

## NOVELS FROM NEAR & FAR

George Woodcock

JACK HODGINS, *The Invention of the World*. Macmillan. \$10.95.

JANE RULE, *The Young in One Another's Arms*. Doubleday. \$6.95.

LEOPOLD VON SACHER-MASOCH, *Venus in Furs*, translated by John Glassco. Blackfish Press.

FREDERICK PHILIP GROVE. *The Master Mason's House*, translated by Paul P. Gubbins. \$15.00.

RESHARD GOOL, *Price*. Square Deal Publications. Hardcover \$9.95, paper \$4.95.

VANCOUVER ISLAND is a strange combination of the pristine and the decadent, of frontier roughness and lingering English manners, with inlays of sheer Canadian myth and a rather sickening varnish of commercialized tourism. Almost thirty years ago I lived there for three uneasy years, in a remote community on the southwest coast, where the Juan de Fuca Strait opens out to the Pacific. It was a ravaged area of rough second growth forest and stump farms, fringed by startlingly beautiful coastal vistas of the snowy Olympics over the Strait and backed by the rocky, mossy, arbutus-tufted Sooke Hills.

It was a place of loggers and fishermen and cougar hunters; a contingent of British remittance men provided what frail claims it had to civilization, and among the mild eccentrics who had gathered there my wife and I hardly seemed out of place in our wrong-headed effort to achieve the Tolstoyan ideal of combining manual and physical work on a piece of land which everyone else knew (but did not tell) was barren for the very reason that made it seem so fertile to us; the broom which we cleared with such labour

grew to a height of twenty feet only because the soil was useless for other crops.

Along the rough road in the hills behind us lived an even more formidable tribe than our own village loggers; they were people dwelling mostly in shacks on land once given to World War I veterans. Some of the veterans were still there, buried in time; a few gay couples had found refuge in the total permissiveness of the environment, but the great majority of these bush folk, as we called them, were loggers of the wilder kind, poverty-stricken marginal farmers whose holdings have since been eaten up by the forest, or mere drifters. Between them bitter feuds over wells and boundaries persisted for decades and were periodically celebrated with rifle duels through the trees or fertilized with the blood of beer parlour brawls.

My favourite place in this backhill community was the abandoned Anglican church, which for a time had been run as a brothel by two enterprising Vancouver whores, later became the local bootlegging depot, and when we reached the area was inhabited by a large family of undetermined origin living in complex

and public incest. Nothing had been of greater interest to the local scandal-mongers since the failure a decade or so before of the religious community (I believe they were called the Star Brethren) whose decaying buildings were still visible in the bush a mile or so west of our village, and whose leader ran away with the funds he had collected from the innocent mid-Westerners who sold up their farms to follow his promise of easy salvation.

I intended, for years, to write the not-so-plain Tales of the Sooke Hills, but while I lived there the rigours of manual work left me no energy even to keep a proper diary, and in the years immediately after leaving the village other interests and travels supervened; gradually the memories lost their sharpness, until no more remains than will fill a short passage of an autobiography. But I always believed that this strange combination of people, washed up on that far shore of Canada by the tide of westering which made it the last of our frontiers, needed its chronicler, even if I had failed my memories, and I am happy to have seen that chronicler at last appear in the person of Jack Hodgins.

Hodgins, whose novel *The Invention of the World* succeeds a collection of short stories, *Spit Delaney's Island*, actually writes about the opposite side of Vancouver Island from the site of my own experiences. The town that is the focal point of his massive folk epic is a fairly literal portrait of Nanaimo, and the greater part of the action — apart from interludes in western Ireland — is set northward from there, at the site of the Revelations Colony of Truth on the edge of the town, and then upisland in remote logging camps and decaying tide-water settlements and valleys where the counter-culture has taken over the marginal farms and contributed a new element of oddity to the mad old frontier mix.

I read *The Invention of the World* with part of my mind wandering through the world that had seemed so strange to me when I entered it half a life ago — the world of the loggers and their whores and the stump farmers and the Anglo-Irish eccentrics and millenarian communities, and I was delighted with the felicity of observation that had enabled Hodgins to catch so well the look and mood of the wild sea-forest-and-mountain landscape, and the speech and mannerisms of its inhabitants. These aspects satisfied my nostalgia and at the same time pleased me with the thought that such a strange and undoubtedly transient world had not gone uncelebrated.

At the same time, I developed reservations about the fictional structure of the book. In the central strand of the plot — the career of Maggie Kyle from logger's moll to proprietor of a trailer park on the site of the Revelations Colony and eventually, after a desperate search for impossible salvations, to marriage with her hollow man of a cousin, Wade Powers, I found nothing to criticize; I have known such a loud, leggy blonde from northern Vancouver Island whose career and character were not much different from Maggie's. Around this main plot the minor fates of island oddities like Madmother Thomas, Julius Champney, Danny Holland and Becker (who in his curiosity over human motives becomes the narrator of much of the book) weave their appropriate patterns, and even the material side of the remembered history of the Revelations Colony — a group of bog Irish led away from home by a conjuring messiah named Keneally — is part of the authentic island experience.

It is when Hodgins turns Keneally into a semi-supernatural being of malign and magical powers that the novel weakens. For what he is doing is to juxtapose true myth with fabricated myth. The strange life of the Vancouver Island communi-

ties is one of those natural gifts to the novelist — truth grown so much stranger than fiction that in memory it is already myth, even before it is set down on paper. To add further convolutions is to transfer it into the world of fictional invention, and to lose it as mythic truth. The founders of the West Coast religious communities were strange and sinister enough beings in their own human right. There was no need to make them demonic.

If Jack Hodgins weakens *The Invention of the World* with an excess of the diabolic, Jane Rule spoils another west coast novel, *The Young in One Another's Arms*, with an excess of the angelic. It is the tale of a boarding-house which one-armed Ruth Wheeler runs in Vancouver and in which, herself a casualty from life, she shelters the misfits and dropouts of society. The little community is threatened by urban development, by police action when one member is picked up and illegally shipped over the border and another killed in a shootup, but it stays together and all is eventually well when the members re-establish their little collectivity on Galiano Island, where they run a restaurant and Ruth's estranged husband providentially dies just in time for them to buy the house from which they are about to be evicted. This is the kind of optimistic book which good writers are sometimes inclined to write in spite of themselves in times of social malaise and threatened crisis; I was often reminded in reading it of Priestley's *Good Companions*. *The Young in One Another's Arms* is written in too satisfying a plain prose to be just a failure, but its imaginative vision is not convincing. It is not merely that such accumulations of goodness are rare indeed in real life; it is even more that a novel in which everything always seems to turn to the good leaves too bland an impression on the mind to be remembered as more than an escapist exercise. We may long for para-

dise regained, but the human condition is a paradise lost.

The three remaining books on my list come all, in various ways, from outside. The farthest outsider of all is the celebrated Leopold von Sacher-Masoch's *Venus in Furs*, and this classic exercise by an Austrian novelist in the psychopathology of love concerns us only because it is translated by John Glassco and very elegantly printed by the Blackfish Press of Vancouver. It is appropriate that such a classic of the whip should have been rendered — and well rendered — into English by the author of *The Fatal Woman* and *Harriet Marwood, Governess*, but the main result of comparing the three books is the conclusion that John Glassco deals far more interestingly with the theme than the unfortunate Sacher-Masoch, whose main claim to our attention will continue to be that Kraft-Ebbing appropriated his name to define a sexual aberration.

One steps a little nearer with *The Master Mason's House*, for that was first published in German in 1906 under the title *Maurermeister Ihles Haus* with the name of Felix Paul Greve attached to it; now it appears in English, translated by Paul H. Gubbins, and under the name of Frederick Philip Grove, whom we all believe to have been Greve's Canadian *alter ego*. *The Master Mason's House* is indeed a recognizable example of Grovian juvenilia. Readers of the Canadian novels will immediately recognize as familiar the central situation of the coarse-grained contractor who drives his wife to madness and then himself becomes the victim of a domineering woman of doubtful antecedents. Greve's intent to push his characters into the arms of destiny is perhaps not so powerful as it became in the later Grove, and the young girl Susie — whose growth towards independence is another strand of *The Master Mason's House*, is far too shallow in herself and

in her relations with her age peers that occupy so much of the book. Perhaps the surest of all the signs of Grove's hand lies in the very evocative description of the Baltic countryside — Grove's own countryside — which for luminosity and particularity of observation closely resembles the landscape passages of *Over Prairie Trails*. The translation is spotty. Mr. Gubbins writes a good narrative prose, but his dialogue is clumsy, and his attempts to render the juvenile chatter of another time and place into modern Canadian teenage cant or to find a Canadian equivalent for Low German dialect speech disastrously mar the book.

The last novel on my list lies farther off in its locale than the Central Europe of Greve and Sacher-Masoch. Réshard Gool's *Price* is set in South Africa — in Cape Town during the period before *apartheid* was introduced. Unlike the novels of Margaret Laurence, Dave Godfrey and Audrey Thomas, it does not establish the familiar pattern of African experiences seen from a Canadian starting point. Gool knew South Africa before, by many leaps across the world, he eventually settled in Prince Edward Island, where he is the editor of Square Deal Publications. And *Price*, the story of an East Indian lawyer, his tragic infatuation for a beautiful and promiscuous

Cape Coloured woman, and his eventual death from political violence, is not merely a tragically moving study of human obsessions and their effects, but also a revelation of an aspect of South African life with which few outsiders can be familiar. For the aspect Gool chooses is that penetrated only by a few whites, the world of Asians and Cape Coloureds, many of them highly sophisticated people, and the struggles for power within that world, even at a time when it was threatened by the tide of Nationalism. The factional battles between Stalinists, Trotskyists, Syndicalists and communal political bosses are displayed with a sharply pessimistic eye, and the way in which the non-European and at the same time non-African communities are corrupted by the perils and opportunities of their situation is exemplified by the sinister Sheikh-Moosa, the wealthy Malay racketeer who in the end, to protect his speculations, is prepared to co-operate with the Afrikaner Nationalists. *Price* is an unusual and strongly written book; it is not exactly a new one, since it was published in a limited edition as *Price of Admission* in 1970, but it appears to have been revised and this is the first time it has been offered to the general reading public.

## THE GOOD JAZZ

Roy MacSkimming

MICHAEL ONDAATJE, *Coming Through Slaughter*. Anansi, \$10 cloth, \$4.95 paperback.

IF IT SEEMED ODD at first glance that a gifted Canadian poet should devote an entire book to an American pop-culture hero, as Michael Ondaatje did six years ago in *The Collected Works of Billy the Kid*, Ondaatje's choice of subject for his latest work may seem even

odder. The protagonist of *Coming Through Slaughter* is Buddy Bolden, known chiefly to jazz aficionados as a pioneering musician in turn-of-the-century New Orleans. Bolden is a hazy, semi-mythological figure at the dawning of jazz — from the days before recordings

or big money or national and international acceptance of Black music. His instinctual genius was recognized by his contemporaries — “He began the good jazz,” one of them is quoted as saying — but all that remains of his career are a few reminiscences, one dim photograph of Bolden and his band, and a record of musician Buck Johnson whistling the way he remembers Bolden playing.

From these fragments and an acquaintanceship with New Orleans and its history, Ondaatje has fashioned a prose work (his first) that is part documentary, part fiction and essentially a spiritual exegesis of a tragic personality. Upon finishing it, one no longer asks why Ondaatje chose Bolden as his principal character. He has journeyed so far into the world and mind of Bolden — or someone he imagines Bolden to have been — that *Coming Through Slaughter* represents an imaginative feat of a high order: a transcending of cultural and racial and historical barriers into a state of nearly total identification, on both the author’s and reader’s part, with the subject.

The pattern of Bolden’s life is a familiar one in Black musical history, a precursor of those talents that have self-destructed in despair and heroin. Bolden’s music was a search for both ecstasy and oblivion: he lived at top speed, becoming celebrated young, drinking vast quantities of alcohol, doing violence to himself and occasionally those around him, going over the edge into madness at 31. Bolden spent the last 24 years of his life in a Louisiana mental institution. It was his way of committing suicide.

All this comes very close to the romanticized image of the dissolute artist, but Ondaatje isn’t interested in that cliché. He wants to burrow under it and chart the subterranean rivers in this man, the subtle and elusive but finally identi-

fiable moments when the decision to go mad is made, rejected, made again.

The process is all the more mysterious because Bolden did not appear outwardly to be a deeply disturbed person. He could usually control the effects of his drinking, was a loving husband and father, an irrepressible raconteur. For a living he cut hair at N. Joseph’s Shaving Parlour, snipping and shaving with an increasingly drunken flamboyance as the day wore on: “Humming loud he would crouch over his sweating victim and cut and cut, offering visions of new styles to the tilted man. He persuaded men out of ten-year moustaches and simultaneously offered raw steaming scandal that brought up erections in the midst of their fear.” He even edited *The Cricket*, a raunchy broadsheet packed with local sensation and rumour. At night he played cornet in front of the dancing crowds and on holidays there were the festive jazz parades down Canal Street.

Through an aggregation of brief incidents, scraps of documentation, and monologues in various voices, not strictly chronological but generating a powerful sense of momentum, we become aware of Bolden’s secret self — infuriated by his “slavery” in the barber shop, appalled by the onrush of his own existence, “governed by fears of certainty,” i.e. of death. He constantly had dreams of his children dying. This terror of mortality helps to explain Bolden’s sudden, unexpected desertion of his family and his music — “wiping out his past again in a casual gesture, contemptuous. Landscape suicide,” as his old friend Webb puts it.

Webb is a police detective (Ondaatje doesn’t say if he ever existed) who takes it on himself to search for Bolden and restore him to his former place in the world. In a nice paradox, this structurally unconventional narrative acquires a detective-story suspense in the course of Webb’s investigation. Piece by piece the

psychological clues pile up until Webb walks triumphantly in on Bolden, who is taking a bath in the apartment where he lives with his new love, Robin, and her uncomplaining husband.

In confessional passages Bolden tries to make Webb understand what he has done: that he was driven into a negation of his talent by the very adulation it brought him. There was his unlikely friend Bellocq, the hydrocephalic photographer (who did exist), who placed no value whatever on Bolden's music and made him mistrust his fame, feel its mocking emptiness. There was Bolden's burgeoning paranoia over his wife, Nora, whom he imagined as being in love with the king pimp of the Storyville district. There seemed no sane way out. Even Bolden's escape into Robin's arms was a "swimming toward the sound of madness."

Nevertheless Webb, well-meaning agent of the rational world, succeeds in bringing Bolden home. In five days Bolden finds the answer he wants: he literally blows his lungs out in a New Orleans parade, playing incomprehensible sounds. He has achieved his oblivion. At this point, after being excruciatingly immediate for most of its length, *Coming Through Slaughter* subsides into a neutral, scholarly, archival mode. Hospital records are produced, along with taped reminiscences of survivors of the period.

It is as if, having tasted a dead man's sweat and blood, we are once again looking at him down the dusty tunnel of history.

Ondaatje doesn't belabour the facts of poverty and social oppression as sources of Bolden's agony — they are implicit in the pungent historical asides, "the Black whores and musicians shipped in (to Storyville) and the Black customers refused." More importantly, Ondaatje succeeds in giving us a sense of how Bolden actually played — "showing all the possibilities in the middle of the story." The texture of the book itself has that fertile, driving, improvisational quality, rich with its own pleasure in language and human complexity. Its considerable drama is marred only when the author shows himself too self-conscious about literary architecture; there is an archly obscure epitaph about the sounds that dolphins make, and bits of poetry are inserted now and then, as if to remind us of the author's other avocation. But it is undoubtedly Ondaatje's experience as a poet which has liberated him from the tired conventions of the novel and helped him to produce a fictional work of such uncompromising existential power. One of Bolden's numbers was titled, "Don't shake, don't get no cake." Bolden the quiet lunatic is given the last word, from the asylum: "There are no prizes."

## THE SEVERED SKULL

Wayne Grady

GRETL FISHER, *In Search of Jerusalem: Religion and Ethics in the Writings of A. M. Klein*. McGill-Queen's University Press. \$14.00.

"IT IS PERHAPS SIGNIFICANT," Tom Marshall has remarked, "that the most perceptive reviews of *The Second Scroll* in 1951 were more convinced of its cultural importance than of its merits

as a novel." Significantly, perhaps, but also alarming. And it is at least alarming that most of the recent studies of A. M. Klein's poetry have concerned themselves not so much with Klein the poet as with

Klein the bibliophagist, Klein the learned, Klein who out-Bubers Buber and then out-Eliots Eliot. This is true of Sidney J. Stephen's study of "Portrait of the Poet as Landscape" (*Dalhousie Review* 51), and of Tom Middlebro's "Yet Another Gloss" on *The Second Scroll* (*Journal of Canadian Fiction* IV:3). It is only slightly less true of Miriam Waddington's *A. M. Klein* (1970), and it is true to the nth degree of Gretl Klaus Fischer's newly-published doctoral dissertation, *In Search of Jerusalem*.

To give Miss Fischer her due, she recognizes, and in part conveys, the value of objective scholarship. She does not suppose that once we have established that Klein read Spinoza's *Theologico-Politicus*, that Klein's view of redemption was shared by the 16th-century Cabbalist Isaac Luria of Safed, that it was Moses de Leon and not Rabbi Simon ben Yochai who wrote the *Zohar*, then we have learned all we need to about Klein's writings, and his book may be closed. Although Fischer carefully scrutinizes Klein's every obscurity, she is only occasionally condescending ("One may distinguish between three elements of Cabala: the first is one of systematization of numbers which are to yield esoteric knowledge; its principles and method cannot seriously appeal to the modern mind . . ." — her attention ought to be drawn to Perle Epstein's study of *Under the Volcano*,) and does seem to be aware that scholarly exegesis carries us only part (or at most, most) of the way to a fuller appreciation of a poet's lifework.

It is not the fact of scholars that alarms, but the imbalance of them, of those versed solely in exantlation and delineation, for whom poetry is uninteresting except as a code to be deciphered. Miss Fischer seems genuinely interested in Klein's "moral purpose", in the extent to which his development was "the archetypal quest of a human being who

emerges from the shelter of orthodox certainty and struggles towards a redeeming philosophy and intellectual peace." It is the mapping of that struggle that we find in *In Search of Jerusalem*: Klein's subtle shifts from orthodox Judaism, through Spinozan pantheism, *via* Chassidic optimism, to apocalyptic oecumenism. Whether or not Klein ever found his redemption and peace, whether or not he ever managed "to say the word that would become sixth sense", it now seems to be certain that his "quest" for it was "archetypal".

There is no doubt that much of Klein's imagery is difficult, and requires explanation. Fischer quotes Earle Birney's exasperated question: Who but a Talmudic scholar can enjoy a poem made up of references like:

The smiling Kahana; Shammai in a mope;  
Hillel instructing an obtuse Ethiope . . .

and it is doubtful that even a Talmudic scholar would enjoy these lines *as poetry*. The point is that Klein was not writing for Talmudic scholars, any more than Cavafy or Kazantzakis wrote for classical scholars. Although Fischer is good at tracing Klein's obscure or undetected references, the sparks thus engendered cry out for weightier wood. Her chapter on Klein's early writing, and her discussion of golem, Rabbi Nachman the Bratzlaver, and Klein's "Ballad of the Dancing Bear" are excellent. She is quite convincing when she sees in the latter poem Klein's completion of an untold tale from Nachman's *The Seven Beggars*, and we are inclined to agree with her conclusion that this in part suggests "Klein's persistent allegiance to Cabalist and Chassidic ideas". But where do we go from there?

The rest is not Miss Fischer's concern. She is an annotator, a compiler of footnotes, and not always a very thorough one at that. She is content to note, for example, that in Poem V of the early

sequence "Out of the Pulver and Polish Lens", Klein "abandons all ostentation of poetic technique" by setting up the poem "in the form of two short prose paragraphs", retaining, however, "iambic pentameter . . ., rime, and metaphor". In fact, the poem is a Petrarchan sonnet, complete with octet, sestet, pentameter (though not iambic) and ABBACDDC-EFFEGG, written in prose. What does this mean? Is this an abandonment of all ostentatious poetic technique? Or is it rather a concealment of it, in the way Klein might have sensed a divine order concealed in the world's labyrinth? Whatever Klein's intention, surely it was more than to lend the lines "the peculiar dignity of an understatement", as Miss Fischer would have us believe.

Similarly, in her discussion of "Yehuda Halevi—His Pilgrimage" (1941), "a poem of 42 stanzas, most of them Spenserian," she notes that

Klein tells us how Halevi, the poet, physician, and philosopher, spent his youth in security and happiness, renowned for his pious songs and his jousting with the wittiest of his contemporaries, until, one night, a dream began to trouble him. He sees an imprisoned lady whose home has been taken by enemies, and unable to forget this dream, leaves Toledo . . . to find her. After various adventures he reaches Jerusalem, where it becomes clear to him that the city itself is the princess for whom he has been searching. With his beautiful ode . . . he can only pour out his love. He cannot free the city. He is murdered, and only the memory of his song remains . . .

That anyone familiar with Klein's life and work can read these lines, let alone write them, without seeing in the fate of Halevi a parallel with not only that of Melech Davidson in *The Second Scroll*, but also with Klein's own tormented and, finally, tragic life, is remarkable. It is all there: Klein's orthodox childhood, his early disillusionment, his vision of Jerusalem, his final, lacunar silence. And yet, without so much as pausing to catch her

breath, Miss Fischer rushes on to tell us that although "few modern readers can find pleasure in the Spenserian vocabulary," it is nonetheless "fitting that Klein should have chosen to remind us of *The Fairie Queene* . . ."

Perhaps the real problem with the book is simply that it was not intended to be a book at all. In one of her Acknowledgements, Miss Fischer thanks Louis Dudek, who directed her doctoral thesis, "on which this book is based." A glance at that thesis, presented just before Klein's death in 1972, reveals that the present book is, except for the appendices and a few minor editorial changes, a *verbatim* reprinting of the original dissertation.

Now, there is nothing intrinsically wrong with publishing a four-year-old thesis, provided some accounting has been taken of subsequent developments in the field. But no mention is made in the book of the Klein Symposium held in Ottawa in May 1974, and only a brief, bibliographical note is made of the appearance in the same year of Miriam Waddington's monumental *Collected Poems of A. M. Klein*, an appearance which ought to have occasioned some major revisions in Fischer's text. Waddington has unearthed some 63 poems, for example, published by Klein between 1927 and 1937, of which only 25 are listed in the Chronology appended to Fischer's thesis. The Chronology has been deleted from the book, and no mention is made anywhere of the 38 new-found poems, many of which ("Kohemoth" for example) are extremely relevant. The Chronology also listed 6 poems of that period which are not found in Waddington, and which are not mentioned again in the book.

The image of Klein that emerges from these pages is that of poet laureate for North American Jewry, a role that he no doubt took upon himself out of his own natural inclination to praise, but one that ultimately must have clashed with his

growing sense of existence as Godless and evil, with his increasing inability to find anything praiseworthy in the universe. This twin-mindedness is evident in his socialist, anti-war poetry written, as Fischer remarks, more from a sense of duty than from any deeply-felt passion, a kind of inverted Masefield describing the evacuation of Dunquerque. And it is especially evident in *The Hitleriad*, which Fischer supposes fails because Klein knew too little about his subject. It

may be that Klein, synthesist of history, myth and poetry, knew too much. He could not with sincerity attribute Hitler's rise to mere stupidity and indifference in the German electorate: for Klein, Hitler was human nature incarnate. Not an accident, but an historical inevitability.

Miss Fischer decapitates Klein, murders to dissect him. And yet, "instance this much-desired case," Klein wrote in 1943: "the skull/ though severed from unbleeding shoulders, lives."

## THE USES OF BIBLIOGRAPHY

*Michael E. Darling*

KAROL W. J. WENEK, *Louis Dudek: A Check-list*. The Golden Dog Press. \$3.00.

MICHAEL GNAROWSKI, *Theses and Dissertations in Canadian Literature (English): a preliminary check list*. The Golden Dog Press. \$3.50.

GLENN CLEVER, *Revised and Updated Index to the Periodical Canadian Literature Nos. 1-62*. The Golden Dog Press. \$8.00.

WHILE the larger presses have been falling over each other in the race to produce more superfluous thematic studies of Canadian Literature, the Golden Dog Press has been quietly building up a reputation in an area far less glamorous but ultimately much more vital to scholarship. Under the direction of Michael Gnarowski, the Golden Dog has published indexes to important literary magazines like *First Statement* and *Canadian Literature*, reprints and carefully edited texts of nineteenth-century poems, and now a check-list of a major Canadian poet.

Karol Wenek's check-list reveals, as no critical study has to date, the enormous range of Dudek's talents. Here we see not only Dudek the poet and critic, but Dudek the editor, translator, philosopher, artist and playwright as well. In attempting to list nearly all published and unpublished works by and about Dudek, Wenek has turned up some very interesting items. These include two un-

published television plays by Layton and Dudek in the Concordia University Archives, drafts of early poems in the library of the State University of New York at Buffalo, a mass of correspondence with Layton, Souster, Birney, Livesay, John Sutherland and others, and scores of reviews and literary notes that appeared in the *McGill Daily*, *Culture*, the *Montreal Gazette*, and the *Montreal Star* over a period of thirty-five years. Adding Dudek's regular contributions to *Delta*, *First Statement* and *CIV/n*, his ten books of poetry plus nine other works authored or edited, exclusive of *Delta* and the McGill Poetry Series, and well over a hundred uncollected poems, makes a body of work exceeded by few Canadian writers. And yet Wenek has still missed a few of the more obvious items: five reviews that Dudek contributed to *Canadian Literature* between 1959 and 1967, and an article entitled "Exotic Reference in the Cantos of Ezra Pound", first published in the *Antigonish Review*

in 1972. These oversights suggest that there may be other items of comparable importance overlooked by Wenek, but he does not, in any case, pretend to have compiled a definitive bibliography.

What is pleasing to note is the high standard of accuracy in the recording of bibliographical data. Checking a reference to Wynne Francis's *Canadian Literature* article on Dudek against the same reference in Gnarowski's *Concise Bibliography of English-Canadian Literature* and Frank Davey's *From There to Here* reveals that only Wenek has correctly recorded the title of the article. Errors that do occur are relatively minor: "Reflecting on Pain" (p. 11) should read "Reflections on Pain", and the date of Dennis Lee's *Books in Canada* review of *Collected Poetry* is October 1971 rather than 1972, but on the whole the checklist can be recommended for its accuracy.

Unfortunately, one cannot say as much for the *Revised and Updated Index to Canadian Literature*. The index has been updated to include the issues of 1973 and 1974, and the printing and binding of the new edition certainly make it a handsomer book than its predecessor. Nevertheless, the index is rife with misprints and inconsistencies, spelling mistakes and faulty cross-referencing. The following are representative: Margaret Laurence becomes Lawrence (p. 2), Kirkconnell becomes Kirconnell (p. 87), Hemingway is spelled Hemmingway (p. 23), Thomas McCulloch is altered to McCullough (p. 113), Hémon becomes Hémons (p. 72), etc. Misprints can creep into any printed text, of course, but one shudders to find the names of Earle Birney, Malcolm Lowry, and Farley Mowat consistently misspelled. What are we to make of such a horror as "A Bibliography of Works by and about Malcolm Lowry, prepared by Earl Birney"? Incidentally, Malcolm Ross and Malcolm Miller suffer the same fate. All of these

errors are reproduced from the first edition of the index, but new ones have been introduced in the "revised" text. Donald Stephens, for some reason, becomes David Stephens (p. 113). A reference to issue no. 19, Winter 1964, is altered to 19 W 74 (p. 35). The annotation to Douglas Barbour's review of Alec Lucas's *Hugh MacLennan* disappears entirely (p. 103).

More grievous than these errors, however, are the inconsistencies in the recording of articles and notes, and the cross-referencing of these items. Theoretically, one would expect to find short notes indexed alphabetically by author, as is done with articles. But this policy is not followed steadily. Thus, one finds the anomaly that Desmond Pacey's enquiry about Roberts's letters is indexed under Pacey, but R. E. Watters's enquiry on Canadiana cannot be found. Similarly, Louis Dudek's reply to an article by A. J. M. Smith can be found under the headings of Dudek and of Smith, whereas Nathan Cohen's reply to John Robert Colombo may be found only under Colombo's name. More serious omissions occur in the cross-referencing of articles. For instance, articles by Robert Gibbs and Nancy Bjerring on Brewster and Davies respectively may be found under their author headings, but not under subject headings; conversely, articles by L. A. A. Harding and Esther James on Haliburton and Ludwig may be found under subject headings only and not under their respective authors. Another annoying habit found only in the indexing of articles from Nos. 55 to 62 of the journal is that of cross-referencing *ad infinitum*. D. G. Jones's article, "Myth, Frye and Canadian Writers" (No. 55, Winter 1973), refers to about forty authors, most of whom are mentioned only in passing. Yet Jones's article is cross-referenced under the names of each one of those writers. A student wishing to read criticism of the works of Birney,

Callaghan, MacLennan, Pratt, Reaney, Souster, Wiseman, and many others, would search in vain to find any discussion of the writers in question. In contrast to this rather ludicrous attempt at repletion, Wynne Francis's "Montreal Poets of the Forties" (No. 14, Autumn 1962), contains interesting biographical information on Dudek, Layton, Page, John Sutherland and others, but no reference to Francis's article can be found under the headings of any of these authors. The same faults on a slightly less exaggerated scale are discernible if one compares Isobel McKenna's "Women in Canadian Literature" (No. 62, Autumn 1974) with Clara Thomas's "Happily Ever After: Canadian Women in Fiction and Fact" (No. 34, Autumn 1967). Again, the recent article, which gives sketchier treatment to each writer, is extensively cross-referenced, while the earlier one is not.

A final quibble is in the matter of annotation. Many of the articles in *Canadian Literature* sport titles which give no clue to the contents of the piece. To know that Louis Dudek wrote an article entitled "A Problem of Meaning" is fine, but how is a reader to know that the article discusses the plays of James Reaney? Occasionally, annotations are supplied, but why not include them for every article? This is just another example of the slipshod way in which the index has been compiled. Readers of *Canadian Literature* who must pay \$8.00 for this "revised" edition have a right to an index that has been organized, edited and proofread carefully and consistently. They don't have such a work as yet.

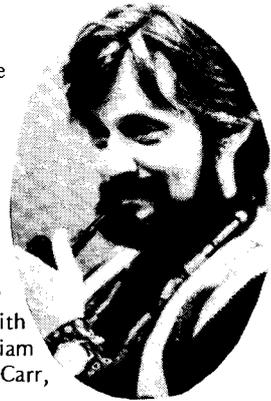
Michael Gnarowski's check-list of theses in English-Canadian Literature is timely and certain to be of use to students, although one might rightly ask whether it is a significant improvement on Klinck,

## *Six Journeys: A Canadian Pattern* Charles Taylor

Scott Symons' role as a family man, journalist, curator and teacher seemed assured, until he rebelled against his genteel Rosedale milieu. His books – *Place d'Armes*, *Civic Square*, *Heritage* – excoriate the social and sexual failures of modern Canada; his celebration of homosexuality, his conservatism in politics, his views on religion and mysticism, make his "journey" particularly relevant today.

The life of Scott Symons is described in Charles Taylor's new book, *SIX JOURNEYS: A CANADIAN PATTERN*, along with the lives of Brigadier James Sutherland Brown, Bishop William White, diplomat Herbert Norman, artist and writer Emily Carr, and novelist James Houston.

*SIX JOURNEYS* gives us biographies of six Canadians who went against the grain of their society and found their sustaining vision in other cultures. Through the experience of these six, Taylor traces the outlines of a Canadian pattern of living, relevant to all of us.



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Watters and Bell, *Canadiana*, or Naaman's *Guide bibliographique des thèses littéraires canadiennes*. Both Klinck's and Naaman's lists include theses in progress, and since many of these were abandoned or altered, none of these listings can be considered accurate. Gnarowski rightly omits theses in progress, and includes many rather obscure writers not found in Naaman, including Henry Alline, Jacob Bailey, Jonathan Odell, and other Maritime loyalists. Gnarowski also includes dissertations written at American and foreign universities, but not comprehensively. *Dissertation Abstracts* lists a Ph.D. thesis on the novels of Morley Callaghan completed at Florida State in 1966, which Gnarowski also could have found in Lawrence F. McNamee's *Dissertations in English and American Literature*.

A revised edition of the check-list ought to clarify a couple of uncertainties: in a number of cases, Gnarowski seems unsure of whether a particular thesis is a master's or doctoral. Generally, these are cases in which Watters and Bell have indicated only "thesis". A further problem is that the check-list, although published in 1975, only includes theses up to 1972, and not comprehensively for the later years. As Gnarowski says in his Foreword, this is only "a tentative compilation," but it does seem unusual that a check-list of this kind should be three years out of date at the time of publication, and that it

should omit theses from major universities that fall well within the limits of the list. I am thinking here of Stanley Dragland's "Forms of Imaginative Perception in the Poetry of Duncan Campbell Scott" (Ph.D. Queen's, 1971), Robert Gibb's "Aspects of Irony in the Poetry of E. J. Pratt" (Ph.D. New Brunswick, 1970), and Edward B. Davies's "The Alien Mind: A Study of the Poetry of Archibald Lampman" (Ph.D. New Brunswick, 1970). A revised edition should make certain of dates as well. This is a very confusing area, as even library catalogues and archives occasionally list dates for the completion of theses which are different from the dates on the title-pages of the theses themselves. But there seem to be too many uncertainties on the whole in the present compilation. Hopefully, a revised edition will also include an author index.

The Golden Dog Press deserves one and a half out of three for its efforts in bibliography and indexing. The Dudek check-list is definitely an important contribution to scholarship, and hopefully other check-lists and perhaps full-scale analytical bibliographies of major Canadian authors will soon be undertaken. Students of Canadian Literature should be grateful to this small press for its efforts in this direction, even if the achievements occasionally fall short of its ambitions.

## THE MYTHMAKERS

*Tom Marshall*

GWENDOLYN MACEWEN, *The Fire-Eaters*. Oberon Press.  
STEPHEN SCOBIE, *The Rooms We Are*. Sono Nis Press.  
WAYNE CLIFFORD, *Glass/Passages*. Oberon Press.

GWENDOLYN MACEWEN has always been a singer, one who sings forcefully of things exotic and mysterious. Readers and reviewers of ten or twelve

years ago responded immediately to her urgent and exuberant utterance even when — in some of the early poems — it approached incoherency. Indeed, a love

of sheer sound, encouraged by her poetic idols Hart Crane and Dylan Thomas, sometimes ran away with the poem. But a myth was being unfolded in brief, sharp bursts of sound and imagery. One finds, for instance, from the beginning a desire for escape to other times and worlds (as in the poems of Michael Ondaatje) but also a passionate longing for the integration of opposites or pairs — light and dark, male and female, Canada and the arcane mysteries, past and future. Hers is the alchemical search for the divine in the mundane; magic and myth abound but are expressed in terms of human emotion and an attractively colloquial and flexible voice.

The cosmos the poet explores is within as well as without:

by eating the world you may enclose it.

seek simplicities; the fingerprints of the sun  
only  
and the fingernail of the moon duplicating  
you in your body,

the cosmos fits your measure; has no  
ending . . .

(The Breakfast")

For MacEwen the individual discovery of the universe is also the creation of the universe. The swimmer, the astronaut, the dancer, the magician recur as images of the poet whose activity is mythmaking, the construction from experience of meaningful patterns, and thus of the larger self, the larger consciousness (a process that assumes overtly nationalist and feminist significances in the work of Margaret Atwood). In *A Breakfast For Barbarians*, MacEwen's first mature collection, the poet is by turns winemaker or magician or an escape artist who finds his way to a new heaven and earth. The poet's "intake" or swallowing of the world in metaphor makes a unity of self and world. This theme persists even through the deepening and darkening of

MacEwen's vision that occurs in *The Shadow-Maker* and afterwards.

The dangers of this stance and of MacEwen's markedly personal style were always evident, and they are evident in her new small collection *The Fire-Eaters*. MacEwen began, like Leonard Cohen, as a romantic adolescent prodigy and has continued as a more or less "natural" writer — she was decidedly not a slow learner like, say, Al Purdy (or myself). Consequently, her poems have truly marvellous ease and energy but sometimes lack over-all shape. Again, one wonders if there is not something of an imbalance in the direction of inner experience here, an evasion of the overwhelming external challenge of Canadian space and society. On a vaster plane, one wonders (sometimes) if MacEwen has always been sufficiently aware of the trickiness, the humour, the *irony* of the God whom she engages.

To be fair, just such tensions and questions are at the heart of her best work; this is part of the reason for its dramatic effectiveness. In "The Discovery" and "Dark Pines Under Water" she sees (as she does in the prose piece "Kingsmere") that Canada itself must be approached as exotic mystery. And she remarks early in her career:

O baby, what Hell to be Greek in this  
country —  
without wings, but burning anyway

("Poem Improvised Around a First Line")

In *The Fire-Eaters* the poet still burns, but it would seem with the fires of perplexity. The book reads like a diary in which the reflections of the day (and the night) are set down. The speaker is coming to terms with the intractable realities of the world, expressing bemusement, horror, humour.

The clouds, the birds and the wind have no  
answer  
even though no question has been posed.

(“The Clouds, the Birds and the Wind”)

That which we took so much for granted  
— Holy poetry of water and of fire —  
Is suddenly debatable.

(“Everyone Knows”)

It is, of course, always debatable, as we all know. A change in outlook seems to be indicated here — perhaps it points in the direction of zen or the uncertainty principle. This book is (it must be said) slighter than MacEwen’s earlier collections, though it bears on every page the unmistakable stamp of her highly distinctive tone, but it suggests a transitional phase. It will be interesting to see where Canada’s mystery-singer finds herself next.

Stephen Scobie’s poetic personality is “elusive” in a sense that could never be applied to the decidedly “present” Gwendolyn MacEwen. One is conscious in *The Rooms We Are* of intelligence, skill and sensibility, of clever ideas and exercises, even of well-realized poems — but without a very high definition or a very strong sense of individual character. Instead one hears, though only at times, faint echoes of Cohen, Atwood and others. Scobie remarks in his nicely lyrical piece on the jacket that the poet must separate himself from his past work, even reject it; noting that these poems were written in 1970-71 and that the book was apparently published in 1974, though it has reached me two years later, I wonder if he cares by now what I think of them. Moreover, I have the impression that I’ve read much stronger and larger poems by him in the last year or two. Oh well. Many of these pieces are brief if shapely enough “thoughts” and jottings, often in very short lines like those employed by Dorothy Livesay in recent times. But they lack the punch that Livesay packs into much of *Ice Age*; they don’t remain in the mind. One poem, the rather delightful “Stesichoros to Helen”, is an exception to everything I say, though: it is

sardonic, witty and wise in a fashion that surely reveals the real Stephen Scobie.

Movement’s the hoard I live in  
swarmed with connection,

writes Wayne Clifford, thereby suggesting the flow of a sensibility and consciousness as powerful as those of MacEwen. Something of a publishing drop-out after his first book (and theirs) was done by Coach House Press in 1965, Clifford now returns with a large collection made up of three sequences and the long poem “Passages”. These display the intricate music, wordplay and syllabic patterning of sound that give his work its extraordinary texture. There is even a kind of subtext of puns e.g. “A gape” reveals itself as *agape*, and “wane” refers to the poet’s own waning self. More important though (for me) than this verbal playfulness is a mastery of the rhythmic phrase that recalls Pound.

The three poem-sequences are “Kriti” (Crete), made up of travel poems, “Blood Suite”, which deals with the conjunction of the birth of a daughter and a brother’s death, and “The Map”, a quite remarkable expression of the strains of marriage: all create a powerful psychological atmosphere through very nimble and flexible rhythmic effects. The three tend to flow together, since there is a certain overlapping of subject-matter; they also provide a (relatively) easy access (or “passage”) to the more difficult “Passages”.

“Passages” itself is not only difficult but original, intricate and brilliant. It unfolds images and rhythmic intimations of birth, diving, mortality, the body’s changes, entropy. The opening fable of Coyote and Duck is an effective — and somewhat humorous — expression of the search for the solid in a world of flux. It is also a creation myth along Indian lines, involving as it does the parting of the waters to make land (an event that

occurs in many other cultures as well, signifying the creation of self and world). Throughout the poem the body is seen in terms of earth and water. The poem's subject is life in the body, how it imprisons us and constantly reminds us of death. ("Now there are no bonds except the flesh," wrote MacEwen once.) This is an interior journey, and one assumes that Clifford will move out from the centre of himself in the work that follows. In this book man reaches out through his senses to communicate with the world but always feels trapped and limited (and in Clifford's case angry about it). Still there are moments of transcendence, especially in the act of writing. One such occurs in a marvellous passage linking man, room, radio, orchestra, Sibelius and Finland, and another in a meditation on a woman's photograph. Life, consciousness is "passage" or a series of passages. In the mov-

ing conclusion the speaker accepts and embraces Coyote Dungflesh who is a symbolic expression of this earthly sphere. Union and communion involve an acceptance of the world in all its horror and glory (this is a theme prominent in MacEwen's work too), The poem resolves itself into a kind of prayer:

Flowering Corruptor, whose two-edged joke  
is this exquisite diagram of *am* traced

thru the dumb and burdened meat, I break  
up from the page . . .

Unbroken Impact, I meet you as  
a man sees his face  
leap up to the water's surface

to welcome to be welcomed to be one.

Clifford's subject-matter is universal and thus not new, but his way with language is the most genuinely exploratory I have encountered in some time, and is highly recommended for that reason.

## CRAWFORD'S STORIES

*Dorothy Livesay*

*Selected Stories of Isabella Valancy Crawford*: Edited with an introduction by Penny Petrone. University of Ottawa Press.

THIS BOOK will not enhance Crawford's reputation as a poet but, for the diligent student, it may help to cast new light upon her narrative poetry and to explain her life and times. It presents, through Miss Petrone's introduction and brief biography, the very human problem of how an artist survives in a pioneer and colonial atmosphere.

Isabella Valancy Crawford has been compared to Emily Carr as a creative artist of genius whose first years were fought through without public recognition or communication with her peers. But Emily Carr, born in 1871, lived to be 74. By the time she was 37 (the age at

which Crawford died) Carr had been to England and Paris, had encountered the French Impressionists and returned to Canada to paint West Coast Indian life in a re-vitalized modern style. True, because of lack of recognition she gave up painting for 15 years; and only through the great good fortune of meeting with the Group of Seven was she released once more into full creative activity.

In the literary field there was to be no such Phoenix-like revival for Isabella Crawford. Born in Anglo-Irish Dublin in 1850, she was brought to the wilds of Northern Ontario at the age of 8, to become a part of the Scotch-Irish pioneer

settlement in the Saugeen River valley. For the greater part of her short life she remained on the fringe of Canadian cultural society, never at its centre. Probably as a girl in her teens living in Douro County on the Otonabee River she would have met and admired Susanna Moodie and her naturalist sister, Catherine Parr Traill. They had an island cottage near the Stoney Indian Reserve and from the internal evidence of her writings it seems very likely that canoe trips with visits to Indian encampments were a part of her summer activities.

Thus in the sense that Crawford lived close to the forest wilderness, her experiences would have been close to those of Carr. But when her physician father, Stephen Crawford — a pecunious alcoholic, from all accounts — moved his practice to Peterborough, there would have been scant literary stimulus for the young girl, except for that to be found in the Mechanic's Institute. Doubtless she could read the Ontario newspapers, *Frank Leslie's Magazine* from New York, Dickens' *Fireside Weekly*; and the instalments of novels by Dickens, Thackeray, Bret Hart as well as by many lesser writers, men and women, with three names to their signature.

In her introduction to this collection Penny Petrone hints at the struggle that must have been going on between the passionate, primitive spirit of Isabella Valancy Crawford, the poet, and her practical need to earn pocket money and perhaps fame and fortune through publishing stories. In the hope of enticing editors she must have begun early to imitate popular styles and genres. Ms. Petrone makes it clear that "all of the subjects were of the extravagant type dearly loved by readers of newspaper *feuilletons*, as they used to be called, and the style was almost always prolix since the contributors were paid by the length of their stories." Miss Petrone has pains-

takingly searched libraries, newspaper "morgues", archives and the very scrappy collection of manuscripts saved by Mr. and Mrs. John Garvin, the editors of Crawford's *Collected Poems*, to establish that the body of Crawford's prose work is unfinished and uneven, a promise rather than an achievement. The young apprentice was trying to teach herself by practising from a variety of models.

For this reason the editor has chosen to limit her selections to examples of the various prose styles employed by the poet: "a sentimental romance . . . a fairy tale, an essay, an extract from an historical romance, an excerpt from a boy's story, an unfinished regional idyll, and two local colour stories." By the latter I would assume that Miss Petrone means the selections "Tudor Tramp" and "Extradited" — two pieces that show that Crawford was feeling her way towards writing the modern realistic short story or *conte*. She was developing characters faced with the pioneer situation reminiscent of Moodie's *Roughing It In The Bush*, and at the same time making a valid attempt to weave these characters into a careful plot structure. Popular pot-boilers these might superficially be called, yet in reading them today one is impressed by the lively sense of individual idiosyncrasy, humour, dialect. Miss Petrone judges that Crawford, at her best "achieves an epigrammatic restraint, as in the following pithy expressions of homespun wisdom . . . 'caterpillars deform the comeliest vines', 'wives are not good bridles in the mouths of wild asses'."

In this first publication ever of Isabella Valancy Crawford's prose in book form the editor has succeeded in giving us clues as to the kinds of writing the versatile Crawford was capable of. This is a useful beginning, but what would have been more fascinating is an appraisal of the relationship of the prose to the narrative poetry. Miss Petrone has not attempted

an analysis of the mythical symbolic themes which recur consistently in the prose as they do in long poems like "Malcolm's Katie", "The Hunters Twain" and "Gisli". Here there are always two men linked, as darkness is with light. Catherine Ross, another graduate student in Canadian Studies has made this the strong point of her thesis, giving evidence that:

Crawford uses the device of the twinship of dark and bright brothers to distinguish opposites and then bring them into alignment.

Mrs. Ross points to the recurring pairs of identical twins that Crawford uses in so many of her prose stories.

Typically, in these prose romances, one twin is raised at home in a loving wealthy family that nurtures his health and spiritual development; the other, often disinherited or stolen away as a child, has been physically broken and sometimes spiritually imbruted by a life of poverty, drunkenness or crime. In the novel, *Pillows of Stone*, Florian Dutrom, who has just come back to New York from school in England, is, like Gisli, spectacularly vigorous and healthy. Clyffe, his elder by fifteen minutes, has been tutored in New York's dissipation and is now, we are told, "a ghost, a vain shadow, a mocking phantom of what might have been of manliness, beauty and strength." One character compares Clyffe with Florian and is moved by the contrast to exclaim, "Oh Father! . . . Clyffe might have been like this

nature who, made in Thy image, is not yet defaced by sin."

In other prose works (as in the documentary poems) twin figures "interconnect the world of the gentleman with the life of the convict and hulks, the expensive boy's school with the frightful city prisons and loathsome city lairs which Crawford describes in "The Hunters Twain."

To conclude I would say that in the light of the research done by both Penny Petrone in this collection, and Catherine Ross in her unpublished thesis, the University of Ottawa Press has made a valuable contribution to Canadiana in bringing Isabella Valancy Crawford's prose to light. It is unfortunate that in appearance and print the present paperback is unattractive, with a bibliography that has not been edited with excessive care. For example, the manuscript of Crawford's novel *Helen's Rock* (with its theme of Andromeda) is printed here as *Helen's Frock!* And another novel, *From Yule to Yule* is listed twice, with different word counts. Nonetheless we should be grateful that a start has been made in exploring the wide universe of Isabella Vallancy Crawford who, like Emily Carr in Wilfred Watson's poem:

And down the valley . . . looked and saw . . .  
every bush an apocalypse of leaf

## FOR EVERY TASTE

*Russell M. Brown*

DAVID WATMOUGH, *Love and the Waiting Game*. Oberon, \$7.95 cloth, \$3.95 paper.  
DON BAILEY, *Replay*. Oberon, \$6.95 cloth, \$3.95 paper.  
75: *New Canadian Stories*, edited by David Helwig and Joan Harcourt. Oberon, \$8.95 cloth, \$3.95 paper.

AMONG CANADIAN publishing houses, Oberon has distinguished itself not only by giving us fine anthologies of new stories each year since 1971, but also by providing us with collections by writers

such as Hugh Hood, Beth Harvor, W. D. Valgardson, and George Bowering. Now here are three new books added to their list, with promise of more to come.

In *My Life as a Man*, Philip Roth

opens his narrative with two short stories, purportedly written by his fictional protagonist and presented to the reader under the rubric "Useful Fictions"; the remainder of the novel is in the form of an "autobiographical" narrative written by this same fictional author. This juxtaposition serves to illustrate the way a writer may become fixed on certain events, certain aspects of his life — and may work these into fiction, transform, rework them, and then return to them yet again. In reading the collections of short stories by Watmough and by Bailey, I had the sense that I was encountering *their* useful fictions, for each of their stories is very nearly the same story, often with the same cast of characters, but also with enough small alterations, enough inconsistencies to keep the individual stories from cohering into a larger whole. Indeed, as in Clark Blaise's fiction, there is no attempt to make a whole of these parts; they are rather ways of dealing with different facets and different possibilities of some part of a life, of some one event on which that life has turned.

Watmough, who is the more engaging writer of the two, writes of his Cornish childhood, stories which are built out of a pervasive nostalgia. As the narrator says at one point, "I talk from hindsight." All that is needed is, as in the closing story, "a small twist, a nudge of distortion," and we find ourselves "following an avenue of memory which leads to a specific Cornish lane."

At times Watmough's re-examinations of the past lead him into a kind of Proustian meditation on the sources of memory. "That's the connection," his narrator discovers:

Primrose stalks, bruised vegetation. A lifetime later, eight thousand miles from where Grandma Bryant yielded her body to the life of the churchyard, I take the cup of my hand that is holding a sprig of salal, a leaf of salmonberry, again to my nose. And it is

the simple vegetable matter that blends  
with my own scent to ring bells of memory.

But if this passage does not provide a novel discovery about the way the past may unexpectedly arise and confront us, it is still nicely drawn and, within the context of the story, entirely convincing. Moreover, behind this recollecting of the past lies an important question, one characteristic of the expatriate experience out of which Watmough writes: "How much is one where one is? And how much is one where one *was*?"

The central event which Watmough seeks to deal with as he carries his narrator, Davey, through these shaded lanes of memory is that of a homosexual encounter. His cousin Jan, and their early childhood intimacy which seems to have led to this, is the source of several stories; Jan is in turn replaced by other ambiguous (and not-so-ambiguous) male figures which give form to various accounts of Davey's maturation and his initiation into adulthood. But as the stories approach and shy away from, and occasionally explicitly treat, the issue of homoeroticism, they also provide moments of insight into universal human situations, feelingly told.

In *Replay*, a book which reprints stories from two earlier collections and adds one new one, Don Bailey seems similarly to be dealing with a single event: each of his narratives treats the after effects of incarceration, the return to society or the inability to make that return; they provide obsessive re-examinations of people who are "not used to having so much space to move around in." Sometimes this experience belongs to the narrator who is meeting a strange woman in a bar on a "nice April day . . . the first one I've spent outside prison walls in six years" or who returns to his family on parole wondering if he can make it on his own; sometimes it is rather that of the girl that he's picked up and who turns out to be on a furlough from a mental hospital.

In any case, these freed prisoners repeatedly find that they are not free at all; they are trapped in miserable lives in which they take no fruitful action that might provide them some genuine escape; they return to the conditions which led them to their original acts of desperation, there to accept and even perpetuate an all-encompassing poverty which is not so much physical as emotional. When they can, they do escape this prisonhouse of the world, but their flights are into fantasy, into drugs, into frantic moments of trying to make things seem better than they are.

Louder and louder they sang and me too, our voices raised in some last desperate hymn. The choir at Trinity Church on Bloor Street performing Handel's *Messiah* never sang that loud or that joyfully either. Maybe it was the pills. The booze? We were all smiling like giddy fools in some fool's paradise. The kid too, her rotten teeth flashing in the dark. But the song ended and the silence returned as abruptly as it had left.

The fantasy ends, the intoxication passes, and the silence seems always to return. Eventually the truth has to be faced: these are not people down on their luck, these are people down on themselves. "We never would have made it on our own. Mostly because we were the type that didn't even have the guts to try. You know what I mean?" It is no wonder that prison often seems the most positive choice, a more attractive alternative than the life that waits outside: "Shit, I thought, at the very worst I'd only be 35 when I got out. And in the meantime I was safe."

It is ultimately hard to like these stories

because it is so very hard to like the people within them. These are glimpses into lonely lives of people taught to hide their emotions and not to care about those of others around them. There are passages of good writing here and the concluding story, in particular, carries impact and poignancy. But, unfortunately, as readers we too at last learn the lesson of a psychic environment dominated by fear and the imminence of death, by the loss of identity and the lack of self-esteem, by isolation, loneliness, and self-contempt — that it is best not to care.

Bailey's fiction also appears in 75, with a story that is only a little different in mood from those of *Replay*, but which reads better for its tighter writing and its ironic playing-off of a narrator who comes from the world of the psychic losers of *Replay* against characters with a different set of values. Moreover it is much easier to read a writer like Bailey when he is only one voice, his only one perspective, in what turns out to be a rich selection of voices and perspectives.

75 is, in fact, another solid annual collection of interesting short fiction. It opens with a comic tale by Leo Simpson — which in itself would have been enough to convince me to buy the book. (I'll buy any collection with a new Leo Simpson story.) It also contains a nicely-executed piece of metafiction by Timothy Findley that sent me looking for more of his work, and memorable stories by H. R. Percy, by Jane Rule, and by Margaret Gibson Gilboord. In fact all of the stories in this collection are solid and, along with the books by Watmough and by Bailey, there is, as they say, something here for every taste.

# MANDEL

*Ron Miles*

extends an arm, produces  
concepts  
like a magician's  
coins.  
Where was air,  
substance finds his  
substantial hands, crooked  
fingers catch  
the form and flow  
of what we thought  
(we know).

Or it is water  
flows around our separate  
boxes, through the chains  
and locks  
so carefully arranged  
that none expected  
keys and openings,  
none had hoped emersion  
once immersed.

If words are tricks  
they trick us out  
of explanations.  
We are a deck  
of single cards  
awaiting summons.  
I am the sceptic  
volunteer  
who almost drowned.

## A GOOD MINOR POET

NEIL TRACY, *Collected Poems*. Borealis Press.

*The Collected Poems* of Neil Tracy not only puts before the public all the poems that he wishes to preserve but enables the reader to trace the changes which he has made since his poems appeared in previous volumes. I have checked these poems carefully against *Shapes of Clay* (1967) and *Voice Line* (1970) — two volumes which I published and which were evidently inadvertently unacknowledged in this book — and have accumulated the following data. Of the seventeen poems in *Shapes of Clay*, two sonnets (“Bernadette” and “Twenty Years After”) have been omitted. Two other poems are printed without change. The remaining thirteen poems have been altered. All of the thirty-eight poems in *Voice Line* appear in this volume, but only five are in their original published form. No doubt had I access to Neil Tracy’s first volume, *The Rain It Raineth* (1938), I would have a similar report to make.

An analysis of these revisions would make a fruitful article in itself. They range from mere punctuation and line differences to differences in form, and their effect is varied. In practically every free verse poem, the line divisions are altered to make the line-unit correspond more closely to the sensory unit it contains; as a result, the aesthetic appearance of the poems has been vastly improved. In the sonnet-changes there are both losses and gains. Few of the revised sonnets any more than their original

forms contain that felicitous union of thought, image, and rhythm that make such sonnets that were not changed as “Eden” and “Retribution” so totally satisfying.

Forty-seven of the ninety-four poems in this volume are sonnets, and at least ten others, while not proper sonnets, resemble the sonnet sufficiently in line-length and logical structure to indicate that they were once sonnets as originally attempted. The remaining poems are written either in jungly couplets, ballad stanzas, or imagist free verse of a texture recalling that of Raymond Knister’s. Neil Tracy’s diction is the result of painstaking intelligence rather than of intuition. Tracy knows both how to use clichés deliberately for effect and how to avoid them. If anything is “given” in these sonnets, it is his often very fine first and last lines. It seems to me, too, that his visual gifts — despite his blindness — are greater than his aural ones. “Eden” is a good example of his capacity as a sonneteer:

I see the long green challenge of the hill  
Crowned with old maples, lusty yet and  
stout,  
The broken wall, where snakes slide in and  
out  
To view our Fall with hooded eyes and  
chill.  
Dead gods in motley walked there through  
the thrill  
Of frosty evenings, casting tares about,  
And bitter-hearted apples, fair without,  
The fruit you proffered which I savour still.

One time I kissed and tears gleamed on her  
face,  
The sickle fell between, and Eve was gone.  
Then Lilith kissed and straight in that dark  
place  
The hard hot apples of enchantment shone.  
We closed until the seed of her embrace  
Lay in her body like a witch’s stone.

Some poems are personal reminiscences; others are dramatic monologues or descriptions of personages in the literary, biblical, and historical past; still

others are comments upon modernity. But whatever the theme or the form, a common unity infuses these poems. None of them look to the future, and all regard the present as a fall from a more ideal past. Neil Tracy loves the peaks of our cultural heritage and believes in the essential worth of our religious and moral tradition. His criticism is reserved for departure from that tradition, too narrow an interpretation of it, and outright hypocrisy.

It is difficult to determine a man's outlook from inference. I feel, however, that Neil Tracy's blindness, occurring as it did in his early twenties, contributed to a habit of turning from the non-visual present to the visual world of memory; from current books, which were not normally available in Braille, to the works of the great masters, which were; and from the present, where his vision relative to that of others was handicapped, to a past where his inner eye put him on more than even terms with other explorers of the same regions. Be that as it may, there is in his work a blend of traditional form, traditional theme, and traditional sensibility to a degree seldom matched by a Canadian poet writing in this generation.

*Collected Poems* is a book by a man who knows his limits and does not try to transcend them. Within this compass he is a craftsman who does his work carefully and well. Neil Tracy is a good minor poet. Though his poems do not in any way enlarge our awareness of the possibilities of thought, feeling, or form, they are good poems and remind us of much that is worthwhile in our heritage which we might too easily otherwise forget. Because they do this, they are valuable and deserve more attention than the work of many more spectacular poets writing more original work that is not balanced by a corresponding craftsmanship.

FRED COGSWELL

## WORDS AND IMAGES

ROBERTSON DAVIES, *Question Time*. Macmillan of Canada.

BEVERLEY SIMONS, *Preparing*. Talonbooks.

THE APPEARANCE of a play in print inevitably raises the question, what is a play? Literature or theatre? What portion of its significance derives from its words and what portion from its images? The publication of Robertson Davies' *Question Time* and Beverly Simons' *Preparing* raises the old question with unusual urgency. These two major figures in contemporary Canadian theatre are as different as east and west, the eastern Davies firmly in the western European tradition and the western Simons looking to the orient for new forms.

The introductions to the two volumes neatly imply their differences. Simons has written a "Prologue", not a discursive introduction, for her collection of one-acters. Three people, two women and one man, are revealed standing on an empty stage; in short sentences, phrases, single words, they conduct a witty dialogue that distances them from their author, that tells us a little about her, and that strongly establishes the sense of theatre — stage, audience, actors, and invisible author. Davies, on the other hand, provides an imaginary interview in which he answers at length the typical questions people have posed to him: "Do you take characters and situations from life?" "Do you re-write much?" "What do you think your play is about?" To this final question, he replies, "It is about the relationship of the Canadian people to their soil, and about the relationship of man to his soul. We neglect both at our peril." Both playwrights inform, editorialize, introduce. But, significantly, one chooses to do so in short lines put into the mouths of anonymous actors, while the other speaks in his own voice, and in paragraphs.

Simons is not anti-verbal, but her com-

mitment to language varies. "Green Lawn Rest Home," the earliest (1962) of the four plays in *Preparing*, predates her visit to the Orient in 1968 but not her interest in Artaud, Claudel, and Genet. The most powerful image in the play is the lawn itself, composed of small stones painted green. The three characters (she likes threes) sit on the porch of the home, two old inmates attempting to get acquainted with a newcomer. Their conversation, naturalistic for the most part, is not overtly about the pathos of age and the myopia forced upon old people by their removal from the realities of life. But the play shows these things, through their inability to see the large glasses hanging on the bosom of the newcomer, by their fear of going through the rocky garden to reach the road, and by various other visual and symbolic devices. It's a good play, with a strong ending in which one character dies and is removed to the cemetery, just across the street, that we have not been permitted to see before. The visual and the verbal are held in good balance.

"Preparing" (1972) is a monologue spoken by a woman as she moves from girlhood, with reminiscences of babyhood, to old age and death. Heavily dependent on a box full of props — a wig, make-up, a mirror, a whiskey bottle — the actress must convey a sense of life as simultaneously waiting and preparing — for what? Only for the end of life. A good actress with considerable vocal and manual dexterity could make this monologue powerfully moving. The other two plays, "Triangle" and "The Crusader" (both 1972), are less successful. Allegorical geometrical, visual in the extreme, they present the ideologies and moral corruptions of man in a manner sometimes crudely obvious, sometimes obscure.

In "The Crusader" we meet for the first time the Helper, the figure from eastern drama who, anonymous and clad

in black, manipulates the props and produces the sound effects. The Helper appears again in *Leela Means to Play*, Simons' most recent play published in the *Canadian Theatre Review* (Winter 1976), along with articles on her other work and a long interview about the writing of *Leela*. Here Simons has moved farther east, farther into images and the forms of dance, and away from language as sequential thought. "I have broken the limits of space and time," she says in the interview.

To a certain extent, Davies, in *Question Time*, has tried to do just that. His play takes place in the wandering mind of the Prime Minister as, in a state of shock from an airplane crash in the far north, he seeks to know his own soul under the ministrations of an arctic shaman with an Edinburgh M.D. The play makes much use of visual effects. As the nation waits for news of the PM, Lloyd Robertson appears as himself on TV to report the lack of news; the PM's wife is interviewed on TV and is tormented into a scathing denunciation of the "squalid art" of such interviewing. These episodes are done on film. The first act is set in Les Montagnes de Glace, haunted by "the Arctic sound" and by the occasional flickering presence of La Sorcière, where the PM wanders, sometimes tuning in to what is being said at home, sometimes confronting the shaman, or his totem animal, or himself. The second act superimposes the image of the House of Commons on the Arctic mountain, as the PM seeks a familiar setting in which to justify himself. The shaman acts as Speaker and La Sorcière becomes the Queen. Here, in a disruptively satirical episode, the Beaver is presented as Canada's totem animal (Davies says in the Introduction that he would prefer the Lynx for that position). The Beaver sings the praises of industry and the Honest Broker, but the Herald confronts him with the fact of his cow-

ardice, his mediocrity. The Herald then tells the legend of how a beaver, seeing that he is about to be overcome in battle with another animal, rolls over, bites off his own testicles, and offers them to his enemy. Protesting, the Beaver soon loses his argument with the Herald, offers a large pair of scissors to his opponents, and assumes "an obliging position" as he is dragged from the House.

When the play was reviewed in the *Globe and Mail*, the headline read, "Question Time complex and glittering," but the review was equivocal. The actors were complimented but said to have done "some hard slogging"; the highest praise went to the designer for his ice forms and to the stage effects of the production in general. The reviewer never says just what is wrong with the play but does indicate unease about it. My own sense of the wrongness comes from the mixture of verbal and visual, of word and image. Davies is a master word-man. The play sparkles with his wit, his irony, his elegant vocabulary. Even the most visual of his effects is tied firmly to the word: the TV films are of "talking heads"; the fantastically costumed shaman has a Scots accent; La Sorcière's lines echo the ends of the PM's lines (until her final appearance reverses the trick); and the Herald anatomizes the Beaver with Shavian pointedness. The play attempts to break through space and time into the mental space and mental time of the central character, but it does so in the kind of language that expresses sequential thought. But even though the central character is a parliamentarian, the language of the play is not right for the purpose. The episode of the Beaver, for example, could easily drift into a wandering mind but the speech of the play is anything but wandering, hence the sense of incongruous interruption. The play is weakened by this central illogicality.

All this is not to say that a strongly

verbal play cannot make good use of "non-verbals," or that a theatre piece can afford to ignore words. It is, rather, to indicate that the relationship between the two needs the dramatist's utmost care.

ANN P. MESSENGER

## DECISIVE INTERVENTIONS

ROBERTSON DAVIES, *World of Wonders*. Macmillan of Canada. \$10.95.

WHEN *Fifth Business* appeared in 1971 it was hailed as an extraordinary achievement. And indeed it was, not only in the field of Canadian literature, but also in the light of the author's previous works. While there had been no lack of wit or cleverness in the Salterton novels or in the plays, it seemed apparent that with the publication of *Fifth Business* Davies was moving into fields which were psychologically and stylistically far more richly textured. Both critics and public clamoured for more — more of the wit, the elegant prose, and the quasi-profound theological and psychological theorizing. But that was not what they got. When *The Manticore* (the second book in the trilogy) appeared in 1972 it was one of the most eagerly awaited novels of the year, but it did not meet with the kind of enthusiasm that had welcomed the first book. Critics were unable to conceal their disappointment; and the public seemed divided: those who had not been introduced to Jung and his psychological theories before found the book "fascinating", but those who were more familiar with that old "fantastical duke of dark corners" were less impressed. It seemed that Davies had simply created David Staunton and Dr. Jo von Haller as props (and very wooden ones at that) on which to hang a few rags and tatters of Jungian

psychology; and even the grand finale, David's descent with Liesl into the bear cave, seemed to be an after-thought — something that was added on to leave the reader with a good taste in his mouth — rather like a glass of fine brandy after a dinner of warmed-over hash. It was only to be hoped that the final book would be more impressive. And it is. Although Ramsay is again the narrator, *World of Wonders* is less concerned with the distinguished hagiographer than it is with his friend Magnus Eisengrim who has reached what Liesl calls "the confessional moment in his life" and has decided to "spill the beans". But even Liesl, marvellously intuitive though she is, does not realize that Eisengrim's confessional urges are prompted more by vengeance than they are by self-revelation. Roland Ingestree, a member of the crew which has come to Sorgenfrei (Leisl's home) to make a film about the French illusionist, Robert-Houdin, is Magnus' unsuspecting "victim".

Like *Fifth Business*, *World of Wonders* is marvellously credible, urbane, and provocative. It is concerned, as is the first book, with God and the Devil, man's place in the universe, and the consequences that can follow on a single action: if Ramsay's life is shaped by the fact that he ducked to avoid a snowball thrown at him by Percy Boyd Staunton, Paul Dempster's is shaped by the smile that he beams back at Willard when the latter slips "his hand down the back of [his] pants". Life, in both books, is a "succession of decisive interventions", and part of man's task is to decide which of "those Two" (God or the Devil) is doing the intervening.

Magnus' autobiography begins dramatically enough on August 30, 1918: "That was the day I descended into hell, and did not rise again for seven years." In a sense Paul Dempster made a Faustian pact with the Devil when he smiled,

however innocently, at Willard's (Mephistopheles') sexual advance. But the Devil, as Ramsay points out, demands a very high rate of interest, and "the interest is charged on the whole of the principal, right up to the last payment, however much you think you have paid off in the meantime." Pondering these words Eisengrim wonders if he may have underestimated the length of his sentence. "That's what I mean", Ramsay replies suggestively, and the reader is left to wonder if Magnus has paid off his demonic adversary even yet. The book is rich in ambiguity; but not all of it is as tightly controlled as this particular example would suggest.

In *The Manticore* Liesl tells David Staunton that the fathers a man chooses for himself are the most significant ones. Most men have two fathers, but Paul Dempster, alias Cass Fletcher, alias Jules LeGrand, alias Mungo Fetch, alias Magnus Eisengrim, has three: his biological father is Amasa Dempster, the "father" who chooses him is Willard the Wizard, and the "father" whom he chooses is Sir John Tresize. One of the most fascinating aspects of the book is the way in which Magnus' relationship with Sir John mirrors his former relationship with Willard. When he first meets Willard, Magnus is "very green" and his soul longs for the Wizard as the "hart pants after the water brooks"; similarly, he describes himself as being "green as grass" in his early relationship with Sir John, and he yearns for Sir John's lifestyle "as the hart pants for the water brooks". With both "fathers" Magnus travels across Canada by train and with both troops he is a "nobody": he is not listed as one of the performers with Wanless's *World of Wonders*, nor does he have any place on the cast lists of Sir John's company. If Willard forces himself on Magnus sexually, Magnus forces himself on Sir John spiritually: and although Magnus' rape

of Sir John's soul appears to be quite different from Willard's rape of Paul Dempster's body, Magnus realizes that he is destined to play the role of slave in both relationships. "Experience never repeats itself", he says, and yet in travelling with Sir John he sees that he is "beginning another servitude, much more dangerous and potentially ruinous" than his relationship with Willard. In both relationships, however, it is Eisengrim, the wolf, who eventually triumphs: he cares for the "confused old wreck" that Willard becomes because, as Magnus gloats, that makes him "utterly mine; he [is] my thing"; nor are his desires to devour Sir John ever far from the surface: "I loved him and served him faithfully . . . but in my inmost self I wanted to eat him, to possess him, to make him mine."

*World of Wonders* is clever, complex, and far more original in its basic conception than *The Manticore*, but it is still less successful than *Fifth Business*. Part of the problem lies with the style — while it never sinks to the lead-footed prose that was all too frequent in *The Manticore*, it seldom soars to that compressed, witty, elegance that was so much a part of the first book ("To live in Bowles Corners we felt, was to be rustic beyond redemption"; "Our privy set the sanitary tone of the village"; "The Stauntons rarely escaped cliché in any of the essential matters of life"). But the novel's central problem has to do with tone or voice. Since each of the novels depends primarily on first-person narration, one would expect the three narrators (Ramsay, David Staunton, and Eisengrim) to be easily distinguishable not only by what they say, but by how they say it. But they are not. When David's and Eisengrim's voices sound most "alive", they both sound remarkably like Dunstan Ramsay who in turn (I suspect) sounds remarkably like Robertson Davies.

*World of Wonders* is not a great character study in the way that *Fifth Business* is, but it is a fascinating book, full of sophisticated conversation, enormously entertaining vignettes about circus life, and, for those who still want to know who killed Boy Staunton, a few ingenious surprises.

MARILYN BAXTER

## NATURALIZATION OF MODERNISM

JOAN MCCULLAGH, *Alan Crawley and Contemporary Verse*. University of British Columbia Press. \$11.00.

FOR THE MOST PART Canadian literary historians and critics suggest that the main thrust to Canadian poetry in the 1940's came from the poets in Montreal, in particular from the groups of writers associated with the two magazines, *Preview* and *First Statement*, and their joint successor, *Northern Review*. However, recently we have had articles in this journal promoting Alan Crawley and his magazine *Contemporary Verse* as an equally important figure and magazine in the development of Canadian poetry at the same time. Both Dorothy Livesay (who contributes a Foreword to this volume under review) and P. K. Page have testified to the enthusiasm of Crawley for poetry and the genuine help he gave editorially to poets.

This book by Joan McCullagh is a welcome documentation of Crawley's role in that poetic renaissance of the 1940's. In a way it sets the record straight, but though it gives some emphasis to the way poets were responding to literary movements and cultural background in the 1930's, it still presents the 1940's, as Desmond Pacey tended to do in his *Creative Writing In Canada*, as a miraculous burgeoning with almost no previous history. McCullagh gives a fair

picture of the poetic scene in modern Canada before the 1940's, but she still repeats the cliché that the 1930's in Canada was a bleak period for poetry, whereas in fact most of the important poets of the 40's had already begun to write from the late 20's on: Smith, Scott, Pratt, Klein, Livesay, Birney, and lesser figures like Ross, Finch, Kennedy, all these were certainly writing consistently before their poetry was collected in book form in the 1940's. Of course there were relatively few outlets in magazines for their poetry at that time, but it is a mistake to see lack of publications as evidence that Canadian poetry was moribund in the 1930's. The Montreal magazines and *Contemporary Verse* became the necessary nuclei around which this poetic activity could cohere — and they brought into light new poets as well.

No one will deny the extreme importance of these events of the 1940's but it is also important to set them in proper perspective. Joan McCullagh's version is certainly clearer and more definite but it still is not as emphatic as it might be about the role of the poets in the 1930's. In fact, Crawley's interest in poetry spread through the 1930's and found some real focus when Dorothy Livesay moved to Vancouver in 1937, for together they started some poetry programmes for radio at the end of that decade. Crawley also undertook several reading tours, perhaps pioneering this element in Canada (for the modern poets at least), as very few of the newer poets were giving public readings of their poems.

Joan McCullagh's book places Crawley very firmly in the native/cosmopolitan controversy of the 1940's, though he himself never became polemical about these two strains as Sutherland and Smith both did. Crawley was very eclectic in his choices and never really espoused either side, though he tended to be more cosmopolitan in outlook. However, McCul-

lagh neatly summarizes the effect of Crawley's selections for *Contemporary Verse* as being an effect of naturalizing modernism.

The book also emphasizes the very particular help Crawley gave to new poets of the 1940's. It is especially good to be reminded that Crawley was instrumental in aiding the development of such new poets as P. K. Page, Jay Macpherson, Anne Wilkinson, James Reaney and Daryl Hine. His eleven years of editing certainly reflected the growth of Canadian poetry in the period, for he found room not only for the new poets he fostered but also the more established poets and the Montreal poets as well. Indeed, one of the most useful sections of this volume is the full bibliographical index to all the issues of *Contemporary Verse*, an index which expresses clearly Crawley's eclecticism.

There was a flowering from the magazine's early years when Crawley complained that too much "churchmonthly stuff" was submitted to him, through the heady middle and late years of the 1940's, to the running-down process that led to his disillusion and his decision to stop *Contemporary Verse*. By then the newer American poets (such as Cid Corman and Robert Creeley) were to be introduced by such a magazine as *Contact*, signalling the beginning of a very different modernism that among other influences we can still see affecting contemporary Canadian poetry.

So *Contemporary Verse* was an important magazine and Joan McCullagh's book is an interesting addition to the history of Canadian poetry. But the book also raises the question as to how Crawley's influence will be felt in the long run. Those poets whom he particularly helped, with the exception of P. K. Page, have added little to their output after their first books: Jay Macpherson has written little since *The Boatman*, James Reaney

is now more concerned with drama than with poetry, Anne Wilkinson's Metaphysical streak has rarely been taken up, and Daryl Hine is outside the Canadian literary scene. Perhaps Crawley's sympathies were with a more literary-articulated poetry, and it may be we will return to that style but in reading this book one wonders whether Crawley would have given his energies to the new verse emerging in the late 1950's and whether his sympathies would have been encompassing enough to allow him to edit a magazine at that time. He was a man seemingly in the right place at the right time, and Canadian poetry has much to be thankful for in his persistence in establishing and maintaining *Contemporary Verse*. Some of his other plans for modern Canadian poetry never came to fruition: For instance, twice he tried to promote anthologies of Canadian poetry. In a recent editorial in this journal, George Woodcock suggested that the issues of *Contemporary Verse* itself "have the containment of an anthology, a selection by a brilliant connoisseur and critic."

His disillusion at the end in 1951 sounds a little petulant, as if he is disappointed that Canadian poetry was moving into directions he was out of sympathy with. Nonetheless, Joan McCullagh's book (though astonishingly overpriced) is a sincere tribute to an important editor and critic, giving a clear portrait of the man and his magazine, a definite expression of the regard in which he was held by practicing poets, an indication of his ideas about modern poetry and its context in Canada (though the book still does not give the description required for a full understanding of the development of modernism in Canadian poetry). With its extremely useful index to *Contemporary Verse* and its sound bibliography Joan McCullagh's study is a very interesting addition to the literary history of Canada.

PETER STEVENS

## PORTRAIT OF THE ARTIST

MORLEY CALLAGHAN, *A Fine and Private Place*. Macmillan, \$9.95.

SEVENTEEN YEARS ago, Irving Layton wrote his poetical obituary in an introduction to his first *Collected Poems*, covering the period between 1942 and 1958. The author responsible for them, he declared, "is now dead." Unwittingly, Morley Callaghan has written a similar introduction to his own body of work, spanning more than fifty years, and ironically this introduction takes the form of another novel — Callaghan's first in fourteen years.

*A Fine and Private Place* embarks still further on what Victor Hoar once described as a style of "literary diction". Hoar claims in his *Morley Callaghan*, a volume in the Studies of Canadian Literature series, that Callaghan put aside his habitual way of telling stories plainly and simple to assume, in *Passion in Rome*, a "literary diction" that to a great extent explains that book's failure. Hoar nails this failure down to the loss of the "figurative language" of the earlier Callaghan novels; he suggests that what characterized the symbolism of *A Passion In Rome* was not so much its rejection of the author's previously established literary principles as a drastic turning of the attention to issues too large, general and obvious to discuss within the structure of a novel. In other words, if a writer wishes to discuss art directly, there are other and more appropriate forms for the task.

In an interview last year, following the publication of his coffee table volume, *Winter*, Callaghan described his newest novel as "like nothing I've ever written". This is not in fact the case. In *A Fine and Private Place* Callaghan again resorts to the "literary diction", but he inter-

sperses it with other manners, with a kind of plausible basic dialogue, with hard, cool and realistic delineations of relationships. Yet these are only the trappings of a wider theme which no reviewer I've yet read had recognized, so that one feels that this time at least Callaghan has been able to disguise his discussion of artistic purpose.

For the real intent of *A Fine and Private Place* is to coerce the reader into an appreciation of Callaghan's writing by depersonalizing the character of Callaghan himself. In a sense, the novel is intended as a vehicle for discussing how a novel is put together, for talking about writing, about the techniques, failures and frustrations of composing stories. It is a kind of literary narcissism, purging the personality of the writer, salvaging what makes him tick. His style. His writing.

To accomplish this, Callaghan moulds a trinity of characters: Eugene Shore, a well-known novelist in a country that has neglected him; an ambitious and cocky young academic in the person of Al Delaney; the vibrant and moving personality of Lisa. All three represent Callaghan. The dialectical manner in which they are employed is nothing new; it originates as far back as his early novel, *Strange Fugitive*. It allows Callaghan to shift about the personalities, quirks and moods of the three characters in a way as confused and magical as that of the con-artist, who challenges a street audience to guess which of three tumblers moved about on the table hides the pea.

The main point is to make us aware of Callaghan's writing. Edmund Wilson's dictum that he is "the most unjustly neglected novelist in the English-speaking world" has embarrassed Callaghan. In fact, more attention has been paid to his moral objectives, to his characters envisaged as real people, and even to his own personality, than to the fictional

essence of his work, and this is the heart of his criticism of the Canadian literary world when he calls for an emphasis on "excellence" rather than on "Canadianism." Though some literary periodicals are exceptions, Canadian reviewers — especially in the widely circulating magazines and newspapers — do in fact make no serious attempt to criticize a book in terms of its writing and its inherent mysteries.

In *A Fine and Private Place* Callaghan sets out to force readers into a discussion of the principles, skills and mysteries of story telling and, by implication, of storytellers. He does this through the figure of Shore, an established writer like Callaghan himself. A critic (obviously echoing Ethel Wilson) declares in an essay in the *New York Review of Books* that Shore is a master who ought to be read wherever the English language was spoken. Callaghan deliberately masks his character by allowing neither the other figures in the novel nor the reader to glimpse the man within Shore, at least in appearance, though in reality one recognizes his traits quite clearly in both Lisa and Al. (Callaghan hinted at this in my interview with him when he said he was still procrastinating about a title for the novel. Then he wanted to call it either *The Light and The Dark of Lisa* or *The Light and the Dark of Eugene Shore*.)

The overt story line deals with an ambitious writer named Al Delaney who is in love with Lisa Tolen. Al is struggling to finish a book on Norman Mailer but finds himself confronting the mystery of Shore. One realizes that the "fine and private place" extends symbolically to include not only the personality of Shore "and what makes him tick", but also the undiscovered (or unrealized) weaknesses of Al and the mysteries of writing itself.

Al secures an advance from a publisher to do a book on Shore. The fact that he cannot complete the profile (and this

appears to be his curse) is the basis on which *A Fine and Private Place* operates. Shore's character — "his mystery" — baffles Al, and until the older writer is removed the study of his life cannot be finished. There is a suggestion that Al in some sense might be responsible for the traffic accident which claims Shore's life. Once he is dead, the book is easily completed.

The point is clearly to divert the reader from analysing the author as man to the direct study of his writing. Too much study of writing patterns itself unfairly on the writer himself, his motives and habits. Callaghan enjoys the writer's "mystery", and thus he keeps the figure of Shore clouded and unpredictable. The dialectic in the novel is between Al's impatience with mysteries ("All his training made him reject mysteries") and Lisa's and Shore's attraction to shadows and the inaccessible — as Al admits when he defines Lisa and Shore as "outlaws . . . in some fine and private place." They are inaccessible and out of reach.

While Al draws near to a recognition of Shore, Lisa becomes alienated. Al feels frustrated by Shore's inaccessibility; it is the older man's "mystery" that stands in his way. This is what, in an aborted sexual scene, Lisa describes as the "ego" of that distinguished man-of-letters. Shore despises himself for ever approaching Lisa, and Lisa is humiliated. She tells Shore: "Al was wrong about one thing. He said you had no egotism. You're all ego, aren't you?" This conclusively points the novel's direction. Al's inability to complete his book on Shore is due to the latter's "ego".

How to remove this "ego" is the task. It is done not simply by implicating Al slightly in the traffic accident that removes Shore's physical presence from the novel, but also by admitting within the structure of the book that Al's work is in fact Callaghan's. The book is about

himself, and it is no mere coincidence that when Al's study is completed, so is *A Fine and Private Place*. Callaghan has removed himself as well as Shore.

The book which Al finally writes is nothing like that on Mailer which he never finished. The presence of a living author in a way that dominates the entire scope of a study prevents an accurate account of both the man and his writing. Once this "ego" is removed, the book falls into shape and can deal with the mysteries of an author, his styles and techniques, provided the attention is un-academic — practical and personal.

Mystery comes with death, especially that of an author. From the collected data of his life one can only guess what he thought. His books and interviews are the only real testimony. All else after death becomes speculation, and it is into this that Callaghan is forcing the reader — back into mystery, into writing. For that reason, Shore's death makes sense.

*A Fine and Private Place* serves as an obituary to the style of writing Callaghan once perfected, because in this novel he has moved in another direction; he has attempted to destroy the writer of that past day in order to become himself. That is essentially what he meant when he said that he had never written a book like it before. One could even define *A Fine and Private Place* as a portrait of the artist — before and after. *A Fine and Private Place* is by no means Callaghan's best book, but in one sense, it is a primer to all his works.

MARTY GERVAIS

## DESIGNING POET

STAN DRAGLAND, comp., *Wilson MacDonald's Western Tour, 1923-24*, Coach House.

IT IS PROBABLY NOT difficult to understand why Wilson MacDonald enjoyed the reputation he did. He espoused ac-

ceptable causes; he showed recurrent righteous indignation; he balanced his satires with romances, and his free verse declarations with poems whose rhythm and rhyme were clearly marked and whose "meaning" was markedly clear. "The droning scholars far too long," he wrote in "A Gypsy Song", "Have ruled the rhymes of men/ Bring back the wayward flights of song/ And errant bards again." Rejecting Carman's success, MacDonald nonetheless strove to outdo it, and remained constantly in Carman's shadow. The speaking tour he undertook in 1923, from North Bay to Victoria, grew out of his early success, and was an attempt to further his reputation. Lorne Pierce and Ryerson Press undertook to establish relationships with local poetry societies for him; the CPR provided a rail pass; but as he autographed his way across the country, the poet's temperament repeatedly revealed itself. By assembling the private letters of that time (which are held by the Douglas Library in Kingston), together with the newspaper reviews, brochures, itineraries, and programmes that lay behind them, Stan Dragland's *Wilson MacDonald's Western Tour* handsomely recaptures both the idiosyncrasies of the man and the tensions between poet and publisher which made themselves only peripherally known to the poet's public.

It would be easy to caricature both MacDonald and the MacDonald coterie. The enigmatic observation of William Archer ("Dean of English critics") is open to interpretation:

Wilson MacDonald interested me more than anything else in America.

Newspaper reviews often lend themselves to parodic distortion:

POET ONCE HORSE'S VALET DELIGHTS CANADIAN CLUB WITH CHARMING ADDRESS . . .

the remarks of Mr. MacDonald were merely strings upon which he threaded the real

pearls of wit and wisdom culled from the volume of his poems.

Another selection which he read . . . was his "Niagara". . . . The poet went to the falls twenty times before he was able to express the grandeur and the awe which were in his soul.

His journey to England in a horse boat is told in one of his poems containing more than 200 verses, but the poet recited about 20, and added many personal touches as he proceeded, which increased the interest in the poem.

A little quoting out of context produces this observation from Lorne Pierce to the Regina journalist Irene Moore:

I envy your ability to empty yourself . . . and place yourself at his feet.

And this apparently serious (and complete) outline of the first chapter of a projected novel epitomizes much that is vintage MacDonald himself:

The homecoming of Bondie Gray. Bondie Gray is elected May Queen. The demonstration against Bondie Gray when Fanks, a dwarf, announces that she is of illegitimate birth. Another May Queen is chosen.

There is a good deal of humour in the book, much unintentional, though MacDonald's poems are never of the inspired awfulness that characterizes James McIntyre's work. But to focus on the humour would be to miss much of the significance of MacDonald's Western Tour.

In the exchange of letters between Pierce and people along the tour we come closer to the situation. Pierce had written to assorted people in a form letter: "In closing I should like to say, quite personally and confidentially, that I have chosen you as the one most likely to encourage public interest in talent and genius, and as the one most likely to see that your community gives him a welcome", promising 10% of the gross proceeds as an incentive. Dr. Ernest Fewster, of the Vancouver Poetry Society, with cultural enthusiasm and honest suspicion,

replied: "remembering Shelly, Keats, Tennyson, Bailey, Noyes, Whitman, Carman & a host of others, shall I proclaim here as one as great if not greater than these?" Pierce replied in ambivalent terms: "You were not the only one who has been surprised by 'What the Critics Say'." After the event, Fewster wrote again: "In Vancouver he has aroused so much antagonism that it would be very unwise to attempt more public appearances in the near future. . . . This is principally on account of . . . his insistence both in public & private, on the idea that his poetry cannot be equalled." MacDonald had his admirers, too, and also people like Irene Moore, who were willing to suffer "celestial irrationality" in a poet. Egocentricity there was in plenty. What complicated it for others was the fact that MacDonald's ego was tied to money even possibly more than it was to Art. He saw himself as a Celebrity, treated himself that way, and railed those who dared to react differently.

MacDonald did stay at the best hotels and apparently reject restraint during his tour. In light of the quality of his work, it would be easy to charge him now with pretentiousness, and to see Ryerson, Pierce, and the Poetry Societies as the victims of an harrassment with which they scarcely knew how to contend. But in large part MacDonald was the victim — of his own ego first of all, of inflated notions about Art and National Culture, of the copyright laws which even then were being condemned as an "almost insurmountable barrier to the Canadian who wishes to remain in this country", and of a publisher who failed either to answer his queries or to distribute his books adequately. There are contemporary parallels.

*Wilson MacDonald's Western Tour* is not a message book. Beautifully put together, in Coach House's best tradition, it incorporates some of MacDonald's own

designs to good effect, brings archives to life, and entertainingly illuminates one of the smaller corners of Canadian cultural history. But the message is there, nonetheless, for readers, writers, and publishers alike.

W. H. NEW

## CALM SENSE ON PRISONS

ANDREAS SCHROEDER, *Shaking It Rough*.  
Doubleday. \$9.95.

IF THERE IS one subject that requires the balm of quiet thought rather than raucously expressed feelings, and which suffers grotesque distortion through the electronic media, in the press, and via such entertainment agencies as books, plays, TV drama and feature movies, it is surely our Canadian prisons.

In recent months across Canada the public has been subjected to a plethora of prison reporting: columns of irate words, yard upon yard of film-footage — all witnessing to the inadequacy of our penal institutions, and to the ire of the convicted or the frustrations of professional custodians. And most of this coverage has been to an incessant accompanying chorus from opposing radicals and conservatives seeking either a reshaping of penal institutions or a stiffening of control over our giant community of the incarcerated.

Historically, it is not too difficult, I think, to see how all this has come about. From the Middle Ages to the beginnings of the 19th Century and the momentum of the industrial revolution, our towns and cities were communities, our values basically shared ones and, just as importantly, *public* ones. What society did with its offenders it did corporately and it did it for everyone to see. Executions were largely public, with the gibbet a

familiar sight. While lesser punishments for criminal offenses were often enacted in a strictly social context: i.e. with the public stocks and other punitive devices serving as cautionary witness for the populace at large whose co-operation was actively encouraged to pour scorn and ridicule upon the offender.

However, with the rise of the middle class and the emphasis upon individuality, upon individual values, there came also the corollary of a vigorous affirmation of privacy. Privacy became (as, indeed it remains today) the most eloquent testament to personal prosperity.

The cost behind this shift from communal to individual action is a significant one. We are all only too aware of social fragmentation, of the isolation of the aged, of mental disturbance exacerbated by loneliness. Well, our prisons, which are largely nineteenth century brain-children, often even in their physical structure, also reflect that profound transfer in the nature and composition of our society from a communally oriented one where the individual was frankly subordinate, to a bourgeois-dominated one where the greatest price society can extract from its criminals is to remove them from the market place (where the stocks used to sit) and place them in a large complex of buildings, surrounded usually by an immensely high wall where sentences can be carried out beyond the day-to-day notice of the public gaze.

I am not a sociologist, nor am I a penologist, but it seems highly plausible to me that with the loss of confidence in today's social structures, and the ability of media technology to peep over penitentiary walls, the confusing clamour over our prisons, their structures, and even their *raison d'être*, should be a direct result.

Particularly welcome then, are those calmer and quieter efforts beyond brute statistics and beyond emotional stances,

which shed light upon the prison experience, *per se*. Such an effort, I think, is encompassed in *Shaking It Rough*, subtitled "A Prison Memoir", by Andreas Schroeder.

Mr. Schroeder is best known to us as a poet, and a somewhat romantic one at that. But there is certainly no whiff of romanticism amid the pages of *Shaking It Rough*. Indeed, somewhat surprisingly for a poet, the prose employed here is generally flat and leaves the impression that the author has tended to bend backwards *not* to sound sensational or give the slightest flavour of histrionics. And the route Mr. Schroeder has taken in order to convey an honesty of depiction and fidelity to observation, is one that generally works well for him.

Using the nomenclature "fragment" rather than "chapter" what he gives us is a personal account of the eight months he spent in the B.C. correctional system. Sometimes these fragments describe incidents, sometimes they invoke reflections. It is in the latter, I think, that the book achieves its fullest potential. Here, for example, is the beginning of Fragment 20 where attitudes for survival while serving time, are eloquently expressed.

Part of the strain of being in prison is the continual fear of feeling bad, the constant sitting under that trembling drop of poison which, if shaken loose, will spread slowly but inexorably like a stain on wet paper through your life, unstoppable, disastrous. Because you know you *have* to stay healthy in this place. The only defense against the undertow that keeps people here half their lives is never to forget that you *want* to get out, that the present is transitory, and must be kept in transit, that it is therefore necessary to resist the urge to take offense, to escape, to revolt or fight back, which would simply subtract what you've already put behind you and start the wheel rolling from the beginning again.

As someone who has also done time — though only in weeks compared to Schroeder's months — and who has also

had experience of visiting inmates, from Pentonville and Wandsworth prisons in England, Sing Sing and San Quentin in the U.S., to both Oakalla and Haney, (where the author did part of his sentence), I can personally attest to the accuracy of those quoted words of his. And the burden of the book is in comparable vein.

But I think the most attractive strength of *Shaking It Rough* is its fairness. Without being aloof, without the arrogance of the insider, and certainly without the taint of self-pity, this memoir reveals one man's experience and even spiritual growth during his incarceration while at the same time revealing the frustrating plight of both inmates and custodians. I have never read a book on this subject — and the literature is by now prodigious — which succeeds so persuasively in rendering a balanced picture of prison life as *Shaking It Rough*.

Balanced picture, yes. Comprehensive? No. Then if Mr. Schroeder had wished to provide an encyclopedic compendium of Canadian penal institutions he would, perforce, have had to step outside his own experience. He was given two years minus a day (for possession of hashish for the purpose of trafficking) and served eight months. Most of that time he spent in works camps with minimum security regulations. Obviously such an experience is not going to reflect the kind of forlorn ugliness we have come to associate with such structures as the federal penitentiary in New Westminster.

All the more credit, then, to Andreas Schroeder for working so admirably within the limitations of experience and for coming up with a balanced, eminently readable account of what he saw with his eyes as well as what developed in his own soul.

DAVID WATMOUGH

## MARGINAL LAMPMAN

*Lampman's Kate: Late Love Poems of Archibald Lampman*, edited and with an introduction by Margaret Coulby Whitridge. Borealis Press. \$3.95.

SEVERAL YEARS AGO in a thesis on Lampman I relegated many of these poems and Katherine Waddell to an appendix. A re-reading confirms my earlier diagnosis; an appendix is of little organic value and if it does not need cutting out it is best forgotten. What always impressed me about these poems, if looked at from the standpoint of Lampman's work as a whole, was their uncharacteristic and peripheral nature. Perhaps Katherine Waddell did inspire deep feeling in Lampman; what is surer is that she inspired his worst, most marginal poetry. The poems evince a marked absence of the physical and the concrete and lack thematic and rhythmic variety. Exclamatory reminders of worked up (not worked on) emotion cannot disguise metaphorical poverty, archaisms and ancillary poeticalities:

Ah, couldst thou know this and destroy  
The sorrow and the dull despair,  
Wouldst thou but smile and pass me by  
Or wouldst thou care?

In this particular area of his work then one wishes that Lampman had taken his own advice in his poem "Silence!" and had not undertaken another version of the story of O!

Lampman's outer life was not an eventful one and further research is unlikely to alter our view of it. I hope that future energy expended in biographical research will stress his emotional and intellectual development; tell us more of what he read, speculate less about his bed. Lampman was neither Byron nor F.P.G.

The present introduction reflects an uncertainty of purpose, has little direction or

order and mixes obvious fact with unsupported speculation. Katherine Waddell did exist and Lampman may have had a sexual relationship with her; and a covert relationship of any kind probably caused him some pain. However, the anguish, isolation, deracination and alienation which are to be found in Lampman's writing were surely not attributable merely to Miss Waddell. In a number of articles on Lampman I have tried to account for the dominant tones of his writing and have yet to change my view that this writer's sensibility becomes available only through such a scrutiny.

We are told, on the one hand, that "Lampman seldom referred directly to Kate Waddell in his correspondence"; on the other hand, that from his "manuscripts and letters it is clear that he went through a terrible period of crisis between 1895 and 1896." Of course Lampman experienced crisis, but not only at this time, and in my own work I have tried to account for the crises. In the bits of letters quoted here there is no evidence to suggest that Kate Waddell was responsible for Lampman's unhappiness, and I would go so far as to say that the entire correspondence between Lampman and Thomson sheds no light on "his friendship with 'my lady' in Ottawa".

Perhaps a closer scrutiny of one paragraph of the introduction will sharpen my argument:

The anguish that the poet suffered was very real and it lasted for years. He, who had sought advancement eagerly, refused Edward Thomson's offer of an editorship on the "Youth's Companion" in Boston at a considerable increase in salary. He, who had longed for academic recognition and an ivory-tower way of life, spurned the offer of a job at Cornell University when it was finally offered, because, "To tell the truth I am too deeply embedded here . . ." Perhaps, the choice of the word "embedded" has Freudian connotations itself. There are many side-long expressions like that in Lampman's correspondence but it is impos-

sible, at this length of time, to say definitely whether they indicate desire or achievement. It seems obvious that he twice refused better positions in the United States because his wife refused him the divorce he wanted and his "lady" refused to share permanently a scandalous liaison.

Lampman turned down Thomson's offer because as he wrote on March 8, 1893:

I doubt whether it would be well for me to go to the "Youth's Companion". I fear my friend that it would merely mean passing from one frying pan into another and perhaps hotter one. Here the drudgery I do — and it is I must confess not very heavy — is a thing apart from my literary faculty and does not directly injure it. While I am at my desk the literary side of me is simply in abeyance. In the Youth's Companion office my literary powers would be brought into actual employment upon a petty and colourless kind of work in which I could have no real interest and the performance of which would require a distinct abnegation of all that is original in my bent of mind. A sort of employment like that persisted in for any length of time would be ten times more deadly than anything I do now.

There was a vague possibility of a professorship at Cornell. Did Lampman spurn it? His letter to Thomson dated September 16, 1891 shows that he would have left the Civil Service, Ottawa, and Canada with alacrity (and with his wife) if the possibility had materialized:

My wife was immensely pleased with the Professorial castle in the air and with the joyous instincts of the zealous housewife proceeded forthwith to map out the details of a transfer from Ottawa to Ithaca. I hope that it may indeed be.

Those observations of Mr. Chamberlain's in the Transcript must have got copied somewhere, for when I got back here various persons informed me that they had heard that I was going to desert my native country. I told them I was not going to abandon the soil just yet, but that I had it in mind to do so at as early a date as possible. We talk a great deal about "Canada for the Canadians", and yet Canadians find it hardest to get on in Canada than anywhere else . . .

What Lampman did eventually turn down was another unrealized possibility of a job in the library at Cornell and for the same reasons that he rejected Thomson's offer. The "obvious" conclusion and "Freudian connotations" drawn from Lampman's refusals are obviously without foundation.

The darker moments in Lampman's work and his best poetry had little to do with Katherine Waddell. As I have demonstrated elsewhere Lampman felt contemporary society to be inimical to the values of the imaginative life. He protested constantly against an encroaching materialism which encouraged a defective, fragmented sensibility at the expense of vitality, intelligence, and spirit. Such a life was not in "abeyance" (as Lampman sometimes feared) and compels fascinated attention because it was frequently anguished, and rightly so.

BARRIE DAVIES

## EARLY SOUSTER

RAYMOND SOUSTER, *Rain-check*. Oberon Press, Ottawa. \$7.95.

RAYMOND SOUSTER'S latest is remarkable less for the poetry it presents than for the critical questions it provokes. Of these the foremost is, should the book have been published at all? For the dust-cover to term it "a gathering for collectors and friends of 105 early poems, all first issued in small editions and all long since out of print", seems to forestall or at least inhibit criticism. Is this really supposed to be a publication or is its appearance not rather an act of piety of the kind usually reserved for definitive collected editions? However admirable it may be in human terms for a poet to accede in this way to his friends' wishes, critically the book's existence forces us to ask more insistently than we might other-

wise have done why these poems were not reprinted in earlier collections. Too often the answer is not hard to find: many of the poems are peripheral and slight. Presented in bulk, their slightness becomes embarrassing.

What should one do, then? Ignore the book? or damn it with faint praise? No, Souster deserves better than that. Along with Dudek and Layton he performed a valuable service to Canadian poetry in the forties by attacking the too-neat, too genteel, neo-Colonial poetry then current and replacing it with a poetry that displayed a new frankness both of language and subject matter. But just as the main political party in Mexico boasts the paradoxical name of the Party of the Institutionalized Revolution, so something of the same phenomenon often occurs with literary revolutions: the *First Statement* group's revolution is now long behind us and since the sixties what Souster's Introduction terms "our kind of poetry", encouraged no doubt by the influence of Williams, the Beat poets and the Black Mountaineers, has become the dominant orthodoxy. Thus, though less useful for such purposes than a selected or collected edition, the present volume does enable one to reassess some elements of that revolution at least on terms of Souster's own contribution to it.

For all his moderate leftish sympathies with the underdog, Souster's clearest commitment seems to be a kind of vitalism that is located especially in the everyday urban or suburban world. Souster's attitudes and subject matter constantly suggest parallels with such major poets as Williams, Hart Crane or Philip Larkin, although in fact one need not go outside Canadian poetry, for Earle Birney, Alden Nowlan and John Newlove have all, in their very different ways, provided more impressive and incisive evocation of modern city life. Two possible reasons for this emerge from the present volume:

romanticism and a sort of rhetorical didacticism.

A disturbingly romantic absoluteness permeates Souster's vision: whether he is writing of "Times Square"'s "acres of neon", the "stone-iron hearts who own you", and its traffic's "mad nowhere dashes with cargoes of nothing", its "brighter, emptier faces", or whether he is evoking "Montreal after dark" where we allegedly find "all the bars filled/ . . . all the bands frantic/ all the taxis taken/ all the rooms occupied/ all the women beautiful" or someplace else where "that face will always be there/ that hand will always be waving . . .", there is a surrender to sensation for its own sake accompanied by a wilful failure to distinguish and discriminate, to suggest any sort of distancing. Characteristically Souster's tactic is to submerge, to present himself as one of the crowd, to accept everything with a sad, wry shrug (perhaps symbolized typographically by his fondness for suspension marks), and to take on the protective colouring of the average little guy who likes his beer and his ballgame.

The reverse side of this is the rhetorical over-assurance of his didacticism. But here the colours become too strident, like pop-art without any hint of controlling irony. Nothing is done, for instance, with "your East River cesspool" to make the last term more than externally applied comment, while poems like "Bourne-mouth" or "The Luxury" choke on excess words, mostly used one-dimensionally and with very little sense of cadence or semantic nuance, and on cumbersome sentence structures. Where this is avoided, as in "The Essentials," the effect is one of crude didacticism:

*When your baby's ready/ for his very first words/ don't waste his time/ teaching momma or papa/ but get right down/ to those few words he'll need/ all the rest of his life/ steal/ lie/ destroy.*

Why should we believe this? It may be true but nothing in Souster's statement of it is memorable enough to make it seem so. It is a jotting rather than a poem.

Indeed, for Souster almost the only alternative in this volume seems to be in terms of vignettes, snapshots of everyday events in themselves so minimal, or at least not placed in any illuminating context, as scarcely to exist, uncommunicated epiphanies. And is post-Layton male poetry obliged to celebrate every pair of lovely legs, every "Lady crossing Queen Street" of "the Unbelievable/ the Incomparable Buttocks"? Is this what John Sutherland meant by "the embodiment of the common man, completing in poetic terms what the average Canadian thinks and feels"? Where are these "poetic terms"? For me at least the bar-room angle on sex objects has grown tediously voyeuristic. Perhaps Canada needs its own Erica Jong to set the sexual balance straight.

In terms of language too the book is disappointing: many of the adjectives seem curiously inert and predictable while his use of slang is indiscriminating, more concerned perhaps to stress democratic solidarity with his readers than to restore the vitality of the spoken word. Nonetheless, there are of course some memorable images: in the first section of "Three Ways of Looking at New York", for instance, we are shown "before the Central Park hotels one long/ parade of limousines disgorging tails and furs". Nor could one deny that there are a number of strong, attractive whole poems, such as "The Attack" or "Why", that stand out by reason of their greater sense of purpose and cohesion. Likewise, within its small limits, a short poem such as "After the necessary adjustments", about the "happy useful lives" the blind can lead, is very successful. It ends:

For example/ this one here —/ sitting out  
in the sun/up near the corner/of Yonge  
and Bloor/cup and pencils ready/ watching  
the darkness flash by.

Where, as in "Recruiting Poster", the point depends solely upon an ironic juxtaposition, in this case "adventure/ travel/ sports/ companionship/ good pay/ pension plan and free / artificial / arms / legs", Souster may be relied upon to drive the message home, but he rarely provides original camera angles and though his genuinely wide sympathies can take him far they cannot take him the whole way. Most of the major Victorian poets wrote far too much. In his introduction Souster says "write 75 to 100 poems a year and you're in trouble — that is, if you'd like to have the majority of them published." True, and his own case shows why: he spreads himself too thin, his methods are too flat, deadpan, even garrulous, to make such a desire feasible. This volume does Souster's reputation a disservice: although attractively produced, as we have come to expect from Oberon, a whole new book was not necessary for the sake of four or five well-turned, incisive poems.

CHRISTOPHER LEVENSON

## THE CANADIAN THIRTIES

*New Provinces*, which appeared in 1936, was the Canadian equivalent of the English anthology, *New Signatures*, which marked the public appearance of the celebrated Thirties poets, looking more like an organized movement than they actually were. *New Provinces* was in some ways an imitation of *New Signatures*, and fulfilled the same purpose of a modest trumpet blast, announcing the arrival of modernism in Canadian poetry. Not that every poet appearing in the collection could really be called a "modernist"; Robert Finch certainly was not, nor was E. J. Pratt, and Leo Kennedy was a borderline case. But Klein, Scott and Smith, the McGill men, certainly were in

the modern lineage and it was their contributions which gave the collection its special value and turned *New Provinces* into a kind of manifesto in verse.

The present reprint, *New Provinces: Poems of Several Authors*, (\$4.95 paper, \$12.50 cloth) in the University of Toronto Press Literature of Canada series, comes with an informative introduction by Michael Gnarowski, setting out the historical background, and with the "Rejected Preface" which A. J. Smith wrote at the time, but which did not accompany the anthology, and indeed was not published until 1965, when it appeared in *Canadian Literature* for the first time, a fact which, unfortunately, is not noted by the editor of the reprint.

G.W.

## FILM TIPS

THE SITUATION has at long last been reached when Canadian writers can expect to be approached by Canadian film-makers to acquire the rights of their books for making into feature films; the same writers may even, if they are astute, be contracted to write the film scripts for their own books. Such possibilities, though they do not offer the legendary awards of Hollywood acceptance, nevertheless could make an appreciable difference to the very marginal incomes of most writers in this country, and for this reason we call attention to a most serviceable book on the business and legal practicalities of the situation. It is Garth H. Drabinsky's *Motion Pictures and the Arts in Canada* (McGraw-Hill Ryerson, \$14.95). The title is misleading; there is nothing about the aesthetics of film, but a great deal about the law and the profits. We recommend it as a sound business handbook for writers, producers and actors.

L.T.C.



*opinions and notes*SEPARATION'S  
HIDDEN COST

WE ARE TOLD by the supporters of the Parti Québécois, and by the theoreticians of separatism in general, that franco-phone culture is at a disadvantage under the present situation, and that once the domination of the anglais is eliminated there will be a finer flowering than ever before of the life of the intellect and arts in Quebec. But can we take it for granted?

Look at the Irish example. During the centuries of Ireland's absorption into the British political structure, literature flourished in Ireland, and Irish writers became recognized as champions in the whole English-writing world. One has only to list the main figures to get an idea of the vast contribution of the Irish from 1700 to about 1920; Swift, Congreve, Goldsmith, Sheridan, Shaw, Wilde, Yeats, Joyce, Synge, O'Casey, O'Flaherty! Half the great names in English writing during that period were Irish, and there was an extraordinary symbiosis between Irish authors, who usually had to come to London to earn a living, and the Saxon readers who loved them and paid well to be entertained and chided by them. Out of that symbiosis emerged almost all the works that give Irish literature a right to be considered of world importance.

With such a beginning in servitude, nobody imagined that in a setting of political liberty Irish literature could do anything but rise to heights unheard-of before! There would — there must be — a whole generation of super-Wildes and super-Joyces! What actually happened was quite different. Deprived of the ten-

sions of the great Anglo-Irish love-hate syndrome, Irish culture sank down to a level of dull complacency, no new writer of notable strength or originality came forward, and since Yeats died in 1939 there has been no really great poet in Eire. In fact the lack of literary creativity became so obvious that during the 1960's the Irish government began to offer freedom from income tax to any English-speaking writer who would settle among them; the takers were few, and most of those left sooner or later, so sterile had the literary world of liberated Dublin become.

The situation between Québec and English Canada is not strictly analogous to that between England and Ireland since — unlike Erse in Ireland — French has remained the living literary language of the province, and for this reason Québec writers have not been accepted in Toronto and Vancouver as fully as Irish writers were once accepted in London. Yet in recent years they have been read increasingly outside the borders of their province, to such an extent that it is now hard anywhere in Canada to neglect Québécois like Gabrielle Roy, Anne Hébert, Hubert Aquin, and a whole group of younger writers. Translation may still not be sufficient, but it is increasing year by year. And there is the vital thing in common between pre-1920 Irish writing in English and pre-1977 French writing in Québec — that they have flourished and come of age in an exhilarating atmosphere of political tension and sometimes of strife.

Now, looking ahead, dare we prophecy that the fate of writing in Québec will be any different, after separation, from the fate of Irish writing? Once separation has taken place, once the beloved enemy has departed, will life have the same creative tension, the same zest of conflict that in recent years have been so productive of fine work? Will separation mean that the

first generation of really vital Québécois writers — those whose works we now enjoy — will also be the last? It is a fearsome possibility. And it is another reason for thinking hard before we willingly consent to Canada's splitting apart, though it does not take away from the argument that without some return to regional autonomy Canada *will* split apart in any case out of sheer frustration at the growing weight of centralization, the incubus of excessive government.

L. T. CORNELIUS

## SAVING THE RADIO PLAYS

Time and again, in editorials, *Canadian Literature* has pointed to the appalling inadequacy of archival arrangements in the Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, and to the fact that radio plays, by far the largest body of drama written and produced in Canada, tend to be aired once or twice and then forgotten. Rarely are radio plays published — the ratio seems to be about 1 in 35 — and if there are no adequate arrangements for keeping this material and making it available to scholars, this important sector of Canadian literary and dramatic creativity is likely to be lost to posterity. Up to now the Canada Council has been secretive about its storage facilities, but occasionally disquieting news has surfaced of the loss of scripts or tapes; the mass destruction of tapes in Vancouver reported in one of our earlier issues was a case in point.

Now, at last, what scripts survive have been salvaged, thanks to the efforts of Howard Fink of Concordia University, who has persuaded the CBC to hand over the remnants to be stored there and indexed under the Radio Drama Project.

Much, indeed, seems to have vanished; the writer of the present note, on receiving a list of the holdings under his name, found only half of the titles he had written for CBC recorded, which means that the losses of material must have been great. Professor Fink has a large task ahead before he comes to the point of publishing a bibliography of CBC drama and the five volumes of selected scripts which are planned in collaboration with the University of Toronto Press.

But, though the task is far from completed, what has been done is greatly welcome, and we can hope that, when all the missing scripts have been gathered together, something like justice can be done to at least the best of the thousands of plays by which writers, actors and producers kept drama alive in Canada during the theatrical doldrums of the forties and fifties, and, in the sixties, moved into experimental directions that were aborted by the commercialization of broadcasting under recent CBC administrations.

G.W.

