For this reason, all debate about date of composition aside, this poem caps off the Delia sequence with a flourish, though there are no references to eroticism at all. Instead, the poet's persona soliloquizes upon the threat of war and his own impending conscription into the 31 B.C. campaign in Aquitaine. Stock allusions to classical culture pervade these lines: the Golden Age, the carefree shepherd with his flocks, the soldier forged of iron, the common cup. Van Toorn has no trouble dealing with these potential anachronisms. He portrays the past in terms of a thoroughly modern psychology. Rather than a line-for-line correlation of texts, there is a striking conflation of past and present situation.

How far Van Toorn deviates from his source is not apparent until two-thirds through his own 29-line poem. Up to then, approximately two lines of English match every one of Latin, a good average given the density of elegiac distich. He does not duplicate the alternating hexameters and pentameters of the Latin, though he does hold to a steady compromise of eleven syllables with variably shifting accents. The extra line in English allows him space to catch up and then to supplement the original. *Quis fuit horrendos primus qui protulit enses*? ("Who was he who first made terrible swords?") thus becomes:

> Who was he, this first butcher and
> weaponmaker
> who simplified dying and growing up for
> a boy?

The notion of a boy soldier-to-be and the hint at childhood sword-fight weapon-training (which follows in line five) would have been inappropriate in classical culture, even for a pacifist like Tibullus. In the early 1970's when debate raged over military toys and news reports on Vietnam beamed in across the Canadian border, it made sense.

By the same process of poetic extrapolation, Van Toorn transmutes the second line *quam ferus et vere ferreus ille fuit* ("how savage, as if truly forged from iron, he was") into:

> He must have been old and grisly, this first
> soldier,
> (poured in the same mould as his pig-iron
> sword)
> forgetting to patent the world's most
> patented toy.

Even in these early lines when there is a relative correspondence between original and transposition, Van Toorn takes liberties which distinguish his poem from translation proper. Where Tibullus has

dirae mortis ("grisly death"), Van Toorn has his *soldier* "old and grisly." Literalists would here insist that he misdeclined *dirus, -a, -um.* What has happened is that Van Toorn took a hint, either from the original or from a translation he studied. "Grisly" is a hard word to forget. The subsequent "his armlong blade was soon tooled into a cold / killing machine" subsumes Tibullus' "a quicker road to grisly death was opened." Van Toorn's goal is a metamorphosis of the Latin, terse and balanced as it is, into a contemporary vernacular flavoured with the disaffection and cynicism of the early seventies.

By the same logic, *Nos ad mala nostra / vertimus in saevas quod dedit ille feras* ("to our misfortune we pervert what he intended for wild beasts") translates:

> Old fool, probably forged it for hacking up wood,
> or butchering bears; and no one understood —
> till there was a market for it.

Though Van Toorn updates the idiom and substitutes an occasionally incongruous item here or there (like that bear), he does not remove his poem from its Latin setting. He is after bigger game. His unwilling conscript speaks the lingo of our times, but allusions to classical mythology poke through. The ideal of the Golden Age was the form primitivism took in classical culture. Elsewhere, Tibullus referred explicitly to that tacit mythic structure (I, 3; II, 3), and his reader needed no footnotes. According to Hesiod, the Golden Age of Saturn was followed by four others culminating in the Iron Age of Jove, characterized by endless strife and turmoil. Pastoralism was a common Roman literary pose, but Tibullus was the most anti-military poet, the one least entranced by the imperial adventures of the dying Republic. His family had been partially dispossessed of its holdings when the government confiscated land in favour of veterans. The myth of a Golden Age particularly appealed to him and his readers well understood that *divitis hoc vitium est auri, nec bella fuerunt* ("this is the vice of precious gold") was more than another statement of the adage familiar to us as "gold is the root of all evil." Greed for gold motivated Hesiod's Jovian Iron Age, whereas in the Saturnian Golden Age swords would not be turned even upon beast, let alone man. Van Toorn must do some explaining to convey this deep-seated myth, but does it well:

> I suppose brains are to blame —
> of this Age of Iron with its manic drive for gold.
> For long ago there were no wars; and no weapon-
> makers. Our food was served up in beechwood bowls.
> Those days even a herdsman could safely bed down
> among his slugcoloured flocks and claim day's work
> without reporting to ramparts, forts and foxholes.

Beechwood was a token of the simplicity of life in pre-imperial Rome before the advent of metal cups and utensils. The shepherd with his flocks was a commonplace of Latin verse. Van Toorn enlivens it with his bizarre "slugcoloured" sheep, which are "variegated" in the original (*varias oves*). In the next line he adds "foxhole" to Tibullus' list of military paraphernalia, palisades and citadels (*non arces, non vallus erta*).

Up to this point we have translation, loose as it may be. But thirteen lines of English remain, and only four of Latin. They read like a bare synopsis of what is to come:

> *tunc mihi vita foret, vulgi nec tristia nossem*
> *arma nec audissem corde micante tubam.*
> *nunc ad bella trahor, et iam quis forsitan hostis*
> *haesura in nostro tela gerit latere.*

A pedestrian literal translation will show how admirably concise the Latin is, but not entirely why Van Toorn took so many lines to transmit the essence of those four:

> That would have been the life for me,
> having never known
> grim war and vulgar troops, never heard,
> heart pounding, the bugle blare.
> Now I'm drawn off to war and perhaps
> some foe
> already bears the arm that will stick in
> my side.

The thirteen lines which correspond are of a different order than those which precede them. We are treated to an intense visualization of martial life depicted in an idiom much our own and with no antecedents in Tibullus:

> And this insanity — for years on end; stuck
> far from home, only one song in your head:
> your life made lousy by bum gear, piles, pot
> luck
> and the endless bungling of bureaucrats, the
> sweat
> pouring down at the sound of each bugle
> call.

In this passage in fact there are only two images from the Latin, and each plays a pivotal role in an entirely new poetic strategy. Van Toorn lends a new voice to the speaker, and a new temporal frame.

The subject of this monologue was originally the first weapon-maker; then the subject became the rigours and clamour of military life as contrasted with the bucolic calm of the shepherd's. Now, at the bugle call, the scene shifts to the immediate present. The speaker hallucinates a hypothetical weapon-maker behind enemy lines, Tibullus' foe bearing arms (*hostis*). Speculation about the past dissolves at the ominous sound of a bugle "blasting us out for a roll call / right now." The foe bearing arms becomes another ordinary joe caught up in Iron Age logic. The poem concludes:

> Just think of it: some energetic jerk
> on the other side's probably polishing blades.
> Maybe just for the sake of doing some work.
> Chances are one of them is going to stay
> behind and rust away in my guts one of
> these days.

In retrospect, this is on a straight line of thought from the pig-iron sword, but what was precise in the Latin is breathtaking in the English. Each language has its genius. We cannot expect original and even translation to coincide at every point. The distinction between translation and transposition is a matter of degree, but is best defined in terms of total poetic strategy, here the decision to make the bugle call concrete and to have it waken the speaker from his reverie and thought. Van Toorn drew upon the same mould Tibullus used, upon recognizable lines, upon his sequence of ideas and his climactic image. But he altered the temporal frame of the poem and thereby invigorated a model which would have been flat and abstract in direct translation.

G. M. LANG

CANADIAN LITERATURE IN ITALY

PERHAPS BECAUSE THEY first encountered Canada in the pages of Marco Polo's *Milione*,[1] the Italians have long regarded it as a land of myth, a snowbound maw into which many of their compatriots have disappeared, "un nuovo minotauro oltremarino" — "a new minotaur beyond the sea," in the words of Mario Praz.[2]

Praz's 1936 essay was long one of the few serious, if brief, considerations of Canadian culture written by an Italian critic, although it is significant that the essay reviewed a travel account with the deadly title *Troppo grano sotto la neve* — "Too Much Grain Beneath the Snow." Not until the mid-1970's, with Raimondo Luraghi's courses on Canadian History at

the University of Genoa (appropriately the native city of Giovanni Caboto), and Giovanna Capone's seminar on Canadian literature at Bologna (1976), did Canadian culture emerge as a field of study in Italy, but since then the growth has been rapid.[3] In the same year that Professor Capone was teaching Canadian literature at Bologna, Giovanni Bonanno was offering a seminar on Canadian history at the University of Messina (Sicily), which will host, in March of 1981, the fourth congress of Canadian studies. The first of these took place in Bologna in 1977, at which the Associazione italiana di studi canadesi / Italian Association for Canadian Studies was founded, with Professor Alfredo Rizzardi (director of English and American studies at Bologna) as its president, and historian Luca Codignola (Pisa) as its secretary. (Codignola is currently engaged in a reconstruction of seventeenth-century Canadian history from documents which have hitherto lain dormant in the Vatican libraries.)

The second of these congresses was held in Pisa in 1978, which year also saw the publication of Profesor Capone's *Canada: il villaggio della terra*;[4] *Canadiana: aspetti della storia e della letteratura canadese*[5] (edited by Codignola); and the first (and so far only) number of the review *Argomenti canadesi*.[6] Professor Capone's book is intended as an introduction, which purpose it fulfils ably, while also providing a number of insights into our literature, many of which focus on the land as a major symbol (the internalization of landscape and its reformulation as inscape; the wilderness/madness equation) while stressing the ambiguity of this symbolism, the land being at once source of identity and locus of annihilation. Pratt, Layton, Cohen, Atwood, MacLennan, Richler, Laurence, and Frye are discussed, and there is a noteworthy chapter on McLuhan dealing with his literary criticism and with his debt to Harold Innis. The essays in *Canadiana* relate to aspects of history (colonisation, the Seven Years' War, the Social Gospel movement) and literature; of the literary essays, Claudio Gorlier's on Atwood's fiction, and Pasquale Jannini's note on Apollinaire's interest in the poetry of Emile Nelligan, address the specialist, while Bonanno's on Hugh MacLennan, and Clément Moisan's, which compares contemporary anglo- and franco-Canadian poetry, are of an introductory nature.

In 1979, Northrop Frye's lecture-tour of Italy (ignominiously reported by the Canadian press) coincided with the third congress, held in Urbino; there, as elsewhere, Frye was received enthusiastically. Although Frye does not present himself as a purveyor of Canadian culture, the great respect in which he is held in Italy — an interview with him in Rome was broadcast during prime time on the national television network — has led to inquiries into the culture from which he emerges, although the connection between Frye's "international" approach to literature and his *canadesità* has not been perceived clearly, I think, given the attempts to define the ethos of Canadian writing in exclusive, rather than inclusive, terms.

The other and more traditional avenue of approach to Canadian studies has been through the study of anglophone literatures, and, in fact, "Canadian" literature in Italy has often meant anglo-Canadian (Torontonian, dare I say), although Tremblay and Blais, for example, have been studied as part of the francophone phenomenon. Clearly, the interest in Canadian literature is academic; our literature has not enjoyed a great public success in Italy. By way of contrast, when we in North America 'discovered' Latin-American literature — Borges, Cortazar, Marquez, Vargas Llosa, Lezama Lima — the interest passed quickly from the academy to the best-seller lists, with, of

course, the help of a number of fine translators. Few works of Canadian literature have been translated into Italian (Atwood's *Edible Woman*, Layton's *The Cold Green Element*, and Cohen's *The Favorite Game* comprise the chief examples) and the translations have not been of uniformly high quality. As I browse through the bookstores in Padua (where I am giving seminars in Canadian literature at the graduating and graduate levels), the Canadian titles most in evidence are translations of McLuhan and Frye, although I did find an edition of *Whiteoak Harvest* which had been on the shelf these forty-odd years. This paucity of titles points to an apparent lack of interest on the part of Canadian publishers and booksellers in the European market. (Professor Capone showed me a letter from Blackwell's stating they could not supply a number of books because they "Do Not Have Canadian Rights.") The detrimental effect of this situation on Canadian studies in Italy (and elsewhere, I am sure) cannot be overstated; this is where the Canadian government, which has been very active in the promotion of Canadian studies in Italy, can use its position and power to greatest advantage.

The Italian view of Canadian literature readily perceives its cosmopolitan element, as Giose Rimanelli indicated in these pages fifteen years ago,[7] and perhaps the most important aspect of Canadian studies in Italy will be to make us more aware of the extent to which our literature participates in literary tradition. Canada's eastern limit is the Terra Nova on which Giovanni Caboto (and not John Cabot, as I was taught in high school) was the "first to plant / ... the Lion of St. Mark's beside the Royal Jack,"[8] in the words of Filippo Salvatore, and its western-most province contains a large parkland named after Garibaldi. Its culture surely must be seen as an epoch in what Dennis Duffy has most suggestively called "a Judaeo-Christian, Western, world-imperial structure, one of whose final waves crashed so deafeningly upon these shores."[9] An aspect of this heterogeneous element in our culture is defined by the literary relations between Canada and Italy, as seen, for example, in the troops of Italy found in James De Mille's *The Dodge Club; or, Italy in 1859*, Mazo De La Roche's *Lark Ascending*, and Callaghan's *A Passion in Rome*; in the Italian influence evident in the novels of Frederick Philip Grove; in the metacritical status *The Second Scroll* bears to the *Divina commedia*; in the confluence of nationalities in F. G. Paci's *The Italians*, and so on. It is interesting, in this context, that Frye's recent reference to the leviathan[10] as one of the major metaphors through which Canadian literature has articulated itself coincides, at the level of myth, with the labyrinth that Praz suggested was central to an understanding of our culture. In their common pursuit, both critics imply that through an understanding of the mythical level of our literature we can perceive its identity, which is another way of affirming that one can successfully study literature from a centre that is fundamentally Canadian.

NOTES

1 " 'Only the Canadian archipelago can be meant,' " according to Tryggvi J. Oleson, by Polo's references to the land of the Gerfalcons. See *Early Voyages and Northern Approaches 1000-1632* (1963), as quoted by John Robert Colombo, *Colombo's Canadian Quotations* (Edmonton: Hurtig, 1974), 479-80 s.v. Polo, Marco.

2 Mario Praz, "Il Canadà," *Cronache letterarie anglosassoni II: cronache inglesi e americane* (Roma: Edizioni di storia e letteratura, 1951), p. 280. The essay, dated 1936, reviews G. G. Napolitano, *Troppo grano sotto la neve: un inverno al Canadà,*

con una visita a Ford (n.p.: Ceschina, n.d.).

[3] For an overview of Canadian studies in Italy, see Luca Codignola, "Gli studi canadesi in Italia," *Atti del I congresso internazionale di storia americana* (Genova: Tilgher (1978), 225-33. See also Damiano Pietropaolo, "The Bologna Connection: An Italian Love Affair with Canadian Writing," in *Saturday Night*, November 1979, pp. 65-68.

[4] Giovanna Capone, *Canada: il villaggio della terra: letteratura canadese di lingua inglese* (Bologna: Patron, 1978). The title, "the village of the land," alludes to Oliver Goldsmith's *The Rising Village* (1825). Capone's book is reviewed by Giovanna Franci in "Letteratura anglo-canadese," *Il Verri*, 6, No. 11 (1978), 161-64.

[5] Luca Codignola, ed., *Canadiana: aspetti della storia e della letteratura canadese* (Venezia: Marsilio, 1978).

[6] *Argomenti canadesi: letteratura canadese di lingua inglese.* A useful feature of this first number is the list of graduating theses (those written for the equivalent of our B.A.) on Canadian topics. The journal also contains articles (in translation) by Frye, Woodcock, Bissell and Rubin, and interviews with McLuhan and Atwood.

[7] Giose Rimanelli, "Canadian Literature: An Italian View," *Canadian Literature*, No. 21 (1964), p. 20.

[8] Filippo Salvatore, "Three Poems for Giovanni Caboto," in *Roman Candles: An Anthology of Poems by Seventeen Italo-Canadian Poets* (Toronto: Hounslow Press, 1978), p. 14.

[9] Denis Duffy, "George Woodcock: Voyager of Liberty," *Canadian Literature*, No. 83 (1979), p. 158.

[10] "The image of being swallowed by the leviathan is an almost inevitable one for Canada: the whole process of coming to the country by ship from Europe, through the Strait of Belle Isle and the Gulf of St. Lawrence and then up the great river, suggests it." See Northrop Frye, "Haunted by Lack of Ghosts: Some Patterns in the Imagery of Canadian Poetry," *The Canadian Imagination*, ed. David Staines (Cambridge, Mass./ London: Harvard Univ. Press, 1977), pp. 22-45.

RICHARD A. CAVELL

ON A. J. M. SMITH

THE EMERGENCE of a clearly defined Canadian literary tradition is so recent that we have actually lived among our classical writers. A. J. M. Smith, who died on November 21, 1980, was one of the earliest of them. From 1924 when, as a student, he began to edit the *McGill Literary Supplement*, he was a moving force in the emergence of a manifestly native poetry and, later, of a distinctive Canadian school of criticism. And until the chronic illnesses he suffered in the late 1970's made him withdraw from active involvement, he remained a force in our literary life, even though from 1936 he was teaching in the United States and returning only in summers to his Canadian home at Magog in the Eastern Townships.

Arthur Smith did not publish his first book of verse, *News of the Phoenix*, until 1943, the same year as he brought out that historic compilation, *The Book of Canadian Poetry*. But this was more an indication of the difficulty of publishing anything during the depression years than of a failure of Smith's work to gain recognition, abroad as well as at home. In England, during the 1930's, a decade or so before I returned to Canada, he was the first Canadian poet, apart from Robert Service, whose work I encountered. We appeared together in the most prestigious English poetry magazines of the period, *New Verse* and *Twentieth Century Verse*, and, as Ralph Gustafson has observed, we were the only Canadians to do so.

I did not encounter Arthur Smith at that time, but in 1958 when I was preparing to launch *Canadian Literature*, I wrote to him, and he immediately sent a fine essay on Duncan Campbell Scott which appeared in the first number of this journal. From that time, through the 1960's, he contributed at regular inter-

vals, seminal essays on general critical themes and fine sharp studies of individual poets — Earle Birney, F. R. Scott, Anne Wilkinson, P. K. Page. He also submitted the rejected preface which he had written in 1936 for the pioneer anthology of modern Canadian poetry, *New Provinces*, so that in 1965 it at last saw the light of print and seemed as timely as it would have been if Frank Scott — his fellow editor of *New Provinces* — had agreed to use it nearly thirty years before.

When Smith finally collected his critical essays and published them as *Towards a View of Canadian Letters* in 1973, almost half the pieces dating from 1959 and after (8 out of 17) had first appeared in *Canadian Literature*. Eli Mandel once remarked to me that the emergence of *Canadian Literature* had in fact brought Smith back to criticism by giving him a journal for which he could write major essays with the assurance of publication, and the degree of stimulation produced by the association is perhaps shown by another figure: out of the 23 critical pieces Smith chose to collect in *Towards a View* . . . , only 6 were written before 1959. In other words, Smith's career as an overt critic largely coincided with the first decade or so of *Canadian Literature*, and the very title of one of his best essays, "Eclectic Detachment" suggested a critical viewpoint very similar to that held by the first editor of the journal.

It may seem that my initial emphasis on Smith as a critic diverts attention from his two other roles, as poet and as anthologist. But I believe the three personae of Arthur Smith were very closely related, and I can think of few truer examples than A.J.M. of the Critic as Artist, which can always of course be inverted into the concept of the Artist as Critic.

One of my discoveries as a literary editor in Canada has been the closeness of the relationship, in our world of writing, between the poet and the critic. The best criticism written in Canada has usually been by poets discussing other poets, and this, I think, derives from the fact that poets highly conscious of their writing as craft, as many Canadian poets tend to be, develop in the balancing of intuitive and intellectual elements a very sharp self-critical sense which they can then apply to the work of others, as poets like Margaret Atwood and Doug Jones and Roy Daniells have done just as ably as A. J. M. Smith.

And A. J. M. Smith, I would say, in all his roles remained the critic, even though at times he was the critic self-transcendant. Thus in his poetry we do indeed find an awareness of the land which he shared with almost all the notable contemporary Canadian poets. He declared his intent:

> To hold in a verse as austere
> As the spirit of prairie and river,
> Lonely, unbuyable, dear,
> The North, as a deed and for ever.

Yet one never finds in his verse either the kind of topographical inventory that often appears in Birney or Gustafson or the kind of immersion in landscape practiced by Purdy or Zieroth. Proceeding from imagism, he abstracts elements from the Canadian scene, but the result, as a poem, is less descriptive than mythological, creating a new landscape of the imagination, as in what is perhaps his most celebrated poem, "The Lonely Land," with its curiously diembodied talk of "a beauty / of dissonance / this resonance / of stony strand / this smoky sky / curled over a black pine. . . ."

And in fact, of course, the greater part of A.J.M.'s poetry has little to do with the Canadian land, moving as it does into areas of literary contrivance and conceit which show Smith recognizing that even if literature derives from experience, the experience of a literary man is likely to be that of books. And so, like the great moderns who preceded him, such as Eliot and

Joyce and Pound, we find, as I remarked a decade ago in *Odysseus Ever Returning*, that

> Smith resorts to those sublime forms of literary criticism — the only fully creative ones: the parody, the translation (there are excellent renderings of Gautier and Mallarmé), the deliberate pastiche (the "Souvenir du Tempus Perdu" written for Leon Edel), and the tribute "in the manner of" (finely rendered in "To Henry Vaughan"). All these are more than feats of imitative virtuosity; they are the empathetic approaches of a poet who can, when he so desires, be resoundingly himself.

Certainly, as an anthologist, Smith's role was overwhelmingly critical. In *The Book of Canadian Poetry* he did not merely make a selection of what he thought had been the best poems written by Canadians. His anthology, accompanied by notes on each poet and by a superb 36-page critical-historical introduction, not only selected earlier poets who had written under the influence of mainly British models, but also picked the poets alive at the time of compilation (and they filled more than half the book) with such astuteness that today, nearly forty years later, we accept most of them as significant poets in our own terms. Smith, in other words, established a chart and a canon of Canadian poetry from its beginnings that have been little changed by the efforts of later critics and literary historians. In his later anthologies, the *Oxford Book of Canadian Verse* (1960) and *Modern Canadian Verse* (1970) he updated his selection and broadened his chart to include the new poets of the 1950's and 1960's, both English and French, and did so with such a true ear that both collections take their places as seminal examples of criticism by selection, as well as readable collections of verse.

But beyond the impressive scholar and critic, the meticulous craftsman in verse who worked his lines to the last safe moment of polishing, there also stood the poet concerned with the great themes of life and death, and aware of the darker shapes within the glass —

> shadows I have seen, of me deemed deeper
> That backed on nothing in the horrid air.

I met Arthur Smith perhaps four times during our twenty years of association, and our friendship developed almost entirely by letters. I was indebted to his help and advice when I started *Canadian Literature* and supported by his interest throughout, and by the warmth and concern that continued even when, in later years, he ceased to contribute. I have always treasured the fact that, as a token of his friendship, he honoured me with the dedication of *Toward a View of Canadian Letters*. I think he viewed the sickness and misfortune of his later years, the death of his wife and his own impending death, with the kind of stoicism that was the other side to the restrain and balance of his poetry, and I am reminded that he closed his *Collected Poems* with an "Epitaph" he doubtless accepted for himself:

> Weep not on this quiet stone,
> I, embedded here,
> Where sturdy roots divide the bone
> And tendrils split a hair,
> Bespeak you comfort of the grass
> That is embodied me,
> Which as I am, not as I was,
> Would choose to be.

GEORGE WOODCOCK

ON THE VERGE

**** EDGAR CHRISTIAN, *Death in the Barren Ground*, ed. George Whalley. Oberon Press, $15.00; pa. $6.95. Many years ago George Whalley wrote a memorable radio documentary which he called "Death in the Barren Ground," about the events that led the northern traveller and his two companions to perish of starvation on the Thelon River during the winter of 1926-27. Later he expanded it into the biographical *Legend of John Hornby* (1962). Now he has used the original title for the diary kept by Hornby's cousin and com-

panion, eighteen-year-old Edgar Christian (first published in 1937 as *Unflinching: A Diary of Tragic Adventure*) and has republished it, with an introduction longer than the diary itself. It remains an extraordinarily pitiful and moving document of folly and fortitude. Hornby and his companions — all the evidence suggests — put themselves into a situation where death was almost certain, but having done so they acted according to their strict British traditions, and the courage with which young Christian (a distant relative of Fletcher Christian of the *Bounty*) faced his virtually inevitable end is made all the more poignant by the naiveté of his prose. A prime document of the Canadian North.

G.W.

**** FERNAND OUELLET, *Lower Canada: 1791-1840*. McClelland & Stewart, n.p. With *Lower Canada: 1791-1840*, the Canadian Centenary series, which W. L. Morton began to edit almost twenty years ago and which McClelland & Stewart began to publish in 1967, is virtually complete. In this case it is not a question of a wholly new book. The editors wisely chose to commission a translation of Ouellet's 1876 masterpiece, *Le Bas-Canada: 1791-1840: changements structureaux et crise*. Ably translated and at times adapted by Patricia Claxton, the book fits admirably into the pattern of the series. Its sub-title, "Social Change and Nationalism," indicates its special approach. Ouellet is concerned with the cultural and economic changes that attend and sometimes influence shifts in social attitudes, and after so many studies dominated by the strictly political circumstances that led up to the rebellions of 1837 and 1838, it is stimulating to have a different approach, and to understand how the shifting relationships between classes and interests in Lower Canada after its creation in 1791 made the political letting of blood in 1837 inevitable and perhaps good for the general health of the community. *Lower Canada: 1791-1840* is a book nobody concerned with examining the roots of contemporary Canadian conflicts should neglect.

G.W.

**** BILL HOLM and GEORGE IRVING QUIMBY, *Edward S. Curtis in the land of the War Canoes*. Douglas & McIntyre, $18.95. One of the ironies born of a generation accustomed to film is that when Edward Curtis's magnificent 1914 film *In the Land of the Head Hunters* was restored in 1972 (and renamed *In the Land of the War Canoes*), many observers accepted it as a factual account of Kwakiutl life. Perhaps it also suggests an audience too ignorant of Indian history and too eager for myth. The film, of course, was a performance. In this fine book, the film's restorers — Holm and Quimby — provide an engaging account of Curtis's career and tell how the film was made; they include script outlines, contemporary reviews, and reflections on why the film won so much critical acclaim, yet affected film history so little. Illuminating the text is a series of photographs — taken *of* the filming in 1914 — by one of Curtis's assistants, Edmund August Schwinke. These constitute an extraordinary cinematic documentary in their own right: but what they catch (in addition to cinematic stills) are those moments of relaxation between takes, of playing and clowning and sober introspection, which reveal both the human connection obviously established between the film-maker and the cast, and the substantial disparity between the film and real life.

W.N.

*** ALLEN WARDWELL, *Objects of Bright Pride*. The Center for Inter-American Relations and The American Federation of Arts (available from Douglas & McIntyre), $22.95. Museum collection catalogues can be more than just tour guides. They can, as here, provide valuable data on stages of a culture's art, and crisp detailed photographs of individual pieces (though they seldom convey a sense of *texture* or reach adequately toward an object's artistic vitality). The items of Northwest Coast Indian art assembled here — many taken south by George Hunt and Franz Boas — are fine examples of masks, panels, fabrics, domestic necessities, and shamanistic figures. But their presence also raises the moral dilemma embodied in any collection: the tension between the function of art in any society and the ambivalent right to possession.

W.N.

*** GERMAINE POULIOT et al., *Par Mille Chemins; Un Ami sur ta route*; *Le Temps d'une rencontre*. Les Editions Projets. These three admirable intermediate school anthologies provide an opportunity to praise again the vitality of literary texts in Quebec. They take seriously the work of Quebec writers, and place Vigneault, Thériault, Roy, Leclerc, and Lasnier in a context including Dickens, Tagore, Lagerlöf, Wilde, and Brecht. But over three separate grades, there isn't an anglophone Canadian writer to be found. So the texts also provide an opportunity to say that translation in a bilingual Canada has to be a two-way art.

W.N.

*** JOHN PORTER, *The Measure of Canadian Society: Education, Equality, Opportunity*. Gage, n.p. John Porter wrote one of the seminal books on Canadian society, and with *The Vertical Mosaic* (1965) changed our thinking on the nature and the distribution of power in this country. It was a masterpiece that combined the intelligent use of statistics with an intuitive grasp of the whole situation to produce a model of writing by an academic that went far beyond collegiate bounds in its appeal and its influence. But over the years until Porter's death in 1979, waiting for something more to equal *The Vertical Mosaic*, one began to sense that he was perhaps a man whose career would be dominated by a single notable work. For the books he published after 1965 were of little interest except to his colleagues, even when, as in *Does Money Matter? Prospects for Higher Education*, he wrote with polemical intent. The present volume is a group of papers which before his death Porter had selected, with the intent of publication, as his best. They are interesting because of the man who wrote them, and anyone concerned with the genesis of a masterpiece will read with much interest the first piece, rather forbiddingly entitled, "Research Biography of a Macrosociological Study: *Vertical Mosaic*." But as one continues through essays which are sometimes informational in a survey manner, and sometimes polemical, arguing a centralist view of Canadian society, it becomes evident that Porter never again roused the creative passion which took him through *Vertical Mosaic*. The surveys are mildly interesting and useful to students; the polemics are honest but unconvincing. There is never again that happy marriage of information and imagination which made Porter's single masterpiece so important and so fascinating a book.

G.W.

*** DENNIS OLSEN, *The State Elite*. McClelland & Stewart, $14.95. Dennis Olsen is frank in admitting his debts to John Porter, and *The State Elite* does in fact take off from Porter's analysis in *The Vertical Mosaic* of the Canadian class and power structure in the early 1960's. Olsen concludes that, if anything, the elites determined by class and ethnicity have increased their hold on Canadian society. It is the state elite — political and bureaucratic — that concerns him, and he sketches out very interestingly how that elite works, and works mainly in favour of the upwardly mobile middle class; the upper class receives the protection it requires without being actively involved in the state elite, and the working class receives merely as much as will keep it reasonably quiet. It is a concise, provocative and clearly-written study.

G.W.

**** F. MURRAY GREENWOOD, ed. and transl., *Land of a Thousand Sorrows*. Univ. of B.C. Press, $25.00. Works like *Roughing It in the Bush* and scores of elementary history texts give most Canadians their glimpse of the 1837 rebellions. Papineau and Mackenzie now stand celebrated as leaders of popular resistance to government chicanery and established centralization. François-Maurice Lepailleur joined the fray in 1838 on the promise that American forces would help ensure *canadien* independence. After a skirmish with the Caughnawaga, Lepailleur and others were captured, and in the name of example, were transported to an Australian penal colony. There — acknowledged only as "*cut throats*" and "bushrangers" — they were imprisoned in the Concord stockade, and secretly Lepailleur managed to keep the daily journal from 1840 to 1842 that Greenwood has here made publicly available. That these prisoners had greater freedom than those in the Tasmanian colony is only a comparative judgment. Lepailleur is critical of the warders, exact in his observations of daily life, and quietly eloquent in his testament to the succour of faith and the sorrow of exile.

W.N.

**** DENNIS REID, *"Our Own Country Canada."* National Gallery of Canada, $29.95. This is a fine book, an intelligent guide to the landscape paintings of Queen Victoria's Canadians, who during the period 1860-1890 were working in Montreal and Toronto and painting what they saw of the wilderness they visited. Jingoism and expansion were social commonplaces of the time, and painters sought the extent of the country's wilderness in order to bring it back home to the metropolitan centres. Niagara, Point Lévis, and Kicking Horse Pass vie with such nameless places as "A Woodland Stream," but the paintings reveal an increasing concern to record exactly what the artists perceived. Such a development reflects not only a change from an idealization of nature to a "scientific" attitude, but also the birth of institutional establishments. As the two cities grew, they fostered art schools, publications like *Picturesque Canada*, an academy, and (importantly) photographic studios like that of William Notman. As the CPR extended west, moreover, it served an artistic function somewhat in the way Darwin's

Beagle expedition did: to carry painters towards the new world, and perhaps a little closer to the new language of the eye their art required. One could wish for more colour in this book — and perhaps in the painters as well: but to a degree Canadian colour awaited the eyes of Tom Thomson and Emily Carr.

W.N.

** WILLIAM DAWSON LESUEUR. *A Critical Spirit: The Thought of William Dawson LeSueur*, ed. A. B. McKillop. McClelland & Stewart, $5.95. WILLIAM DAWSON LESUEUR. *William Lyon Mackenzie: A Reinterpretation.* Ed. A. B. McKillop. Macmillan, $9.95. William Dawson LeSueur has long had a great reputation in negative. He was — says the legend — the man who wrote the biography of William Lyon Mackenzie that was not published because Mackenzie's heirs, and William Lyon Mackenzie King in particular, objected to its criticisms of the great rebel. All this in recent years, when liberal historians have fallen into disrepute, had given LeSueur a modish lustre as a precursor of contemporary Tory historians like Donald Creighton. But all too often the eager revival of a neglected figure results in his eventual rejection, and this may well be the case with LeSueur. At last The Carleton Library presents, published for the first time, his *William Lyon Mackenzie*. Simultaneously, in *A Critical Spirit*, edited by A. B. McKillop, it offers a group of his essays on morality, politics, and like subjects. There are times when two works of an author operate to reinforce each other. The opposite is the case with LeSueur, for the very deficiencies that quickly become evident in *A Critical Spirit* help to explain why *William Lyon Mackenzie* may have been rejected by Morang for simple literary reasons even before Mackenzie King's henchmen got to work. LeSueur was not merely an intellectual; he was one of the cold-hearted kind. For him, the intellectual is the writer whose "attention is concentrated on abstract or general questions." His essays are remarkable for the absence in them of any evidence that he understood that appeal of the concrete and the particular which is so necessary to the true literary artist and, perhaps most of all, to the biographer. That absence shows up disastrously in *William Lyon Mackenzie*. LeSueur never really evokes Mackenzie as a personality, never creates a living sense of his period; one ends by dismissing this work, so long celebrated *in absentia*, as a pompous and prolix disquisition that fails always to focus sharply enough on its subject to hold our interest. We never grasp Mackenzie's true nature; always he is receding into a fog of words.

G.W.

** HARRY GUTKIN, *Journey Into Our Heritage*. Lester & Orpen Dennys, $24.95. Anyone interested in the Jewish emigrations to Western Canada and the heritage that was celebrated there will find in this book a quick historical guide and a wealth of photographs. But it escapes me to know how whole chapters on Jewish literature and education in the prairies could entirely avoid mentioning the names of Fredelle Bruser Maynard and Eli Mandel.

W.N.

contributors

Francis SPARSHOTT, Germaine WARKENTIN, and D. J. DOOLEY teach at the University of Toronto; Caroline BAYARD and Linda HUTCHEON teach at McMaster, and W. MACNAUGHTON teaches at Waterloo; Keith GAREBIAN and Fraser SUTHERLAND live in Montreal, Irving LAYTON in Niagara-on-the-Lake, and David O'ROURKE in Downsview; Perry M. NODELMAN teaches at the University of Winnipeg, and Kathy MEZEI at Simon Fraser; P. K. PAGE and G. V. DOWNES live in Victoria, and Dorothy LIVESAY on Galiano Island; Alan R. SHUCARD teaches at the University of Wisconsin, G. M. LANG at Bordeaux, and Richard A. CAVELL at Padova; Eric NICOL, Ed PRATO, and George WOODCOCK live in Vancouver; David S. WEST, Pegeen BRENNAN, Eva-Marie KROLLER, Janet GILTROW, and Diana BRYDON teach at U.B.C., R. L. McDOUGALL is at Carleton University, Michael HURLEY at Queen's, Maurice LEBEL at Laval, and Gwendolyn DAVIES at Mt. Allison; Lorraine McMULLEN and Glen CLEVER teach at the University of Ottawa, and R. G. MOYLES and Bert ALMON at the University of Alberta; Susan BECKMANN teaches at the University of Saskatchewan; Lorne DANIEL lives in Sylvan Lake, Alta., D. PRECOSKY in Prince George, B.C., Rod WILLMOT in Katevale, P.Q., and Michael BENAZON in Lennoxville.